

THE UNITED CHURCH - A STUDY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

This book consists of 30 sermon summaries which cover the period of time from approximately 1050-930 BC in which ancient Israel existed as a united monarchy. This was the featured Bible study for Calvary Baptist Church from May through December of 2018.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Sermon Title</u>	<u>Scripture Reference(s)</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	Israel Demands A King	1 Sam. 8	1
2	Saul Becomes King	1 Sam. 9-10	5
3	Saul Defeats the Ammonites	1 Sam. 11-12	8
4	Saul Battles the Philistines	1 Sam. 13-14	11
5	Saul Rejected as King	1 Sam. 15	15
6	A Boy Named David	1 Sam. 16	19
7	David and Goliath	1 Sam. 17	22
8	David & Jonathan	1 Sam. 18-20	26
9	Saul Pursues David	1 Sam. 21-27	30
10	Saul Seeks a Medium	1 Sam. 28	34
11	David's Conquers the Amalekites	1 Sam. 29-30	38
12	Saul Dies in Battle	1 Sam. 31; 1 Chr. 10	41
13	David Grieves	2 Sam. 1	44
14	Civil War (Part 1)	2 Sam. 2	48
15	Civil War (Part 2)	2 Sam. 3-4	51
16	David Becomes King	2 Sam. 5,23:8-39; 1 Chr. 11-12,14	54
17	The Ark & The Temple	2 Sam. 6-7; 1 Chr. 13,15-17	57
18	David's Victories	2 Sam. 8-10,12:26-31; 1 Chr. 18:1-20:3	61
19	David's Great Sin	2 Sam. 11:1-12:25	64
20	Family Turmoil	2 Sam. 13-14	68
21	Absalom's Conspiracy	2 Sam. 15-19	71
22	David's Troubles Continue	2 Sam. 20-21,24; 1 Chr. 20:4-21:30	75
23	The Psalms of David	2 Samuel 22:1-23:7	78
24	The Coregency	1 Kings 1-2; 1 Chr. 22-29	81
25	Solomon's Wisdom	1 Kings 3; 2 Chr. 1:1-13	84
26	Solomon Prospers	1 Kings 4-5; 2 Chr. 1:14-2:18	87
27	Solomon's Construction	1 Kings 6-7; 2 Chr. 3-4	90
28	The Temple Dedication	1 Kings 8,9:1-9; 2 Chr. 5-7	93
29	Solomon's Renown	1 Kings 9:10-10:29; 2 Chr. 8:1-9:28	96
30	Solomon's Demise	1 Kings 11; 2 Chr. 9:29-31	99

Israel Demands a King

Originally Preached - 5/6/2018

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12:2

Today we are beginning an extended sermon series called “The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel”. We will be reading and discussing those parts of the Old Testament that deal with the united nation of Israel. This portion of Israel’s history is documented in 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st Kings, and 1st and 2nd Chronicles. Other books written during this period include Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. We will examine each of these texts to varying degrees during the coming months. My hope is that this study will be a tremendous blessing to our church.

While the New Testament Church is distinctly different than Old Testament Israel, they both share a similar purpose. God chose the children of Israel to serve as His representatives on the earth. They were to spread the message of God to all of the nations around them. Their story is told in Old Testament. Unfortunately, on the whole Israel failed to accomplish this task and ultimately rejected their Messiah. Thus, God established the Church to continue the work of spreading the gospel. This is the story of the New Testament. Today, the Church still strives to accomplish this grand mission. Rather than ignoring the Old Testament, Christians should learn from the successes and failures of ancient Israel as they seek to win this lost world to Jesus. It is for this reason that I equate the Church and ancient Israel in the title of this study.

Following the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, the children of Israel settled in Canaan. For about 350 years they existed as a loosely connected federation of tribes. The tribes often cooperated with each other against common enemies. During this time, regional judges governed the people as needed. Whenever oppression sprang up in a particular area, God would raise up a judge to deliver His children. Some of the more well-known judges include Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. There was no unified nation of Israel as of yet, but rather 12 distinct tribes that took care of themselves for the most part.

Samuel is generally considered to be the last of the judges. He was also a prophet and priest. Following his lead, the people of Israel were able to overcome the Philistines and enjoy a period of lasting peace. However, they were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their form of government. Change was coming. The era of tribal judges was ending and a new period in Israel’s history was about to begin...

I. ISRAEL’S DEMAND (1 Samuel 8:1-9)

Samuel had grown old and was seeking to pass his authority as judge on to his 2 sons - Joel

and Abijah. For a brief time, they presided among the tribe of Judah in the city of Beersheba. Unfortunately, both of them were exceedingly wicked and corrupt. They sought their own personal gain and did not follow the ways of their father. Their misdeeds contributed to the people's growing desire for a change.

Representatives from the various tribes of Israel gathered together and approached Samuel at Ramah, a city in the land of Benjamin where his parents were from. They pointed out that Samuel had grown too old to judge and that his sons were too dishonest. The delegation wanted to do away with judges altogether and unite all of the tribes to form a single nation. To this end, they demanded that Samuel appoint a king to rule over them. The children of Israel wished to be like the other nations around them, a monarchy under the headship of a strong centralized king.

Hearing their request, Samuel became very upset. He turned to the LORD and prayed about what he should do. Samuel couldn't help but to take this personally, seeing that the children of Israel wished to replace him and his sons as their leaders. But it was far worse than that. God responded to Samuel's prayers by saying that the people had in fact rejected Him as their Divine King, preferring instead to follow a human leader. Though He had been faithful to His children for centuries, this was yet another example of their rebellion against God.

The children of Israel wanted to be like everyone else - like the other nations around them. They didn't want to be different or set apart. They didn't trust that God alone would lead and sustain them. Rather, they wanted a human king that would make the nation strong and powerful. In the same way, many churches today seek to be just like the world around them. In some places Christianity has become so compromised that it is almost indistinguishable from the culture. Increasingly, churches are rejecting the headship of Christ and their unique and distinctive calling in Him. The church should not look like this lost world, but should stand in stark contrast to it.

II. SAMUEL'S WARNING (1 Samuel 8:10-18)

God instructed Samuel to deliver a strong warning to the children of Israel regarding the behavior of kings. Samuel told them that a king would conscript their young men into military service and appoint officers over them. He would compel others to build and fashion weapons of war. He would enlist many workers to plow his fields and to reap his harvest so that the royal provisions would always be plentiful. He would take their daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers in the palace. He would seize the best of their servants for himself, to use for his own benefit, leaving them with lesser quality help.

Samuel went on to say that a king would surely implement taxes. He would take from them the best portions of their annual harvest - a tenth of their produce from the fields, the vineyards, and the orchards. He would take from their donkeys and flocks as well. All of this would be used to sustain and grow his personal kingdom, not necessarily the nation itself. Samuel warned that in

time the people would grow weary of their king and would cry out against him, but that in that day God would not listen.

God spoke through Samuel to caution His children about the numerous dangers of a human king. Modern equivalencies are still evident today among those nations that exercise strong centralized authority. The warning isn't necessarily against any particular form of government, but rather against concentrating too much power into the hands of a few. This is why broadly dispersed local control is always preferable to national government, which should be kept relatively small and strictly limited. As the saying goes, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

III. GOD'S CONCESSION (1 Samuel 8:19-22)

The people refused to heed Samuel's stern warning. They repeated their desire to become like the other nations. They insisted upon crowning a king to rule over them who would assemble an army to fight on their behalf. Samuel was still troubled by their request and again turned to the LORD in prayer. Despite His reservations, God granted their petition and told Samuel to appoint a king over all of Israel. Samuel shared God's decision with the delegation of elders, and then dismissed them to return to their homes. In the days that followed, he began the search for their new king.

People are free to make their own decisions - even Israel. It was not God's idea to establish the united nation, but rather it was theirs. Nor was it His idea for them to govern themselves like all of the other nations. In fact, the text suggests that He was somewhat leary of it. Fortunately, the LORD knows the thoughts of men even before they act and is able to incorporate all of their decisions into the grand scheme of His sovereign will. So, even though it was originally founded on misguided human pretenses, God still blesses the nation of Israel and allows it to play a prominent role in His master plan for humanity.

CONCLUSION

After more than 3 centuries of tribal governance, the fundamental structure of Israel was about to undergo a major change. The elders had all agreed and the initial groundwork had been laid to consolidate the tribes into a single nation. The boundaries that once divided their various inheritances would soon be dissolved. The newly united state would be ruled by a single king who'd exercise authority over all of Israel.

The era that was about to begin has frequently been called "The Golden Age of Israel". Over the course of the next 120 years, the nation of Israel would rise in power, prominence, and prosperity. It would move from a position of relative obscurity to one of world-wide acclaim. It would become the envy of many other kingdoms and nations. It would change from a state of perpetual warfare to one of prolonged peace, and from poverty to abundant wealth.

From a worldly perspective, I can understand why some would consider these to be the greatest years in the history of Israel. Still, we must always remember that God measures success differently than the world does. The nation of Israel was founded upon a rejection of God as its Divine King and the natural desire to be like everyone else. As it grew in fame and notoriety, Israel inevitably became less and less dependent upon the LORD. We must be careful not to always equate material success and/or renown for the blessings of God - they may not be. Sometimes these things actually draw us away from Him. That said, I personally disagree with the notion that these were "The Golden Years of Israel."

Next week we will talk about about Samuel's search to find Israel's first king. Who would he be? Would God, though having be rejected by His people again, remain faithful to Israel and help Samuel in this all-important search? I hope you can join us as we explore these questions. Until then, may God bless you.

Saul Becomes King

Originally Preached - 5/13/2018

“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” - Joshua 24:15

This morning we continue our current sermon series titled “The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel”. This promises to be an exciting collection of messages focusing on those portions of the Old Testament that deal with the united nation of Israel. This period of Biblical history covers approximately 120 years, during which time Israel grew from a meager federation of separated tribes into a powerful and wealthy nation-state.

This study will feature the reigns of ancient Israel’s 3 kings - Saul, David, and Solomon. Each of these men was distinctly different, exhibiting unique personalities and character traits. As is generally the case with all groups of people, the nation of Israel as a whole tended to follow the direction and temperament of their leader - for better or for worse. People in authority set the tone and often make or break the organization, whatever type it may be. As you might expect, there will be several lessons about effective and ineffective leadership presented during the course of this series.

Regional judges had reigned over the 12 tribes of Israel for almost 350 years - since the death of Joshua following the conquest of Canaan. In or around 1050 BC the tribal elders met with Samuel and expressed their desire to form a united nation ruled by a single king. Prompted by God, Samuel warned them about the many disadvantages of a monarchy. Still the people insisted, so God consented to their request, and Samuel vowed to find someone that would lead the new nation. This is where today’s sermon begins...

I. CHOSEN BY GOD (1 Samuel 9)

Saul was from a wealthy family of the tribe of Benjamin. His father’s name was Kish. Saul was young and very handsome. As a matter of fact, he was more handsome than all of the other men in Israel. He was a head and shoulders taller than anyone else. Based upon his privileged upbringing and outward appearance, Saul was the perfect person to be king.

One day Kish sent his son Saul along with a servant to search for some of his lost donkeys. They traveled through the lands of Ephraim, Shalishah, Shaalim, and Benjamin, but did not find them. When they arrived at Zuph, Saul was ready to give up and go home. But the servant suggested that they ask a prophet who was in the city at the time which way they should go to find the missing animals. After some debate, Saul agreed and the pair went to find this man of God (who happened to be Samuel).

Meanwhile, the LORD appeared to Samuel and told him that He'd chosen Saul to be the king. So when Saul and his servant approached Samuel, he began by telling them that Kish's donkeys had already been found. Then, rather than sending them home immediately, he invited Saul and his servant to stay and have dinner with him. He took them to a dining hall where there were about 30 guests, seated Saul at the head of the table, gave him the best portions of the food, and treated him with special honor and respect. The next morning, as they were preparing to leave, Samuel pulled Saul aside by himself and explained that God had chosen him to become the first king of Israel.

The elders had requested that Samuel find them a man to become their king. Amazingly, Samuel did not have to search far and wide or even interview numerous candidates for the position. God led Saul right to him! Sometimes we find ourselves searching to find God's will, when all the while He has placed it right before our eyes. Perhaps you have been seeking something that you can't seem to find. Why not let God bring it to you today?

II. ANOINTED BY SAMUEL (1 Samuel 10:1-16)

Samuel anointed Saul as the prince of Israel, knowing that he would soon be promoted to king. In order to establish his credibility, the prophet foretold several of the events that would happen to Saul and his servant as they traveled home. Samuel said that they'd met some men in Zelpah and speak about the missing donkeys. Later, at the oak of Tabor, they'd meet other men who would give them some bread. When they passed through Gibeath they'd meet a group of prophets, the Spirit of the LORD would come upon Saul, and he would begin prophesying with them. After these things had taken place, Saul was to go on to Gilgal and wait for Samuel there.

Saul was probably somewhat bewildered by everything that he was hearing and experiencing. What had started as a search for his father's donkeys had taken a remarkable turn. Could this be true? Could Samuel's words be legitimate? As Saul and his servant journeyed home, everything that had Samuel foretold happened just as he'd predicted. God changed Saul's heart and he realized that Samuel had been speaking the truth. Whatsmore, the people who witnessed Saul prophesying wondered what had happened to him. Even Saul's uncle noticed a change in Saul's behavior.

God had chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel. Now, the LORD was tailoring Saul to fulfill this special role. The LORD never calls anyone to service without also equipping them for it. Though it wasn't God's choice for Israel to appoint a king, He did not abandon or forsake them for doing so. Instead, He lovingly chose and prepared Saul to lead them.

III. ACCEPTED BY ISRAEL (1 Samuel 10:17-27)

Samuel called for a meeting at Mizpah and many people throughout the land of Israel came. He reminded them of God's historic faithfulness to His people, and again rebuked them for desiring a human king. Nevertheless, Samuel had all the tribes gather before him. Casting lots, the

prophet first chose the tribe of Benjamin from among the other tribes, then the clan of the Matrites from among the Benjaminites, and then Saul son of Kish from among the families of the Matrites. The people looked for Saul but he was nowhere to be found, and they wondered if perhaps there was another person to take his place.

God then spoke to Samuel and the people and told them where Saul was hiding. Hearing this, they went and found Saul. When they looked at him, they were taken back at his stature and good looks. He was an impressive young man. Samuel told them that Saul was the one God had chosen. The people were elated and began to shout, "Long live the king!" Samuel spoke up and wrote down all of the duties and rights of the kingship. Afterward, he sent everyone home. Though the majority of Israel had accepted Saul joyfully and with open arms, some "worthless fellows" despised him publicly.

Clearly Saul was God's choice to be king. He was the right man for the job. Even still, a small faction of people did not want him to be their ruler. They treated him with great contempt and disrespect. Sadly, there have been and will always be people just like this. They are the haters, those who have no regard or appreciation for God's chosen leaders. Anyone who holds a position of authority should be aware of these kinds of people and not allow their antics to dissuade them from godly leadership.

CONCLUSION

The united nation of Israel was in its earliest stages. There was not yet an official capital city or even a palace from which the king could reign. There was no royal court to serve him or lofty throne upon which he could sit. The extent of the king's authority was somewhat blurred and uncertain. The young nation was disorganized and not firmly established. Nevertheless, Saul had been chosen by God, anointed by Samuel, and accepted by the people. He was to become Israel's first king. This was a new beginning. These were exciting times for the people of Israel.

The LORD had chosen a king and charged Samuel with presenting him to the people. It was up to them to either accept or reject God's choice. As we learned earlier, some gladly accepted him while others grumbled in disapproval. In the same way, God chose his beloved son Jesus Christ to be the redeemer and righteous king over all creation. Those of us who have already believed in Him are responsible for making Him known to others. Ultimately, everyone must choose for themselves whether or not to receive Jesus, the mighty King of kings, as their Lord and Savior.

May I ask you today... who is the king of your life? Who sits upon the throne of your heart? Who governs the decisions you make? Whose royal decrees do you follow? Who directs your steps? Is it King Jesus, or perhaps someone else? Many people have placed themselves on the throne, choosing to live selfish and materialistic lives. Some have allowed another person to sit in the figurative king's chair to lord over them. Sadly, thousands of people have given Satan control of their lives and follow his wicked ways. My friends, no king other than Jesus will ever satisfy the longings of your heart.

Saul Defeats the Ammonites

Originally Preached - 5/20/2018

“For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a skillful psalm. God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham, for the shields of the earth belong to God; He is highly exalted.” - Psalm 47:7-9

The Old Testament recounts the history of the Jewish people from the days of Abraham until their return to Judah after the Babylonian exile. Our current sermon series focuses upon the small portion of Israel’s history in which it stood as a single unified nation. This era lasted approximately 120 years from roughly 1050-930 BC. We are calling this collection of messages “The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel”.

Elders from the 12 tribes approached Samuel and asked him to appoint a king to rule over them. Though he was initially hesitant, the LORD instructed Samuel to comply. As it turned out, the prophet did not have to search at all for an appropriate candidate. Instead, God chose a man named Saul and led him straight to Samuel. When they met, Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the nation of Israel and the majority of the people accepted him joyfully.

Interestingly, though he had been chosen to be king, Saul returned to his home in Gibeah and reigned from there. As a matter of fact, Gibeah served as the capital city of Israel throughout Saul’s kingship. For a time, he even continued working as a herdsman. At first Saul didn’t seem overly eager to rule as king. It would take awhile for the new nation to take on the characteristics of a monarchy and for Saul to adjust to his new role.

Meanwhile the surrounding nations continued to encroach upon Israel just as they’d done during the time of the judges. This ongoing threat was the main reason why the tribes had united to begin with. They wanted a strong king who would fight their battles and increase their military might. Perhaps Saul could make a name for himself by driving back the enemies of Israel...

I. SAUL STEPS UP (1 Samuel 11)

Nahash was the king of the Ammonites, the descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot. He heavily oppressed the portions of Israel that lay east of the Jordan River, particularly the tribes of Gad and Reuben. The city of Jabesh-gilead was located in this remote area. Nahash and his army laid siege upon the beleaguered city and threatened to kill everyone there. In exchange for their lives, Nahash offered to gouge out the right eye of all the citizens thereby making them a reproach in Israel. He gave them 7 days to consider his morbid terms of surrender and to seek assistance.

The men of Jabesh-gilead sent messengers to Gibeah where Saul, the newly appointed king,

lived and worked. When Saul heard their report, the Spirit of God came upon him and he grew very angry. So Saul slaughtered a yoke of oxen, divided them into pieces, and sent them throughout Israel along with a stern warning - "I will do the same to your oxen if you don't join me in battle." As the message spread, the men of Israel responded in droves. Saul quickly amassed an army of 330,000 soldiers that came from places scattered all throughout Israel and Judah. He then informed the people of Jabesh-gilead that help was on the way. Saul divided his troops into 3 companies, they attacked the Ammonites the next morning, and defeated them soundly. Their city was saved and the enemy survivors scattered in retreat.

The Israelites remembered those who had despised Saul earlier and rejected him as king. They wanted these rebels put to death, but Saul showed mercy and chose not to harm them. Instead, he urged the people to celebrate what the LORD had done in giving them the great victory. Afterwards the people went to Gilgal, where Samuel offered sacrifices and peace offerings, and they ceremoniously confirmed Saul as the first king of the nation of Israel. It was a time of great rejoicing.

II. SAMUEL STEPS ASIDE (1 Samuel 12:1-11)

Samuel spoke to the people, probably during their gathering in Gilgal, and told them that he had completed his task of finding someone to be their king. He went on to say that he had grown old and was ready to retire. Samuel then reminded them of the honesty and integrity he'd shown to Israel during his lifetime. All of the people agreed that Samuel had been an admirable leader and judge over them.

He recalled how their ancestors had been delivered from Egyptian bondage by Moses and Aaron, yet had forgotten about the LORD after arriving in the Promised Land. They'd chased false gods such as the Baals and the Ashtaroath. As a result, the Moabites, the Philistines, and other enemies had risen up against them. Still God remained faithful and appointed men such as Jephthah and others to rescue them. Samuel even named himself as one of Israel's great deliverers of the past.

With his resounding victory over the Ammonites, Saul had firmly established himself as the clear leader of Israel. Samuel realized that his role as judge was finished, and it was time to move on. He would continue to serve as a prophet and priest for the people, but Saul was now their undisputed leader and king. Samuel wanted to make this transfer of power clear so that there would be no confusion or division within the nation.

There are times in life when we need to step aside so that someone else can step up. Eventually, everyone has to pass the torch. Some people have a hard time doing this because they fear that no one can do things as well as they did them. It can be hard to let someone else take the reins when you've poured so much of yourself into something over a span of many years. But there will come a day when we must, for such is nature of life. We must trust God enough to let go.

III. GOD REIGNS SUPREME (1 Samuel 12:12-25)

Samuel continued speaking to the Israelites. He conceded that Saul had accomplished exactly what they'd wanted from a king. He had delivered them from the cruel hand of the Ammonites. But hadn't the LORD rescued them time and time again using other methods as well? Samuel wanted the people to understand that God had saved them and that King Saul was merely the instrument through which He'd done so. The aging prophet told the people that as long as they feared the LORD, He'd bless both them and their king. However, if they turned away from God, His hand would be against them. The bottom line - nothing had really changed. God was still sovereign over His creation.

Samuel asked God to send a storm as a testimony of His might. The dark clouds gathered, the thunder clapped, and the rain poured upon the wheat fields of Israel. The people acknowledged their sinfulness in asking for a human king, perhaps realizing momentarily that the LORD was the only one they truly needed. On that day, Israel feared both God and Samuel.

As the rain fell, the people urged Samuel to pray for them. Though they had sinned in seeking an earthly king, Samuel consoled them by saying that they should just keep serving God. The LORD would not abandon them for making this mistake, nor would Samuel stop praying for and/or teaching them what was good and right. Samuel encouraged them to remember the faithfulness of God and to follow Him, otherwise they'd be swept away.

CONCLUSION

The Ammonites had been defeated and the citizens of Jabesh-gilead had been saved. King Saul had risen to the occasion and Israel was growing more formidable. Things appeared to be playing out just as the tribes had hoped when they'd first agreed to unite as a nation. Yet, Samuel saw cause for concern. While the king had won a great battle, his methods were a bit troubling. Saul had threatened the livelihood of his own subjects if they refused to comply with his order to join his army. He had compelled the men to serve, just as Samuel had previously warned that he would. Would such behavior characterize the leadership style of this new king? Only time would tell...

The main point of today's message is this - God alone is king. From the White House to the state house, from the state house to the courthouse, from the courthouse to your house - at every level God reigns supreme. Those who have authority over others are still subject to the dominion of our LORD. Those who wish to lead well must always remember that they themselves are servants of Almighty God.

Every victory belongs to the LORD. Every success can be attributed to Him. All blessings are of God. Every perfect gift has come down from the Father of Lights. He is the source of all we have. Praise Him! Hallelujah! Our God is good! His riches are never ending!

Saul Battles the Philistines

Originally Preached - 5/28/2018

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. - Romans 12:3

After many years of autonomy the 12 tribes of Israel united to form a distinct nation. The original founding of Israel took place sometime around 1050 BC. While God blessed the new nation, and continues to do so even to this day, He also warned them of potential dangers. Strong centralized governments may offer some benefits, but they are also a threat to individual freedom and independence. What's more, many of the citizens in such places erroneously trust the state rather than God to be their protector and provider.

Saul was chosen to be the first king of Israel. He effectively replaced Samuel, who had served as a judge over the people. Saul lived with his family in Gibeah, a town in the land of Benjamin. When he was informed that the Ammonites were besieging the city of Jabesh-gilead, Saul quickly amassed an army to confront them. Under his leadership Israel attacked, and God gave them an overwhelming victory over the enemy. Saul had achieved great success in his first recorded act as king and the people cheered.

This morning's message is the fourth in our current series titled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". King Saul had recently routed the Ammonites in Gilead, and now felt emboldened as a military leader. Perhaps he could defeat another adversary and drive them out of Israel too. It seems that Saul was intentionally looking for another fight, and the Philistines were a fitting opponent.

I. SAMUEL'S BOLDNESS (1 Samuel 13)

After his victory over the Ammonites, King Saul released most of his army's troops. However, he did retain a smaller force of 3,000 select men. Saul stationed himself and 2,000 soldiers in Michmash and his son Jonathan led the remaining 1,000 in Gibeah. In the nearby town of Geba, there was a garrison of Philistines. Their presence so deep into Israelite territory was troubling. Likely following the orders of his father, Jonathan and his men struck the Philistine garrison. This provocative action infuriated the Philistines at large, who responded by sending their entire army to Michmash to fight against Israel. Saul retreated to Gilgal where he summoned the Israelites to battle once again.

Samuel, the priest, had instructed the king to wait there for 7 days until his arrival. He intended to offer sacrifices and petition the LORD for His divine favor during the impending conflict. But as the week passed, the people were beginning to defect, and King Saul was growing impatient. Finally, Saul foolishly chose to offer the sacrifices himself. After he'd finished, Samuel arrived

and discovered what the king had done. He told Saul that making such offerings was a task reserved only for the priests, and that because he'd broken God's command so egregiously his kingdom would not endure.

King Saul, along with only 600 men, came to Geba and joined forces with his son Jonathan and his detachment of troops. They had very few weapons with them. The Philistine army, consisting of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and an untold myriad of foot soldiers, was camped to the north at Michmash. Between the 2 armies was a deep ravine, or canyon, that ran east to west across the region. The only traversable crossing was a narrow natural land bridge known simply as "the pass". Unfortunately, it was being guarded by a Philistine patrol.

II. JONATHAN'S BRAVERY (1 Samuel 14:1-23)

Unable to cross the ravine, Saul and his troops remained camped at Gibeah. Jonathan, unbeknownst to his father, decided to attempt a daring maneuver on his own. He trusted that God could deliver the Philistines into Israel's hands even though they were overpowered and outnumbered. He planned to climb down into the ravine and back up the opposite side, thereby flanking the Philistine garrison. Then, if God approved, he intended to attack them by surprise.

Along with only one other person, his armor bearer, Jonathan quietly and carefully descended into the deep canyon and scaled back up the rocky slope on the other side. When the Philistine garrison saw the pair God signaled Jonathan to approach. He and his armor bearer bravely charged into the fray, and quickly slaughtered 20 Philistine soldiers. Moments later a violent earthquake shook the ground, and the Philistine army was thrown into disarray.

Saul's watchmen reported that the guards at the pass were no longer there and that the Philistines were scattering. He ordered Israel's army to attack. At the same time, those Israelites who'd joined the Philistines for fear they'd be killed began to rebel against them. What's more, those Israelites who had hidden themselves in the surrounding hills and caves came out to confront the enemy as well. In great confusion, the Philistines even began fighting against each other. The LORD had saved Israel yet again, and the Philistines were now in full retreat.

III. SAUL'S FOOLISHNESS (1 Samuel 14:24-52)

In his zeal to pursue and kill all of the fleeing Philistines, Saul ordered his troops not to stop and eat anything until the victory was complete. He promised to kill anyone who broke this decree. However, Jonathan was not with Saul and his army at the time and did not hear his father's command. As the day progressed Israel relentlessly chased the Philistines into the forest, and came across a comb filled with delicious honey. Jonathan paused for a moment to refresh himself and ate some of the honey. The weary and hungry Israelites were unable to stop Jonathan before he took a bite. When they told him about his father's orders, Jonathan reasoned that if they'd all been allowed to eat something they would have caught more of the retreating Philistines. Instead, they were completely famished.

When the Israelite army finally stopped for the night, the people hastily ate from the spoil of the Philistines. King Saul constructed an altar and asked the LORD if he should continue his pursuit in the morning. To his surprise, God did not answer. The king sensed that something was wrong, and so he gathered all of the people together to investigate. After casting lots, Saul determined that Jonathan had defied his order not to eat any food during the chase. Though he'd promised to kill any offender, the people stepped up on Jonathan's behalf and the king spared his son's life. Nevertheless, Saul ended his pursuit. The remaining Philistines escaped and lived to fight another day.

Saul was king over Israel for 42 years. His reign was characterized by constant warfare. Saul battled against Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, the Philistines, and the Amalekites. He enjoyed tremendous success during these campaigns, inflicting great punishment upon the enemies of Israel. Saul's cousin Abner served as the captain of his army. Due to the severity and the ongoing nature of conflict, Saul constantly and continuously drafted the men of Israel into military service.

CONCLUSION

Last week, we read that King Saul had amassed an army by threatening harm to his own people if they did not comply with his command to join. This week we read that he apparently picked a fight with the Philistines. He also proved to be both impatient and arrogant, believing himself to be qualified to offer sacrifices in lieu of the priest. In addition, he was foolish to order that his own troops not take care of themselves during their pursuit of the enemy. He was so blinded by his desire to win that he again neglected the needs of his own people. Saul was a very flawed person who had a highly inflated ego. His success went to his head, and he was deeply intimidated by anyone who stole any of his spotlight.

There are several takeaways from today's message that are worth highlighting. First, we must always wait patiently upon the LORD. When we get ahead of God, bad things almost always happen. Second, we must not presume ourselves to be more worthy than we are. Such arrogance will certainly lead to trouble. Third, we should not elevate our own desires over the needs of others. Selfishness is never the proper approach. The consequences of these misbehaviors are not always immediate, but they do come in time - just as they would for King Saul. We will see this unfold in the coming weeks...

Another observation. Saul had a priest by his side during the battle, but it wasn't Samuel. Why not? Could it be that Saul was angry at Samuel for confronting him at Gilgal? Perhaps Samuel had embarrassed or angered him by calling out his sinful conduct. If so, maybe Saul didn't want Samuel there. Conceited people often surround themselves with only those who will stroke their egos. Saul wanted a spiritual leader who would make him feel good about himself and affirm his every deed, rather than one who'd point out his sinful and reckless behavior. I'm so glad that people today don't follow this methodology when choosing their pastors... (Sorry for the

sarcasm here; I just couldn't help myself.)

Finally, this story describes 2 armies separated by a large canyon. Jonathan passed through it, defeated the enemy, and enabled Israel to cross over the divide. This picture is comparable to the great gulf of sin that separates unrighteous people from God. Only Jesus was able to span this gap through His death and resurrection. In so doing, the Lord forever conquered death and the grave and opened the pathway to salvation. Now everyone has access to God and can cross over to Him if they so choose simply by placing their faith in Jesus.

Next week, we will discuss the beginning of Saul's demise. What caused it and what would be the result? Until then, may God's glorious countenance shine upon you.

Saul Rejected as King

Originally Preached - 6/3/2018

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. - 1 John 2:3-5a

We began our current sermon series titled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel" just over a month ago. Thus far we have learned how the 12 tribes consolidated with one another to form a single nation called Israel. This happened around 1050 BC. Under God's direction, the priest Samuel anointed a Benjaminite named Saul to serve as Israel's first king. Saul was a wealthy, handsome, and stately young man. He became king when he was 30 years old. His reign lasted 42 years and was marked by constant warfare.

Saul enjoyed his first victory over the Ammonites when he delivered the besieged city of Jabesh-gilead. Later on, with the aid of his courageous son Jonathan, Saul defeated the Philistines at the pass near Michmash. The king had won back-to-back conflicts, but in so doing had demonstrated several character flaws. Saul was extremely egotistical, impulsive, and impatient. Because of his foolish and sinful behavior, Samuel warned Saul that his kingdom would not endure.

Some 400 years earlier, during the exodus from Egypt, the Amalekites had attacked the children of Israel as they journeyed toward Mt. Sinai. Joshua led the children of Israel in battle against them, while Moses observed from an overlooking hilltop. When Moses held his hands up Israel prevailed and when they dropped Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur assisted by holding Moses' arms up as the fighting waged on. Ultimately, the Israelites won the victory and the surviving Amalekites retreated. At that time, the LORD told Moses that one day He'd completely annihilate all of these vicious Amalekites and forever "blot out their memory" because of their aggression towards His people.

In today's message, we will see that God remembered this centuries-old promise. The LORD would use the militaristic King Saul to again battle against these dreaded Amalekites. Would Saul be able to completely destroy these hated enemies of Israel? Let's find out...

I. DISOBEDIENT (1 Samuel 15:1-9)

God spoke to Samuel, who in turn spoke to King Saul, and told him to strike the Amalekites and to utterly destroy them. He was to show no mercy, but rather to kill them all - men, women, children, infants, and animals. Though this may have seemed extremely harsh, it was God's promised judgment upon the Amalekites for their wickedness against Israel. It was probably long overdue. The LORD is long-suffering, but at some point He will judge rebellious nations.

Saul rallied together an army of over 200,000 soldiers. They proceeded to the city of Amalek, where they set an ambush in the valley. The Kenites also lived in this area, dispersed among the Amalekites. Unlike the Amalekites, the Kenites were not hostile toward Israel. Not wanting to harm a friend, Saul asked the Kenites to leave before engaging in the conflict. After they'd safely gone, Saul attacked the Amalekites and soundly defeated them. In the process Saul killed most of them, but not all. He took King Agag alive as a hostage and spared many of their best animals.

Saul failed to carry out God's instructions. He was supposed to completely destroy all of the Amalekites - both man and beast. There were to be absolutely no survivors. Instead, some of them remained. Anything less than complete obedience is, in fact, disobedience. God does not ask us to partially keep His commandments, but rather to obey them fully!

II. DISAPPROVED (1 Samuel 15:10-21)

God was disappointed with Saul's continued disobedience and expressed His frustration to Samuel. Hearing this, Samuel also became distressed and cried out to the LORD all night. Meanwhile, Saul had built a monument for himself at Carmel and then gone down to Gilgal. Samuel went to meet Saul there. The king began to boast about his great victory and wholehearted obedience to God, but Samuel interrupted by asking, "Then why do I hear the sounds of sheep and oxen?" Saul answered that the people had chosen to keep these animals alive in order to make sacrifices to God.

Samuel began to tell Saul all of the things that God had said to him the night before. The aging prophet reminded Saul of his humble beginnings and how God had exalted him to the kingship of Israel. Samuel then repeated the LORD's original instructions to Saul regarding the heathen Amalekites - to exterminate them all including their animals. Samuel then asked, "Why have you not obeyed the LORD's command?"

The stunned king began offering excuses for his behavior. He insisted that he had utterly destroyed the Amalekites just as God desired, and had only brought back King Agag as a hostage. He then blamed the people for sparing the lives of certain animals, arguing that it had been done for a noble reason. They wanted to offer these beasts to the LORD as sacrifices. Despite Saul's attempts to justify his disobedience, God disapproved.

III. DISMISSED (1 Samuel 15:22-35)

Samuel had heard enough rhetoric. He spoke boldly saying, "Does the LORD find more delight in the sacrifices made by His people or in their obedience to Him?" As this applied specifically to the situation at hand, Samuel was asking whether God would be more pleased by their sacrifices of these animals than He would have been if'd they'd killed them when they were supposed to. Without waiting for a response, Samuel then answered his question by

proclaiming an important truth - "Obedience is better than sacrifice." What's more, he also told Saul that God had rejected him as king over Israel because of his sinful rebellion against the LORD's word.

Saul urged Samuel to forgive him, again blaming his people for what had happened, but Samuel refused. As he turned to leave, the desperate king grabbed Samuel's robe and it tore. Seeing this, Samuel stated that the LORD had torn the kingdom of Israel away from Saul and had given it to someone else. Though his fate had already been sealed, still Saul pleaded with Samuel to stay and worship with him. Samuel reluctantly agreed.

Samuel asked that Saul's prisoner, King Agag, the ruler of the Amalekites, be brought to him. The defeated king stood before Samuel confident that he himself would be spared. But Samuel, the man of God, took a sword and cut Agag into pieces. Unlike Saul, Samuel obeyed the will of God completely. After this bloody incident, Samuel and Saul parted ways and did not see each other again until the day of Saul's death. Samuel grieved for Saul, who the LORD had dismissed as king over Israel.

Apparently, King Saul had spared other Amalekites too or perhaps allowed some to escape. He did not fulfill the promise that God had made to Moses. The Amalekites are mentioned again during the reigns of King David and King Hezekiah. The final reference to the Amalekites is found in the story of Esther, which took place some 600 years later. Haman, the evil villain who sought to destroy all of the Jews, was an Agagite - a descendant of the brutal King Agag. Because of Saul's disobedience, many more Israelites died and the hands of the Amalekites before they were finally blotted out completely.

CONCLUSION

There are a couple of really important principles embedded in the passage of Scripture that we read and discussed this morning. Let me conclude the service this morning by pointing them out briefly.

First, Saul had chosen to disobey God by sparing the enemy's best animals. He insisted that his heart was in the right place because he just wanted to sacrifice them to God. After all, wouldn't this be pleasing to the LORD? In other words, Saul believed that his misbehavior was acceptable because it was done with good intentions. But Samuel refuted this flawed thinking. Beloved, please learn this lesson from the text - Good intentions do not justify bad behavior. It is never okay to disobey God's commands, even if you think there is a good reason for doing so.

Second, God desires our obedience more than our sacrifices. In ancient times, sacrifices were primarily offered in the temple as an act of worship to God. A modern equivalent would be the sacrifices of praise that we bring to Him each Sunday at church. The principle is this - God is more pleased when we obey Him by doing what He says than He is by our participation in a weekend worship service. This is not to minimize the importance of church attendance and

worship, but rather to point out the much greater importance of continual obedience to God's commands.

Finally, though Saul was still literally the king over Israel and would continue as such for many more years, God had spiritually rejected him and chosen another. The LORD's favor and blessing had been removed. As such, Saul's remaining years would be characterized largely by crazed jealousy and bitter obsession. This new king would be "better" than Saul, more righteous, more godly, a man after God's own heart... Next week we will be introduced to this young man for the first time.

A Boy Named David

Originally Preached - 6/10/2018

No creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. - Hebrews 4:13 [ESV]

Saul's reign as the first king of Israel was characterized by frequent and constant warfare. His first conflict involved the Ammonites whom he defeated at Jabesh-gilead. Soon thereafter he routed the Philistines near the pass at Michmash. Saul's son Jonathan played an integral role in this victory. After that he attacked and killed most of the heathen Amalekites, though some survived and fled. In each of these battles God had fought alongside King Saul and the Israelites, which led to their great success.

While these military accomplishments were truly impressive, they also revealed many of Saul's personal flaws. He was an arrogant and prideful man who built a monument for himself and esteemed himself worthy of offering sacrifices in place of the priest. He was also impatient, not willing to wait on Samuel or God's blessing before taking action. He was foolish to order his soldiers not to eat during their pursuit of the enemy. He took what he wanted and threatened his own people with harm if they did not comply with his commands. He was sometimes blatantly disobedient to God. For these and possibly many other reasons, the LORD rejected Saul as king and removed His blessing from him.

Samuel, the man who had originally anointed Saul, was now regretting his decision. He and the king's relationship was deeply strained and greatly deteriorated. The 2 men had parted ways, and Saul was now escorted by another priest. The warnings that Samuel had spoken to the tribal elders about the potential dangers of an earthly king had come to fruition. Samuel could have said "I told you so!", but instead he lamented for Saul and his countrymen. The bewildered prophet was broken and did not know what to do.

During our study of "Ancient Israel" this morning we will be introduced to a boy named David. This young man would represent the future of Israel. But as we will discover over the coming weeks, his ascension to the throne would be long and difficult.

I. SEARCHING (1 Samuel 16:1-5)

After a lengthy season of grieving, the LORD spoke to Samuel and told him it was time to move on. God instructed Samuel to go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem where he was to anoint one of his sons as king. The LORD did not yet specify which of the sons He had selected. Upon hearing this, Samuel expressed fear over what might happen to him if he anointed a new king while Saul was still on the throne. Saul was an extremely jealous and violent man who wouldn't hesitate to kill Samuel or anyone else for that matter.

God told Samuel to take a heifer with him to Bethlehem and to offer it as a sacrifice. This ceremonial sacrifice would provide him with the cover to meet and speak with Jesse while not revealing his true intentions to the watchful king. Samuel arrived in Bethlehem and invited several people from the city, including Jesse and his sons, to attend the animal sacrifice. Those loyal to Saul thought nothing of it.

These verses demonstrate that God listens to and cares for the concerns of his children. Samuel was truly afraid for his life and was uncertain how Saul might react if he found out what was going on. When Samuel expressed his worries to the LORD, God himself devised a plan to protect the fearful prophet. In the same way, when believers cast their worries and anxieties upon the LORD He will take care of them also.

II. SELECTING (1 Samuel 16:6-13)

When Jesse and his sons showed up at the ceremony, Samuel began to observe and evaluate each of them. He began with Jesse's oldest son Eliab. When Samuel saw Eliab's grand stature and appearance he thought that surely he would be God's choice. But God had not chosen Eliab. Samuel moved on to Abinadab, but God had not chosen him either. Next came Shammah, and again God said no. One by one, Jesse's sons passed by Samuel from oldest to youngest but none were chosen. Samuel was confused and asked Jesse if these were all of his sons. Jesse replied that his youngest son was not present, but rather was tending the sheep. Samuel asked that he be brought to the sacrifice.

When the boy arrived, God told Samuel to anoint him in the presence of his father and older brothers. As Samuel poured the oil upon him, the Spirit of the LORD fell mightily upon young David. This handsome lad was God's choice to become the future king of Israel. After the anointing, Samuel returned to Ramah and David stayed with his family. A few years passed by uneventfully.

Of all of the brothers, David seemed to be the least likely choice. All of the observable signs seemed to suggest that another son was more suitable. Samuel presumed that one of the older brothers would surely be God's pick. But during the selection process the LORD taught Samuel an important truth. He said, "God sees what man does not see. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." God knows the hearts of men, and He saw in David something that Samuel could not.

III. SOOTHING (1 Samuel 16:14-23)

Not only did the Spirit of the LORD fall upon David, but it also departed from King Saul. Instead, an evil spirit began to terrorize the lofty king. Saul became increasingly irritated and his servants thought that music might be helpful to bring him comfort. They suggested that a skilled harp player be found to play for the king. Saul agreed and ordered that such a musician be brought to him.

One of Saul's men stated that he knew someone who played the harp well. It was the son of Jesse, a godly young man named David. So Saul requested that David come to Gibeath and serve him as the king's musician. Jesse made the necessary preparations and then sent his son David from his home in Bethlehem to work in the royal court. David became Saul's personal attendant. The king loved David greatly and over time even named him as his armor bearer.

Saul sent word to Jesse to express how much he appreciated his son David. Whenever the king became restless or agitated by the evil spirit that came upon him, David would play the harp and Saul would be refreshed. The beautiful music calmed Saul's nerves, allowing him to relax and regain his composure.

Music is powerful. It can stir men to action and can help them find rest. It allows people to express their deepest thoughts and feelings when words alone are insufficient. It provides a means to worship God through songs of joyful praise. Music is one of the most beautiful creative expressions of God, and it is inherent to the heart of men.

CONCLUSION

One might ask why God would intentionally terrorize someone with an evil spirit. It doesn't seem very godly, does it? Well, let's consider for a moment that Saul had been very disobedient to the LORD and was deserving of judgment. Perhaps this was part of the reason why God allowed an evil spirit to pester the king. More importantly, let's also not forget that it was the presence of this spirit that paved the way for David to be brought into the royal court. So, upon reflection, it is evident that God used the evil spirit to accomplish His divine will.

Early on in their relationship, King Saul loved young David and showed him great kindness and favor. But Saul was still a very egotistical man who felt threatened by anyone who took away from his own personal glory. As David rose in prominence and renown, Saul's attitude toward him dramatically changed. We will see this unfold in the coming chapters...

The main idea of today message is this - while people see just what is on the outside, God sees what is on the inside. He knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Samuel could only see a little shepherd boy who seemed unfit to be king, but God saw greatness and righteousness in David's heart. What does the LORD see in you? Perhaps you should stop listening to the negative voices of those who don't know the real you and instead cling to the truths of God. He has chosen us to be kings and queens because of the faith that resides within each of us.

Next week we will read one of the mostly widely known stories in the entire Bible. It tells of a boy, a sling, a stone, and a giant. You have probably heard this story and even told it yourself many times, and yet it never grows old. I trust you will join us as we read this passage again, and seek to discover how it applies to our lives today.

David and Goliath

Originally Preached - 6/18/2018

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me? - Psalm 56:3-4

This morning we will read one of the most well known stories in the Bible. It tells of a courageous shepherd boy who fearlessly faces a Philistine giant. Though he appears to be no match for the colossal champion, this young lad has a secret weapon. This is the epic story of David versus Goliath, and it's the seventh message in our study of ancient Israel.

In the order of Scripture, the battle between David and Goliath is told after Saul's terrors begin. Last week we read that the king had sought out a musician to play the harp for him whenever he needed comfort. This harpist he found was David. Over time Saul developed a great love for the young boy. He even expressed his appreciation to David's father Jesse. This would suggest that the king knew David and his dad sometime before his contest with Goliath.

However, after David kills the giant Philistine (which we will read about today), the Bible indicates that King Saul wonders who David's father is. He asks Abner, the commander of his army, and he doesn't know either. This seems to indicate that Saul did not know David or his father prior to his fight against Goliath. What's more, David journeys to the battle from his boyhood home in Bethlehem rather than from Saul's royal home in Gibeah. Perhaps David was not yet staying with and serving King Saul. It seems possible that events of chapter 17 actually took place before some of those described in chapter 16.

Though their chronological sequence is uncertain, we know that David both faced Goliath and served as Saul's harpist. He was a multi-talented young man. David's love for music continued throughout his life as evidenced by the book of Psalms, most of which he composed. His courage was another trait that he exhibited throughout his life as well. This bravery was certainly on display in today's sermon.

I. CHALLENGE PRESENTED (1 Samuel 17:1-19)

The Philistines had once again gathered their armies together to wage war against Israel. King Saul summoned his troops to meet them in Judah. The 2 forces positioned themselves on opposite mountain sides with the valley of Elah between them. One of the Philistines, a mighty champion named Goliath, walked out of their camp and down into the valley. He was almost 10 feet tall and clad with heavy armor. The giant shouted out to the Israelites so that all could hear. He challenged them to send their best warrior forward to meet him in a one-on-one, "winner take all" contest. If Goliath won, Israel would surrender to the Philistines. If Goliath lost, the Philistines would surrender to Israel. Because of his daunting size and strength, King Saul and his men were dismayed and discouraged by the giant's challenge.

Goliath came forward in the morning and the evening for 40 days, taunting Israel and issuing his challenge. But Saul and his troops were frozen in fear, for no one wanted to face the mighty Philistine champion. Jesse's 3 oldest sons were soldiers in Saul's army. After many days had passed, Jesse became worried and sent his youngest son David to check on them and bring back a report. David departed from his home in Bethlehem with supplies for his brothers who were on the battlefield at the valley of Elah.

If we as God's people allow the enemy to dictate the terms of battle we will likely always live in fear and distress. Make no mistake, the Devil will always present conditions that are advantageous to him and never to us. He will entice us into valleys where we should never go. Why do we foolishly consent to his demands and believe his lies? Jesus Christ has already conquered death and the grave. Satan is a defeated enemy. We do not have to play by his rules or answer to his terms. Allow God to exercise control over your life.

II. CHALLENGE ACCEPTED (1 Samuel 17:20-32)

David arrived at the camp and found his brothers. While he was greeting them, Goliath came forward shouting his challenge to the armies of Israel. David saw how all of King Saul's men cowered before the dreaded Philistine. They told David that Saul had promised to greatly reward anyone who could defeat the giant. David was intrigued. He questioned why an uncircumcised Philistine would be allowed to taunt the armies of God.

David's oldest brother Eliab overheard him speaking with the other soldiers. Eliab was furious and charged David with abandoning his father's flocks in Bethlehem in order to come watch the battle. David answered his brother's ire by stating that he was simply asking a legitimate question. He went throughout the camp inquiring about Goliath and his challenge until word finally reached the king. Saul asked that David be brought to him. Standing before the embattled king, young David boldly accepted the Philistine's challenge to fight.

David could not believe that the armies of Israel, God's chosen people, were afraid of this heathen Philistine. It bothered him to see how they trembled in fear. David believed that God was almighty and that no enemy could stand before Him - not even a great warrior like Goliath. His unwavering faith in God's power led to David's tremendous courage. May we as Christians share this same level of faith...

III. CHALLENGE COMPLETED (1 Samuel 17:33-58)

King Saul initially tried to talk David out of his decision, believing that the young boy had virtually no chance against mighty Goliath. But David insisted, telling Saul of previous encounters in which God had enabled him to kill both the lion and the bear. Impressed by his confidence, the king consented and gave David his armor and sword. David tried it on, but the armor did not fit well and felt funny, so he took it off. Instead the shepherd boy took a simple sling and 5 smooth

stones from a nearby brook. Armed with only these, David bravely walked out into the valley to confront the Philistine giant.

When Goliath saw David approaching, he began to curse incredulously. He could not believe that Israel had allowed a mere boy to answer his challenge. But David boldly proclaimed that God would deliver the Philistine into his hands. Goliath was angered by David's words and began to advance. Then David took a stone, placed it in his sling, and slung it at the giant. It hit Goliath squarely in the forehead causing the mighty champion to fall down on his face.

Seizing the moment, David quickly ran up to the dazed Philistine. He took Goliath's sword from its sheath and cut off the giant's head. When the Philistine army saw what had happened, they turned and fled. The men of Israel pursued them, killing many and plundering their camps as they went. David kept Goliath's head as a trophy and brought it to Jerusalem. He also kept the vanquished champion's sword. Saul so impressed that he wanted to know more about David's background and family. Notice that the Philistines themselves did not honor the terms of Goliath's challenge as they fled rather than surrendering.

David used a weapon that he was most comfortable with - a sling and a stone. Sometimes we lose the battles in our lives because we fight them with the wrong weapons. God has provided us with the necessary armor to fend off the Devil and his demonic soldiers (see Ephesians 6:11-18). We need to familiarize ourselves with it, to test it, and to ready ourselves to use it when the time comes. We need to put on the whole armor of God, and to masterfully wield the Sword of the Spirit, as we face the the LORD's enemies.

CONCLUSION

Prior to their encounter in the valley of Elah, David had never met Goliath. These 2 men were not personally acquainted. Goliath was not an enemy of David per se, but rather an enemy of God. This is what made him so offensive and repugnant to the young lad. Goliath was an affront to the LORD and His people. It is important that we make this distinction. The story of David and Goliath is not so much about overcoming your own personal challenges or the giants in your life, but rather about boldly facing those who stand against the LORD.

How do we view the enemies of God? Do we find them as vile and reprehensible as David did? Probably not. Most of us are content with allowing their taunting and ridicule to go on indefinitely. We have come to accept the God-hating rhetoric as a part of our culture and, sadly, it barely bothers us anymore. Perhaps we need to become more disturbed by the sinfulness of this world. Then we might be more inclined to actually enter into the fray.

God has called His children to bravely confront the evil forces of this world. We are to engage these giants with confidence, knowing that the LORD is mightier than any other person or power. We should not be discouraged or paralyzed by fear and doubt, but rather advance His cause with courage and persistence. We must not allow Satan to dictate the terms by which we

live, but rather we must adhere to the holy and righteous standards of God. We must arm ourselves with the right weapons in order to bring God's enemies down.

Next week we will discuss one of the closest and most endearing friendships in the Bible. We will also see a rift beginning to develop between King Saul and his courageous servant David. Until then, may we boldly stand before the enemies of God and conquer them valiantly in His strength and for His glory!

David and Jonathan

Originally Preached - 6/24/2018

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for [times of] adversity. - Proverbs 17:17

I hope you have been enjoying this year's extended sermon series titled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". It covers the fascinating period of Jewish history in which the nation of Israel was first established. The Hebrew people had been separated according to their tribal families for centuries, but eventually united to form a single nation. Israel was established as a monarchy and Saul became its first king.

Despite his early military success, Saul had disobeyed God and had forfeited the LORD's favor. God had instead chosen Jesse's youngest son David, a mere shepherd boy from Bethlehem, to someday follow Saul as the new king. Through a series of divine circumstances, young David had been chosen to play the harp for Saul whenever the king needed refreshing. Thus, David began to develop a familiarity with the royal family even as a youth.

Then David courageously slew the champion Goliath. This event marked an important turning point in Saul and David's relationship. Today's message sheds light on the deep divide that developed between King Saul and his servant David. The lingering ramifications of David's victory over the Philistine giant would poison Saul's behavior for the rest of his life.

However, this message also emphasizes the wonderful friendship that blossomed between David and Jonathan. Theirs was one of the strongest friendships written about in the entire Bible. Thus, today's sermon applies to both the love of a friend and the hatred of an enemy.

I. A FORBIDDEN FRIEND (1 Samuel 18)

After David's incredible triumph over Goliath, Saul had him brought to live in the royal household permanently. Prior to this point it appears that David was summoned to serve the king on an "as needed basis". Now that he resided there full-time, young David began to develop closer relationships with those who lived in the king's house. Over time, he became best friends with Saul's son Jonathan. These 2 men pledged their mutual devotion and loyalty to one another.

Meanwhile King Saul had overheard some women singing about how remarkable David was compared to him. The troubled king was disturbed by these assertions. The next day Saul was overcome by the evil spirit from God and David came to play the harp for him. As he played, Saul angrily threw a spear at David but missed. Saul did not want David living in his house anymore, so the king appointed David to be a commander in his army and sent him away. For the next few years, David enjoyed great success in battle and became more and more famous while King Saul became increasingly fearful and jealous of him.

Eventually Saul decided to offer his oldest daughter to David in marriage, hoping perhaps to secure the young man's allegiance and servitude. David politely and humbly declined the offer, stating that he was unworthy to be the king's son-in-law. King Saul would not be deterred, so he then offered his younger daughter Michal to David - if he could kill 100 Philistines. Saul actually hoped that David would die trying to reach this number, but instead David boldly accepted the king's challenge and killed 200 Philistines. King Saul was furious, but reluctantly gave his daughter Michal to David in marriage. No matter what evil schemes Saul conspired against him, it seemed that David always came out on top. Meanwhile, during all this time, David and Jonathan's friendship grew stronger and stronger.

II. A FAITHFUL FRIEND (1 Samuel 19)

Finally Saul decided to tackle the problem directly by simply decreeing that David be executed. But Jonathan couldn't stand to see David killed, especially for no good reason, so he warned him to go and hide until the situation was resolved. Then Jonathan went to reason with his father, and successfully convinced Saul to leave David alone. So David temporarily returned to the king's service and things were as they had been before. David resumed his role as commander and led the army to another victory over the Philistines.

Not long after, David was again summoned to play comforting music for the ailing king. Saul, for the second time, in an outburst of rage threw his spear at David but missed. David fled into the night and came to his house, but King Saul sent men to lie in wait for him there. They were ordered to kill David the next morning. Michal helped David escape through a window, and deceived Saul's soldiers by pretending that David was ill. David had again eluded Saul's clutches and fled to Samuel's home in Ramah.

Samuel sought to provide refuge for David in Naioth, a nearby settlement where Samuel led a community of prophets. Once the king discovered where David had gone, he dispatched a team to go get him. But when these men arrived, the Spirit of God came upon them and they began to prophesy. As such, they were rendered unable to capture David. Saul sent a second team and then a third team, but both times these men prophesied also. Finally Saul himself went to Ramah, but he too was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied. None of Saul's servants, including the king himself, were able to catch David.

Jonathan had interceded on David's behalf to spare his life. Michal had tricked Saul's men so that David could escape. Samuel had given David refuge in Ramah and God Himself had protected David from being captured. Everyone loved David, even Saul's own children, and the king became consumed with jealousy.

III. A FOREVER FRIEND (1 Samuel 20)

David left Ramah and went to meet with his friend Jonathan once again. The situation was dire and something had to be done, so the 2 men developed a plan. The New Moon feast was

approaching and David was expected to attend the event at Saul's house, but he was understandably afraid to do so. Jonathan agreed that David should hide in the field. Jonathan wanted to find out what his father's intentions were regarding David. The friends developed a signal, using a bow and arrows, that would secretly let David know if it was safe to return.

The first night of the feast Saul noticed that David was absent, but he didn't say anything about it. The second night, however, King Saul asked his son Jonathan if he knew where David was. Jonathan answered that he'd allowed David to travel home to Bethlehem for a few days. The king was furious at Jonathan for siding with David over his own father. Saul then errantly threw his spear at Jonathan! The king's son left the table disgusted, knowing now that David could never return safely. King Saul burned with hatred for David.

The next morning, in keeping with their plan, Jonathan discreetly went outside to practice archery. He took a servant boy with him to the field where David was hiding and watching. The signal was simple - if Jonathan shot his arrows beside the target then David was safe but if he shot them beyond the target then David was in danger. Jonathan shot 3 arrows beyond the target, thereby warning David that Saul's anger had not subsided. After the boy gathered the arrows, Jonathan sent him back to the palace. When he was gone, David rose from his hiding place. He and Jonathan exchanged an emotional embrace as they said goodbye for the last time. Both men knew that David could never come back as long as Saul was king. They again pledged that, despite their separation, they would remain friends forever. Then David fled and Jonathan returned home.

CONCLUSION

Though we have talked a lot this morning about King Saul's blinding resentment and anger toward David, I want to close by focusing our attention on the special friendship between David and Jonathan. There are several important observations we can make as we consider their relationship. I will mention 3 of them briefly.

First, though his father most certainly disapproved, Jonathan loved David dearly. This shows that sometimes our friendships can become stronger and more meaningful than our family relationships. After all - you get to choose your friends, but you don't get to choose your relatives. It is important that we choose our friends wisely.

Second, true friends will always be there for each other. Jonathan put his own life in jeopardy multiple times to help protect David. He did not sell David out even when pressured repeatedly to do so. If not for Jonathan, young David might have been killed or imprisoned. Jonathan's loyalty to David stands as an example of what it means to be a faithful friend.

Third, after it became obvious that David and Jonathan would have to part ways the 2 men still pledged to remain friends forever. Genuine friendships endure even if they are separated by great amounts of time and distance. For example, I haven't seen some of my best friends for

several years now, yet I know that if I needed them they'd still be here for me. All I'd have to do is call. That is the power a lifelong friendship.

In closing, we should always remember that Jesus calls His followers "friends". There is no closer or truer friend than Jesus. He is always faithful to His disciples. Whatsmore, He gave his life for us so that we might be eternally set free from sin and death. Jesus chose to ransom us - He wasn't forced to do it. He did it because He loves us. Jesus is the best friend that anyone can ever have. All you have to do is call upon His name. He will never let you down.

Saul Pursues David

Originally Preached - 7/1/2018

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

We are journeying through a series of sermons titled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". These messages focus upon the roughly 120 year period from Israel's original founding as a united nation until its separation into 2 distinct kingdoms. This took place from approximately 1050 BC to 930 BC.

As we read last week, the relationship between King Saul and his servant David had become hopelessly broken. It had deteriorated far past the point of rescue. Jonathan finally said goodbye to his dear friend, and David ran from Saul's presence. For the next 10 years of his life, from roughly age 20 to age 30, David would be a fugitive. His flight would take him to various locations throughout southern Israel (Judah), into the neighboring nation of Moab, and even into the hated land of Philistia (including the Negev Desert).

During this phase of his life, David wrote several psalms. Some of these were general in nature and others were specific to his present circumstances. Most of David's psalms do not provide any background information or context, but some of them (13 to be exact) do. It seems likely that Psalms 52, 54, 56, 57, and 63 were all written either during or about things that happened during the years when David was a fugitive. There may be other psalms besides these that would go in this category but remain unidentified. In all, David is credited with writing approximately 75 (or half) of the Psalms.

Today's message covers 7 chapters in the Bible. It could easily be broken down into several segments, but for the purposes of this series we will combine this content into a single sermon. As such, I will have to summarize the events that took place during this time period. I urge you, as always, to take some time to read these passages in Scripture rather than just taking my word for it. My sermons are never intended to take the place of actually reading God's Word. They are given to supplement or provide commentary for your daily Bible reading.

I. ON THE RUN (1 Samuel 21-22)

After saying farewell to Jonathan, likely near the king's house in Gibeah, David escaped to the priestly city of Nob. This town was near Jerusalem and may have been the location of the Ark of the Covenant. Nevertheless, David arrived without any supplies or weapons for his journey. He urged the priests to help him. Because he did not have any regular bread to offer, Ahimelech gave David some of the consecrated bread that had been used in the synagogue. He also gave

David the sword of the slain Philistine giant Goliath which had apparently been stored there. While David was hiding at Nob, he was seen by one of Saul's servants - a man named Doeg.

David decided to journey into the country of Philistia, hoping to find refuge in the city of Gath. However, when he arrived he was not welcomed. King Achish's servants recognized David as a valiant Israelite warrior. Fearing for his life, David pretended as if he was insane. King Achish thought that David was crazy and opted not to kill him. However, the king did ask David to depart from his presence.

David travelled to the caves of Adullam and hid himself inside. While there, many people including some of his family members, came to join him. In just a short span of time, David developed a following of about 400 men. From there, David and his supporters proceeded to the land of Moab, east of the Dead Sea, and stayed at Mizpah. Because the king of Moab was an enemy of King Saul, David figured they'd accept him. Sure enough, David found refuge in Moab for awhile. Eventually however, David sensed that God was calling him to return to Israel (the land of Judah). So David left his parents in Moab and went back. He and his men concealed themselves in the forest of Hereth.

Meanwhile, Saul's servant Doeg reported to the king that he'd seen David while in the city of Nob. Even worse, Doeg told Saul that the priests there had given David food and supplies. The angry king summoned the priests of Nob and had all 85 of them killed. He also had his men destroy the city itself. One of the priest's sons - Abiathar - escaped and fled to David and his men. He told David what had happened, and then joined the group.

II. A NARROW ESCAPE (1 Samuel 23-24)

While hiding in the forest, David learned that the Philistines had attacked the nearby city of Keilah. Risking exposure, David and his men left the forest and came to the rescue. When King Saul heard that David had delivered the people of Keilah he summoned men to go find him. Before they arrived, David retreated to the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul's men searched desperately but were unable to find the elusive David.

Somehow Jonathan learned that David was located at Horesh. He went to meet secretly with his dear and forbidden friend. Sometime after their meeting, the locals sent word to King Saul that David was hiding among them. Saul and his men were dispatched to the area, while David ventured south to Maon. Saul's men circled around one side of a mountain as David narrowly escaped on the other side. Just as it seemed that David would be captured, word came to King Saul that the Philistines had invaded. Saul broke off his pursuit in order to go confront the Philistines and David's troop withdrew to Engedi.

After dealing with the Philistine threat, Saul again renewed his search and came to the region of Engedi where David had fled. On one particular occasion, the king ordered his men to stop while he went to use the bathroom. Saul entered a cave to relieve himself, not knowing that

David was hidden inside. While he was “doing his business”, David quietly snuck up behind Saul and cut off a piece of his robe. After Saul left the cave and had gone away a short distance, David came out and shouted that he could have easily killed the king but chose not to. He held up the piece of cloth as proof. King Saul acknowledged that David was an honorable man and promised not pursue him any longer. The king and his men departed.

III. FINDING REFUGE (1 Samuel 25-27)

Sadly, news spread throughout Israel that the great prophet Samuel had died and been buried at Ramah. David and his men returned to the Wilderness of Paran, in the vicinity of Maon where they had stayed previously. While there, David’s company provided protection for several shepherds who worked for a wealthy businessman named Nabal. One day David sent a few messengers to Nabal to ask for provisions. Nabal treated them scornfully and sent them away empty-handed. David became angry at Nabal and decided to take action. Nabal’s wife Abigail learned of David’s plan and intervened on behalf of her husband. After listening to her pleas, David chose not to kill Nabal. However, a few days later Nabal died anyway. The new widow Abigail married David, thereby becoming his third wife. Michal, David’s first wife, was no longer with him but had been taken away by her father Saul sometime previously.

As they’d done once before, the citizens of Ziph alerted King Saul that David was again abiding in the area. Saul violated his truce agreement, gathered a small army of 3,000, and pursued David into the wilderness. One night, while Saul’s men were sleeping soundly, David and a friend quietly snuck into their camp. David tiptoed to the place where King Saul was sleeping. Rather than killing him in his sleep, David took Saul’s spear and left. After putting a safe distance between himself and the camp, David shouted loudly and woke the sleeping soldiers up. He displayed Saul’s spear and claimed that he could have easily killed the king yet again, but chose not to. Once more, Saul realized that David was a righteous man. The king apologized for chasing after him, and returned to his home in Gibeah.

David had heard Saul’s empty promises to leave him alone before, and decided to return to the land of the Philistines where he’d be safe. He arrived in the city of Gath, where Achish was still ruling as king. This time David did not have to pretend to be insane, because the Philistines now recognized that he was no longer siding with Israel. King Achish gave the city of Ziklag to David as a home. David and his men were ordered to perform raids in Judah, but instead they made raids in the Negev desert and misled Achish about their exploits. David lived comfortably in Philistia for almost a year and a half.

CONCLUSION

David spent 10 years of his life running and hiding from the deranged King Saul. During this time, David had a few opportunities to kill the king. Instead, David repeatedly showed favor toward Saul and spared his life. Even though he was an enemy, David respected King Saul because he was God’s chosen leader. Perhaps in today’s highly charged political climate, we

would be wise to show respect and civility to our leaders even if we don't necessarily agree with their actions. David trusted in God's protection more than he feared Saul's jealousy.

There are numerous lessons to be found in these chapters, but we will conclude this morning by considering the big picture. In these passages David was on the run. He was trying to escape from someone or something that feverishly pursued him. Have you ever been there? Have you ever sensed Satan nipping at your heels and worried because you felt as if you were only one step ahead of him? Would you like to stop running once and for all? If you've never done so before, today you can find refuge by placing your heart and life in the mighty hands of Jesus.

Saul Seeks a Medium

Originally Preached - 7/8/2018

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. - Galatians 5:19-21

Saul reigned over Israel for 42 years. While his kingship began with great fanfare and early military success, its latter years were dominated by Saul's jealous pursuit of David. The quality of his leadership declined sharply. Rather than focusing upon the welfare and management of Israel as a whole, King Saul instead spent a considerable amount of time and resources chasing David. Saul prioritized his own personal vendetta above the concerns of his nation and all of Israel suffered as a result.

After almost 10 years in zealous pursuit, Saul finally gave up the chase. David had escaped from Israel and had settled safely in the land of the Philistines. Saul was hesitant to cross over into Philistia, because they were a strong and formidable adversary. The king's decade-long quest to capture and kill David had failed, which left Saul feeling even more disgusted and unsatisfied than before.

This morning's message is the 10th installment of our current sermon series called "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". At this point in our study, we are nearing the end of Saul's reign over Israel. David has found refuge in Ziklag and has earned the favor of the Philistine King Achish. The renowned prophet Samuel has died and been buried in Ramah. Saul has returned to his home in Gibeah to rule over his people.

The sermon this morning highlights the issue of witchcraft or sorcery. Today's passage describes a seance in which King Saul seeks out and speaks with a medium. This story is the most detailed and developed one of its kind found in the Bible. While it won't answer every question we might have about the spirits and communicating with the dead, there are several lessons we can learn from this intriguing chapter.

I. THE WITCH OF ENDOR (1 Samuel 28:1-14)

Once again the Philistine army was threatening Israel. They were camped in Shunem while the Israelite forces were gathered closeby at Gilboa. King Saul observed the size and strength of the Philistine military and grew very afraid. He called out to God, hoping to receive some direction, but the LORD did not answer him. The king tried various methods of contact, but God remained silent. Finally, he decided to consult a medium.

Earlier during his kingship, Saul had outlawed the sinful practice of witchcraft and sorcery in Israel. However, because he was desperate, Saul violated his own decree and sought out a witch. The king disguised himself and came to the woman at night. He asked her to conjure up the spirit of Samuel, but she initially refused citing that it was illegal and she might get into trouble. The man in disguise promised that he wouldn't tell anyone and that no one would find out, so the medium complied with his request and the seance began.

All forms of witchcraft and black magic were violations of the Mosaic Law and were condemned severely. Those who practiced such things were to be put to death by stoning. Even today, these behaviors are still considered to be sins and should be avoided. Saul knew this was wrong, as evidenced by his earlier decree outlawing sorcery, yet he still chose to involve himself in it. We often do the same thing by choosing to take actions that we know are sinful.

II. THE SPIRIT OF SAMUEL (1 Samuel 28:15-19)

As the woman began summoning up the spirit of Samuel, she realized that the man in disguise sitting across from her was actually King Saul. He reassured her that it was okay to continue and then asked her what she saw. The medium proceeded to describe an old man rising from the earth who was dressed in robe. Saul bowed his face to the ground paying homage to the deceased prophet.

After being raised from the grave, Samuel's spirit wondered aloud why it had been disturbed. Saul explained that the Philistines were waging war, that God wouldn't answer him, and that he needed some wise advice. Samuel reminded the king that God had rejected him and become his enemy. God had given the kingdom of Israel over to David because Saul had disobeyed Him regarding the destruction of the Amalekites. Samuel concluded his rebuke by confirming Saul's worst fears. He bluntly told the jittery king that both he and his sons would be killed by the Philistines in the looming battle.

From ancient times until the present, curious people have longed to speak with the dead. Many want to contact lost family members or friends to express certain feelings or sentiments that were never said while their departed loved ones were alive. Others simply want to know what it is like in the afterlife. Whatever the reason, communing with the dead is foolish and dangerous. Notice that Samuel's spirit was not pleased about being disturbed. Fortunately it did not act out in violence, but other spirits might of. If Samuel's spirit was upset, it is certainly possible that a less righteous person's spirit might have been furious. The wisest course of action is to leave the spirits of the deceased alone.

III. THE REACTION OF SAUL (1 Samuel 28:20-25)

When King Saul heard Samuel's dire warning, he was paralyzed with fear. He had eaten nothing all that day or night and was completely devoid of strength. Seeing that he was greatly distressed, the medium quickly ended the seance and offered Saul something to eat. She could

tell that he was completely terrified by the message that he'd heard. Frozen in fear, King Saul refused to eat anything even as she urged him to do so. Finally the servants who were with Saul that night persuaded him to eat something.

The woman got up and went to prepare a small meal for the king. She slaughtered a fattened calf and baked some unleavened bread from flour. She brought the food to Saul and his servants and they ate it. Afterwards, they arose and departed during the night. Saul was stilled rattled by the ominous message that he'd received from Samuel.

In 1st Chronicles 10:13-14 the Bible plainly says that God put Saul to death because he consulted a medium. Though his death won't actually take place for a few more chapters, even now Saul is already consumed with fear. It seems that nothing good comes from consulting with the dead or involving oneself in sorcery or witchcraft. It is a fool's game.

CONCLUSION

Our culture is fascinated by the spooky, strange, morbid, and macabre. Many of our most popular television shows and movies depict witches, vampires, zombies, evil spirits, and so forth. There is an entire industry of people who make their living hunting ghosts or trying to communicate with them on behalf of their paying customers. In other less developed societies, black magic and voodoo are still practiced openly. While some of these practices are nothing more than an elaborate hoax, I do believe that there is a spiritual realm that coexists with us.

I'll admit that I'm not an expert in the area of the occult or sorcery. This is because I chose not to dabble in it. Just as I have never been drawn to alcohol or illegal drugs, likewise I've never had much interest in witchcraft. It simply doesn't appeal to me. I have several vices, but this isn't one of them. The Bible says that divination is sinful and should be avoided - that's good enough for me!

Samuel died prior to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was a godly man who had a saving faith. Therefore when Samuel died his spirit descended into Abraham's Bosom (which is also called Paradise). This was the region of Sheol that was reserved for righteous, redeemed saints. The Bible describes Sheol as the grave, which would explain why the witch saw Samuel's spirit rising up from the earth. After Jesus' resurrection, the inhabitants of Abraham's Bosom were carried away with Jesus into heaven. This portion of Sheol is now vacant.

While I can't be absolutely certain, I would argue that the dead who remain in Sheol cannot be conjured up. The only spirits who still abide there are those of unrepentant sinners that have been confined to Hades. They are restricted by Almighty God from communicating with the living. Meanwhile, the spirits of the redeemed who'd formerly been there are now present with Christ in heaven and are also inaccessible to those of us on earth. While consulting with the spirit of a deceased saint might have been possible in Old Testament times, I don't think that it is today.

I believe that those who seek to communicate with the dead can stir up spirits, but they are not those of deceased human beings. On the contrary, they are demonic spirits who often pose as departed people in order to entice curious seekers. Their allure draws people deeper and deeper into sin and further and further away from God. The Devil exploits a person's fascination with the dead in order to lead them astray. This is the slippery slope of sin.

The LORD desires that we seek Him alone for the answers to our questions and the comfort for our hurts. When we seek something or someone else, we are placing them before God. This is a clear violation of His divine law. Saul was wrong to consult a medium, and we are too if we involve ourselves in witchcraft.

David Conquers the Amalekites

Originally Preached - 7/15/2018

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. - Ephesians 4:7

After centuries of division according to their tribal identities, the people of God in the Old Testament united to form a single nation called Israel. The New Testament describes the people of God as united members of the Body of Christ, otherwise known as the church. The similarity between these 2 unions is emphasized in the name of our sermon series "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel".

King Saul's reign over Israel was nearing its fateful end. The Philistine army had invaded the land, established a camp, and was preparing itself for war. Saul was unsettled and troubled. He sought God's direction, but after decades of personal rebellion and disobedience the LORD chose not to answer him. In desperation, Saul turned to a medium in hopes of discerning how he should proceed. God was appalled by King Saul's decision to participate in witchcraft. The spirit of Samuel foretold that Saul and his sons would be killed in the coming battle.

The timing of today's message requires us to backtrack just a bit. As you might recall from our previous study, after nearly 10 years of running from Saul's goons David finally found a home in Philistia. Over a period of several months, David earned the trust of the Philistine king and allied himself with their people. As the Philistines marched into Israel on this particular occasion, David wanted to come along with them to fight against King Saul and his army.

This morning's sermon is called "David Conquers the Amalekites". It describes what David and his men were doing in Philistia while Saul was consulting a medium in Israel. The events of these chapters (29 & 30) took place at roughly the same time as those we discussed last week (in chapter 28) and those we will discuss next week (in chapter 31).

I. MISTRUSTED (1 Samuel 29)

King Achish of Philistia liked David and had previously promised that he could accompany the Philistine camp into battle. As such, David and his men tagged along in the rear of the Philistine procession as they marched toward Israel. However, when the Philistine commanders realized that David was traveling with them they became angry. Fearing that David might turn against them when the conflict started, the Philistine leaders urged their king to send David back to Philistia.

King Achish did not share his lord's concerns about David, but he didn't want to upset them either so he told David and his men to return to Philistia. David had spent months living among the Philistines, yet none of them trusted him other than the king. Despite an initial protest, David and his men complied and returned to their home in Ziklag. Meanwhile the Philistine army

continued on into Israel.

Some 15 to 20 years earlier, as a youth, David had defeated the Philistine giant Goliath with merely a sling and a stone. Though much had transpired since then and David had proven himself to be a reliable ally of the Philistines, still they didn't trust him. Some people are always skeptical of others and lack the ability to place their trust in anyone. Sometimes perhaps their suspicions are justified, but not always. We as Christians are called to place our full trust in Jesus without any doubts or reservations.

II. VICTORIOUS (1 Samuel 30:1-20)

When David and his men reached their hometown of Ziklag they discovered that the city had been raided by the Amalekites sometime while they were gone. It had been burned and all of the women and children had been taken away as captives, including David's 2 wives Ahinoam and Abigail. David and his men groaned in sorrow. The people were so upset about their missing children that they briefly considered stoning David for leaving the city so vulnerable.

After consulting with the priest, David and 600 men set out in pursuit of the Amalekites. David's troop chased so feverishly that by the time they arrived at the brook Besor 200 of his men were too exhausted to continue. Leaving them behind, David and his 400 remaining troops continued their quest. They soon encountered one of the Amalekite's servants, an Egyptian who had fallen ill and been left behind. In exchange for his safety, the servant led David and his men to the Amalekite camp.

David attacked and slaughtered almost all of the Amalekites, except for 400 who fled riding on camels. He recovered all of the women and children, including his own wives, as well as the rest of the spoil. Nothing was missing. He even recovered some things that the Amalekites had taken from other places besides Ziklag.

In the early part of his reign, God had instructed King Saul to completely annihilate the Amalekites as punishment for attacking the children of Israel during the days of the exodus. Saul failed to obey God's command completely and the kingdom was stripped from him. Now God used David to inflict even more punishment upon the Amalekites. But again, the victory was incomplete as some of them escaped. Years later the descendants of Simeon eliminated the last of the Amalekites (1 Chronicles 4:43), thereby fulfilling God's promise to totally annihilate them.

III. GRACIOUS (1 Samuel 30:21-31)

David gathered the animals and other spoil he'd recovered from the enemy and returned from the battle. On the way home he encountered those 200 men who'd been left behind earlier at the brook called Besor. Some of the 400 soldiers who had actually gone and fought against the Amalekites thought that the others who'd stayed behind should not be allowed to share in the

spoils of the victory. But David insisted that the spoils be divided and shared among all of his men, by both those who participated in the battle and those who did not. David's generosity became the new standard by which spoils were apportioned in Israel.

When David and his men made it back to Ziklag, he sent some of the surplus spoil to elders in various cities throughout southern Judah - including Hebron (which will become important a bit later in this study). In so doing, he endeared himself with his native people. We must remember that David was born and raised in Bethlehem of Judah, which belonged to the nation of Israel. The only reason he'd left Israel is because King Saul had driven him out. Though he had been living in Philistia for some time, it was clear that they didn't trust him. David held a special place in his heart for the people of his homeland in Judah.

In some ways, this story is reminiscent of a parable that Jesus told in Matthew 20:1-16 commonly called "The Laborers in the Vineyard". In this parable, Jesus describes a landowner who chooses to pay all of his workers equally even though they worked for different amounts of time. After his win over the Amalekites, David chose to share his spoil evenly with all of his men though some did not actually participate in the battle. Both passages picture the generous sharing of God's saving grace to all of His people, regardless of the quality or quantity of their good works. Sadly, they also reveal the critical attitudes of some people who falsely believe themselves to be more worthy than others.

CONCLUSION

The message today includes lessons about 2 very important issues - trust and grace.

David had proven himself to be a trustworthy friend of the Philistines. King Achish believed in him, but the other leaders did not. In the same way, God has shown Himself to be faithful and reliable. He never forsakes those who love Him. However, some people still refuse to trust in Him. They choose instead to rely on themselves or others. Their unwillingness to trust in God through a relationship with Jesus Christ will eventually lead to eternal condemnation. Trust is a necessary component of salvation.

David captured all of the spoil previously held by the Amalekites. He graciously chose to share it evenly and unconditionally among all of his people. In the same way, God has distributed a portion of His saving grace to every repentant believer regardless of their good works. Salvation is not something that can be earned or even deserved, but rather is a gift made available to all who would receive it through faith in Jesus. Grace is also a necessary component of salvation.

Let's consider these 2 words together. When we as lost sinners turn to the Lord and place our trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, God applies His saving grace to our souls securing us and granting to us eternal life. In other words, we are saved by God's amazing grace as affected by our dependant faith (or trust) in Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:8-9). This is the wonderful means of salvation! If you've never received it, I urge you to do so today.

Saul Dies in Battle

Originally Preached - 7/22/2018

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. - Acts 20:24

This morning's sermon is titled "Saul Dies in Battle". It is the 12th message of our current Bible series "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". We will be reading from 1st Samuel 31 which is the last chapter of the book. Starting next week we will move into 2nd Samuel. While most of 1 Samuel is concerned with turbulent kingship of Saul, 2nd Samuel focuses exclusively on the reign of King David.

There were 3 different kings who ruled over the entire united monarchy of Israel. King Saul was the first of these and his reign is recorded only in 1st Samuel. King David was the second and his reign is described in both 2nd Samuel and 1st Chronicles. King Solomon is the last of the trio and his reign is documented in 2nd Chronicles and 1st Kings. Thus, the books of Samuel begin with Saul, the books of Chronicles begin with David, and the books of Kings begin with Solomon.

David joined the Philistines as they headed towards Israel, but they did not want his help and asked him and his men return to Ziklag. During the days that followed, David journeyed home and then had to deal with the Amalekites. Meanwhile the Philistine army marched into Israel to wage war against King Saul. When Saul heard that the Philistines had arrived to fight, he foolishly sought out a medium in hopes of determining what he should do. The message he received was quite troubling. Saul was told that he and his sons would be killed in the upcoming battle against the Philistines and that Israel would be soundly defeated.

In our study today, we will learn what actually happened during this heated conflict. We will also discover some events that took place in the immediate aftermath of the battle. As always, we will try to glean some lesson from this text that applies to our lives today.

I. THE DEATH OF KING SAUL (1 Samuel 31:1-6; 1 Chronicles 10:1-6 & 10:13-14)

Fierce fighting broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites. Soon the armies of Israel were overpowered and began to flee, but the Philistines gave chase and slaughtered many men on Mt. Gilboa. The Philistines overtook the sons of Saul - Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua - and killed all 3 of them. During his retreat, King Saul was hit by a Philistine archer's arrow and was critically wounded. He could not continue his escape.

Saul did not want to be captured and killed by the heathen Philistines, lest they make a sport of him, so he ordered his armor bearer to pierce him through with a sword. When the fearful armor

bearer refused, Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword. The armor bearer saw that the king was dead and then committed suicide also. The foreboding words of the medium had come true - King Saul, his 3 sons, his armor bearer, and numerous Israeli soldiers were dead.

Saul's sinful rebellion against God finally caught up with him. He died as a result of the trespasses he committed, the word of the LORD which he did not keep, and for consulting a medium rather than inquiring of God. While Saul's disobedience might have been more severe and continuous than others, the truth is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Furthermore, "the wages of sin is death". Saul's tragic end is a stark reminder that everyone will die as a result of their sin someday. The only question is, are you prepared for that day when it comes?

II. THE OCCUPATION OF THE VALLEY (1 Samuel 31:7; 1 Chronicles 10:7)

The combat had taken place in the Jezreel Valley which is located in north-central Israel. When the inhabitants of the valley saw that the battle was lost they abandoned their cities. The victorious Philistines came and occupied them. As a result, a large presence of Philistines was temporarily established in this region of Israel.

Their crushing defeat at the Valley of Jezreel was a devastating loss for the young nation of Israel. Their king was dead, and so were his sons - his most obvious successors. Their army was greatly depleted and in utter disarray. What's more, a large area of the country had now fallen into the hands of and was inhabited by the enemy. This was one of Israel's most catastrophic military losses in ancient history.

Scripture records several battles that were fought in or around the Jezreel Valley. Some of them were great victories and others were horrific defeats. However, the most important contest to take place there has yet to come. The city of Megiddo is located in the valley, and many Biblical scholars agree that the Battle of Armageddon will take place in this region. Following the Great Tribulation, the enemies of God led by the Anti-Christ himself will gather to make a final assault on Israel. Jesus will come riding out of heaven leading the armies of God and will execute the LORD's wrath upon the Devil and his followers. Christ's victory will be swift and complete, Israel will be saved, and Satan and his forces will be bound for 1,000 years during the Millennium.

III. THE RECOVERY OF SAUL'S BODY (1 Samuel 31:8-13; 1 Chronicles 10:8-12)

After the fighting had ended, on the next day, the Philistines returned to the battlefield to strip the armor and other valuables from the fallen Israelites. As they were doing so, they came across the bodies of King Saul and his sons on Mt. Gilboa. The Philistines cut Saul's head off, took his weapons, and sent them back to Philistia as a declaration of their triumph to be placed in the idolatrous temple of Ashtaroah. Meanwhile Saul's decapitated body was taken to the now occupied Israeli city of Bath-shan and fastened onto a wall.

When the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done, a group of valiant men planned a daring mission to recover Saul's body. They travelled on foot all night to Beth-shan. Under the cover of darkness, these brave men took the bodies of King Saul and his sons down from the wall and brought them back to Jabesh. Then they burned the bodies and buried the bones under a tamarisk (oak) tree. Burning bodies was uncommon in Israel, but presumably because these had been so mutilated and exposed they determined it to be appropriate in this instance. The distraught people of Jabesh mourned and fasted for 7 days.

Perhaps you recall, earlier in this series, that King Saul was held in high regard by the citizens of Jabesh-gilead. One of his very first acts as king was to deliver this besieged city from the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11). Nahash had threatened to kill them all or at least to gouge out their right eyes even if they surrendered. But King Saul rallied the Israelite forces and came to their rescue, driving the heathen Ammonites away. Now, some 40 years later, the men of Jabesh showed their appreciation by bravely retrieving Saul's body and giving it a proper burial. The lesson - people don't forget the kind things that you do for them. So be nice and help people - perhaps someday they will return the favor.

CONCLUSION

Saul's long reign as Israel's first king came to a chilling end on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. His rule had started off so well. The people of Israel had celebrated his coronation with great fanfare. The first half of his kingship included several extraordinary military successes. But as time progressed Saul increasingly disobeyed the commands of God. Eventually the Spirit of God departed from Saul, his rule began to deteriorate quickly. In the later part of his reign King Saul largely neglected the interests of Israel as a whole, but instead devoted himself to the jealous pursuit of David. Finally he died in disgrace by his own hand.

Saul's story depicts the life of a person who began well but ended poorly. Perhaps you have heard the expression, "It doesn't matter how you start - what matters is how you finish." How true this is! Life is a marathon, not a sprint. Rarely does the runner who starts off in lead go on to win the race. Saul's life can be compared to someone who came out of the gates quickly and took an early lead, but as the race wore on they faded to the back. When it was all over, Saul was in last place.

On the contrary, Jesus reminds us that it is how we finish that is most important. Perhaps your life has not started off very well. Maybe you've stumbled and fallen right out of the blocks. Could it be that the hurdles of life have slowed you down and left you far behind? My friend, as long as you are living on this earth there is still an opportunity to turn things around. Jesus can bring you from the back of the pack to the front in an instant. He can transform your circumstances and give you the victory. Don't quit. Commit your life to Jesus. Run for the prize and finish well!

David Grieves

Originally Preached - 7/29/2018

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." - Matthew 5:4

Today's sermon is the first of this series taken from 2nd Samuel. The books of 1st and 2nd Samuel are obviously named after Samuel. However, not all of the material was written by Samuel, as he died during the reign of King Saul and therefore wasn't alive to see David rule over Israel. The latter chapters of 1st Samuel and all of those in 2nd Samuel are accredited primarily to Nathan and Gad, both of whom lived and served during the reign of King David. Their combined writings document this exciting period of history (1 Chronicles 29:29).

The grueling battle between the Philistines and Israelites that we discussed last week took place in the Jezreel Valley while David and his men were chasing down the Amalekites in the Negev desert many miles away. News did not travel as quickly back then, so David did not yet know that Saul and Jonathan had been killed. It was a few days before David received word of the Philistine victory and the tragic death of Israel's first king.

The message this morning describes David's reaction after finding out that King Saul and his sons were dead. When one considers everything that Saul attempted in order to destroy David, it would seem reasonable for David to celebrate his demise. For many years King Saul had been one of David's greatest adversaries, chasing him all over the countryside. While David would certainly be saddened by the loss of his dear friend Jonathan, how would he feel about King Saul's death? The answer might surprise you...

I. THE MESSAGE (2 Samuel 1:1-10)

David and his men had just defeated the Amalekites and freed the captives they'd taken. They all returned safely to Ziklag. 3 days later an Israelite messenger arrived from the camp of King Saul. The dirty and tattered man fell on the ground before David and proceeded to tell him what had happened. He explained that he'd escaped from the battlefield, that Israel had been utterly defeated, and that King Saul and Jonathan were both dead.

David pressed the messenger to find out exactly how or from whom he had received this report. The man stated that while fleeing on Mt. Gilboa he had personally witnessed Saul leaning on his spear. When he approached the fallen king, Saul was still alive though gravely wounded. Apparently Saul's suicide attempt was not immediately effective. The Philistines were quickly approaching. Saul agonizingly begged the messenger to kill him. Determining that there was no way for Saul to survive his injuries, the messenger put the dying king out of his misery. He then took Saul's crown and bracelet and brought them to David. This is how he knew firsthand that Saul was dead - for he himself was directly involved.

The scene presented in these verses describes a practice known as “assisted suicide”. This is very similar to euthanasia, sometimes called “mercy killing”. The only difference is whether or not the decedent actually asked to be killed. When someone is terminal, particularly if they are in a great amount of pain, it can become tempting to end their life artificially. It is heart wrenching to watch such a person suffer. That said, Scripture is clear that God alone is both the giver and taker of human life. When anyone takes the life of another person artificially or prematurely (other than for a Biblically just cause), they are usurping God’s authority. People should be allowed to die naturally, in keeping with the sovereign purposes of God.

While I am on this subject, if killing people artificially is wrong then it stands to reason that keeping them alive artificially is also wrong. We should not unnecessarily prolong the process of natural death. This is just another way of subverting the sovereign will of God. Perhaps you could make a case for doing so if there is a reasonable hope for recovery or resuscitation in the near-term, but why would we as believers want to indefinitely delay someone from going to Heaven? Beloved, whenever I die I sure hope the doctors let me stay dead!

II. THE MESSENGER (2 Samuel 1:11-16)

When they heard that Saul and Jonathan were dead and that Israel had been defeated, David and those who were with him tore their clothes, wept, and fasted for the remainder of the day. David questioned the messenger and discovered that he was of Amalekite descent and had relocated to Israel. Furthermore, David asked why he’d been so bold as to kill King Saul. Remember that David himself had been given several opportunities to kill Saul, but had chosen not to do so out of respect for God’s anointed one.

David charged the messenger with killing King Saul. He had admitted to doing so by his own testimony. Perhaps if he’d known how David would react, the messenger might have modified his story a bit. As punishment, David instructed one of his servants to execute the man. So David’s servant struck him and he died. Though it wasn’t the main reason for David’s swift judgment, it probably didn’t help that the guy was an Amalekite...

Some Bible commentators have speculated that this entire report was an elaborate lie. They propose that this Amalekite messenger actually found Saul sometime after he’d died - perhaps even the next day, but before the Philistines arrived to strip the body. He took the king’s crown and bracelet to David thinking that he’d be pleased, and perhaps hoping to receive a reward. Proponents of this theory point out the story’s inconsistency of Saul falling on a spear rather than a sword, which would have been highly unlikely. In the end, regardless of whether his words were true or false, this messenger ended up dead...

III. THE MOURNING (2 Samuel 1:17-27)

David was a musician and poet. He composed approximately half of the Psalms. On this particular occasion, David wrote and sung a poetic lament to express his deep sorrow over the

passing of Saul and Jonathan. He instructed the people of Judah to teach this song to their children from one generation to the next as a memorial to these 2 great men. David called it the song of the bow. The lyrics of this mournful poem were recorded and preserved for a time in the ancient Hebrew book of Jasher.

The main line of the song is "How the mighty have fallen!" This phrase is repeated 3 times - once at the beginning, again in the middle, and finally at the end of the lament. It expresses David's great reverence and respect for both Saul and Jonathan. It also reveals the vast extent of his sadness and grief. Even today these words are sometimes spoken at the funerals of brave and honorable heroes who have sacrificed everything for the sake of others.

The book of Jasher is referenced twice in the Bible - here and in Joshua 10:13. While it contained some important information, it was not considered to be inspired by God and therefore was not added to the Old Testament. There are several other writings also called "The Book of Jasher". Some of these have been claimed to be copies of the original, but have been widely discredited as forgeries. The modern Jewish manuscript sometimes referred to as the book of Jasher was written by sages and rabbis no earlier than the mid-1500's. It is not the same text cited in the Bible. Unfortunately, the ancient Hebrew book of Jasher has never been found and may remain lost forever.

CONCLUSION

The main lesson of this passage, as I understand it, is that we should never celebrate or rejoice in the death of anyone. Saul and Jonathan had very different - practically the opposite - relationships with David, yet he grieved for them both. I suspect his sorrow for them was motivated by different reasons, but it was genuine nonetheless.

Saul had been one of David's greatest enemies, yet David still mourned deeply for him. Perhaps this is because he was uncertain if Saul had a saving knowledge of the LORD. While it is impossible for one person to know definitively whether or not another person is saved, there are observable indications. Saul's disobedience and open rebellion tended to suggest that he did not know God. Maybe the possibility that King Saul had been condemned to an eternity in Hell drove David to despair. It makes me wonder how troubled we are as Christians over the death of the lost...

Jonathan, on the other hand, was one of David's best friends. When he died, David felt the excruciating pain of losing someone close to him. Over the course of their friendship, Jonathan had risked his life on several occasions in order to protect David. When someone dear to us dies, there is always the possibility that we might become bitter with God. Fortunately, this was not the case with David. While he mourned the loss of his friend, he still clung to the steadfast goodness of God.

God provides comfort to those who are sorrowful and brokenhearted. If you are struggling with

grief and despair this morning, cry out to Jesus and He will bring you much needed relief and restoration. He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Next week we will learn more about what happened following Saul's death. Who would be named the new king over Israel? Would it be David or someone else? How would the young nation move forward after this terrible tragedy? Find out the answers to these and other questions this coming Sunday!

Civil War (Part 1)

Originally Preached - 8/4/2018

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” - 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

The message this morning is the first of a 2-part exhortation which outlines Israel's first official civil war. It is the 14th sermon in “The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel” series. Looking ahead, I project there will be about 28 or so lessons in this series altogether which means that we are just about halfway through it. I trust that you are enjoying this study so far, and learning some new things that will help you grow in your faith.

The fledgling nation of Israel is just barely over 40 years old. It's first ruler, King Saul, has died tragically in battle along with 3 of his sons on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. David, whom God chose and Samuel anointed to replace Saul as king, has fled to Ziklag and been serving the Philistines for almost 2 years - he isn't even living in Israel anymore. The military is in disarray after their recent loss and the government itself is in shambles due to the neglectful and misguided leadership of King Saul for the past several years. As uncertainty abounds Israel must undergo its first transition of power from one king to the next.

The period that we will discuss today and next week was a brief but turbulent time in Israel's history. Following Saul's death, the nation struggled to unite under its new king. David did not immediately rise to the throne. His ascendancy was fraught with trouble. The people's division ultimately led to hostility and civil war. For 7 long and difficult years Israel was separated into opposing factions.

In the message this morning, we will learn that 2 different men were named as king simultaneously and discover how Israel's allegiance was divided between them. We will also discuss the first battle between these 2 leaders.

I. DAVID - KING OF JUDAH (2 Samuel 2:1-7)

After learning that King Saul had been killed, David turned to the LORD and asked whether He should return to Judah. At the time David was still living in Ziklag and serving the Philistines, but his heart remained devoted to Israel. God answered by instructing David to return to his homeland, specifically to the city of Hebron. This was one of several cities in Judah where David had sent surplus spoil from his victory over the Amalekites. So David, his wives, and all of his mighty men moved to Hebron and the people of Judah joyfully anointed him as king.

The people informed David that the men of Jabesh-gilead had recovered and buried the body of King Saul. David was moved by their courageous actions. He sent messengers to commend

these men for the kindness and honor they'd shown to the fallen king. David prayed that God would shower them in lovingkindness for the good deed that they'd done. David also told the people of Jabesh-gilead that he'd been named king over Judah, and further promised to treat them well.

Following the occupation of the Promised Land during the days of Joshua, the tribe of Judah was given a larger inheritance than any of the other tribes. The territory of Judah by itself covered approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of Israel. The combined area of all of the other tribes, not including the locations east of the Jordan River, was roughly twice the size as Judah. Thus, when David was made king over Judah he reigned over the entire southern region of Israel.

II. ISH-BOSHETH - KING OF ISRAEL (2 Samuel 2:8-11)

Abner was King Saul's relative, long-time friend, and military commander. Apparently he had somehow survived the recent battle with the Philistines. When he discovered that the king had been killed, Abner feared that a new monarch - especially someone like David - might replace him. Therefore, he acted quickly to secure his place of power. Abner declared Saul's only surviving son Ish-bosheth as king over Israel. Ish-bosheth appears to have been a cowardly man, as evidenced by his noteworthy absence from the Philistine battle alongside his brothers, whom Abner believed could be easily influenced and intimidated.

Ish-bosheth ruled over the northern and transJordan portions of Israel for 2 short years. However, he was never recognized as king by the entire nation. Meanwhile David reigned from the city Hebron over the people of Judah for 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ years. Thus, for a brief time, Israel was divided with 2 men serving as king simultaneously. This situation was unsustainable and soon erupted into civil war.

III. THE BATTLE AT GIBEON (2 Samuel 2:12-32)

The dueling kings' forces met at Gibeon. The armies of Israel were led by Abner while the men of Judah were led by Joab. Rather than engaging in a full-on military conflict, the opposing generals first agreed to a contest. Both sides chose 12 warriors to fight against each other. This small battle was to determine the outcome of the larger conflict. However, when the competition began all 24 of the men killed each other so that none remained alive. Neither side had prevailed and the contest was a draw. Thus, the armies proceeded into battle as usual, and the David's men won.

Abner and the Israeli soldiers fled from the battlefield. Asahel, a captain in Judah's army and Joab's brother, pursued Abner relentlessly. Abner urged Asahel to call off the chase and encouraged him to be satisfied with the spoils of victory, but Asahel doggedly continued the pursuit. Seizing an opportunity, Abner suddenly turned back from his flight and confronted Asahel, killing him with the butt of his spear. Then Abner quickly resumed his retreat as Joab and others continued to give chase.

As the sun was setting, David's forces arrived at the hill of Ammah. Abner and his men had gathered atop the hill. Abner called down to Joab and pleaded with him to relent, arguing that the men of Israel and Judah were all brothers from the line of Jacob and should not devour each other. After hearing his appeal, Joab called off the pursuit and Abner's army departed in defeat.

The Battle of Gibeon had been a convincing victory for David's military. Judah had only lost 19 men, not including Asahel. Though their overall losses were few, Asahel's death was significant. On the other hand, Israel's army (which consisted primarily of men from the tribe of Benjamin) suffered 360 casualties. Joab's troops took Asahel's body to Bethlehem and buried it there before returning victoriously to Hebron.

CONCLUSION

There were 2 men serving as king over parts of Israel - David in the south and Ish-bosheth in the north - but only one of these men was the legitimate leader. The other's kingship was spurious. David had been chosen by God, anointed by Samuel, and accepted by the people of Judah. On the contrary, Ish-bosheth had not been chosen by God or by the consent of his people, but rather was hurriedly installed to power by the decree of Abner. His efforts to reign over Israel led to nothing but misery and strife.

We can see in this ancient scenario an image of our world today. Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is the true and only Ruler over God's creation - the King of kings and Lord of lords. However, for a time, God has allowed Satan to exercise some limited authority over this world. The Devil is described in scripture as a prince and a ruler who aspires to reign in God's place. He heads up the kingdom of darkness, which wars against the kingdom of Light, in fierce conflict over the souls of men. While it might not be described as a civil war in its truest sense, there is a spiritual war going on nonetheless...

Millions of people have fallen victim to their sin and been lost in the throws of battle. But the Rightful and Righteous King still offers redemption, deliverance, and forgiveness to any who will accept it. Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, declare their allegiance and commitment to Him as the true Lord of Creation. Don't follow after an illegitimate ruler or waiver back and forth between 2 opposing sides. Give your life to Jesus and receive the gift of salvation and the promise of eternal life!

Civil War (Part 2)

Originally Preached - 8/12/2018

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." - Galatians 6:7-8

Good morning! Today we will conclude the message we began last Sunday about Israel's bitter civil war. It began following the Philistines' victory at the battle of Jezreel in which King Saul and 3 of his sons were killed. In the wake of his defeat, Israel's military commander Abner installed Saul's only surviving son Ish-bosheth as the new king. However, around this same time David returned to his homeland after a lengthy absence and was anointed king in Judah. Thus the nation was divided between 2 leaders and the tension led to hostility.

The Battle of Gibeon was the first of several during this long civil war, but it is the only conflict specifically described in the Bible. In it, David's forces (led by Joab) prevailed over Israel while suffering relatively few casualties. Notably, Abner personally killed Joab's brother Asahel with the butt of his spear as the Israelites were withdrawing in retreat. Both sides agreed to a truce, but the peace was short-lived.

During the months that followed the combat resumed. Over time the house of David grew stronger while the house of Ish-bosheth declined (2 Samuel 3:1-5). In other words, Judah was clearly winning the war. It was in these years, while David was ruling over Judah from the city of Hebron, that he had several of his sons - including Amnon and Absalom (who we will learn more about later in this series). The minor threat posed by Ish-bosheth, Abner, and the armies of Israel did not prevent David from starting his family.

The sequence of events that we will discuss in this morning's message led to the natural ending of Israel's civil war. Key deaths resulted in a cessation of hostilities as both sides eventually came to a mutual understanding and recognition of David as the legitimate king.

I. ABNER COMMITS TREASON (2 Samuel 3:6-21)

Though Ish-bosheth was technically the king, Abner was the man calling the shots in Israel. Perhaps feeling threatened, Ish-bosheth foolishly accused Abner of sleeping with one of his father's concubine. Abner became furious with the weak, sniveling king and decided to pledge his allegiance to David instead. Abner's decision was probably also motivated by a realization that Judah was going to win the ongoing civil war and that he, as the losing general, would likely suffer some consequences as a result. Ish-bosheth cowered when confronted by Abner.

Abner sent messengers to Judah stating that he was willing to betray Ish-bosheth and could deliver Israel over to David. David agreed to accept Abner's assistance on the condition that

Israel would return Michal to him. Several years earlier, long before his death, King Saul had begrudgingly given his younger daughter Michal to David in marriage. Apparently, the jealous king had taken her back at some point and given her to another man in marriage. Abner consented to David's request, and compelled Ish-bosheth into return Michal to him - seemingly against her will. Michal's current husband was brokenhearted.

Abner then met with the elders of Israel and those of the tribe of Benjamin and convinced them to reject Ish-bosheth as king and to join him in siding with David. Afterwards Abner traveled to Hebron and met with David personally. While there, the 2 men made a covenant to bring the war to an end and to make David king over all of Israel. When they finished talking, David sent Abner back home in peace. Abner had become a traitor against Israel.

II. JOAB KILLS ABNER (2 Samuel 3:22-39)

Abner's meeting with David had taken place while Joab away. When Joab returned to Hebron from the battlefield, he learned about what had transpired in his absence. Having fought against Abner in the past on multiple occasions, Joab was extremely skeptical. Therefore, Joab approached King David and told him that Abner was untrustworthy and conniving. Joab was clearly upset that David had spoken with Abner.

So, unbeknownst to David, Joab sent messengers to Abner asking that he return to Hebron. When Abner arrived back at the city, Joab took him aside privately as if to speak to him. When they were alone Joab killed Abner by striking him in the belly. In so doing, Joab avenged his brother Asahel's death. When David heard what had happened, he pronounced a curse on Joab and his house.

David then proceeded to mourn the death of his former adversary Abner. This was no surprise considering that he'd also mourned the death of his greatest nemesis King Saul not long before. Though David was a valiant warrior, he took no delight in the death of his enemies and frequently took time to grieve after their demise. That said, David recognized that Joab and his brothers did not share the same sentiment. He described them as hard men who lacked compassion, a characteristic that made them formidable military leaders.

III. ISH-BOSHETH IS ASSASSINATED (2 Samuel 4)

Ish-bosheth was now a king without a kingdom. His strong military leader Abner had betrayed him and subsequently been murdered by then vengeful Joab. The people of Israel had abandoned him in favor of David. Even Ish-bosheth's own royal servants wanted him gone. Baanah and Rechab - 2 of Ish-bosheth's prominent commanders - plotted and conspired against him. One day while the king was napping, they snuck into his house and assassinated him in cold blood.

Baanah and Rechab then cut Ish-bosheth's head off and took it to David. They expected David

to be pleased that Ish-bosheth was dead. Apparently they did not know that David had slain an Amalekite messenger under similar circumstances when he'd brought news of Saul's death. When these guys told David what they'd done, he was not happy at all. Instead, he ordered that both Baanah and Rechab be executed for their crime. Later he honored his fallen enemies by taking Ish-bosheth's severed head and burying it along with Abner's body in a grave at Hebron.

The civil war had effectively ended. There was no one left to fight against David and the men of Judah. The people of Israel had come to accept him as their legitimate king. As such, peace was established between both sides and they were again united as a single nation.

CONCLUSION

One of the principles that is repeated several times in the Bible is called "The Law of Reaping and Sowing". This is a fairly simple concept to understand. If a farmer sows wheat, at harvest time he will reap wheat. The wheat seeds that he planted will not grow up to produce oats or some other type of grain. The farmer can expect to get back that which he put in. So also, those who sow evil and corruption should expect to receive evil and corruption.

Abner was a dishonest, treasonous man whose only real concern was his own well-being. He first sought to wield power over Israel as the defacto king. When he saw the writing on the wall, Abner turned his back on Ish-bosheth in an attempt to save himself. His nefarious behavior eventually led to his death. He got what was coming to him... he reaped what he sowed.

Ish-bosheth was never the rightful king of Israel. He was a weak and spineless man who could not even stand up to his own servants. He repeatedly allowed himself to be manipulated through fear and intimidation. He chose to become an enemy of God by siding against David. Ultimately Ish-bosheth was killed by his own people. He too reaped what he sowed.

Sometimes the ends do not justify the means. Though they rightly believed that Ish-bosheth's demise would lead to peace, Baanah and Rechab sinned by committing murder. What they thought would be pleasing to David clearly wasn't. They killed Ish-bosheth without having a just cause, and as a result they themselves were executed. The punishment rendered fit the crime. These men also reaped what they sowed.

The moral of today's sermon is simple... if you live a life full of rebellion against God, sinfulness, bitterness, anger, and evil you can expect to receive judgment and condemnation - if not in this life certainly in the next. If, however, you turn to Christ in repentance the LORD will enable you to live a life of love, kindness, goodness, joy, peace, and grace. Those who practice such things can expect to receive the richness of God's blessings for all of eternity!

David Becomes King

Originally Preached - 8/19/2018

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, ‘May peace be within you.’ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.” - Psalm 122:6-9

This morning’s sermon is about the official beginning of King David’s reign in Israel. Over the next several weeks we will learn much about the events that took place during this time. David was the most heralded and beloved king in the history of Israel. The details of his kingship are recorded in the books of 2nd Samuel and 1st Chronicles.

The Chronicles were written much later than the books of Samuel. 1st and 2nd Samuel were written by men who lived at the same time as Saul and David, and later compiled into a single narrative. 1st and 2nd Chronicles were most likely written by Ezra, a priest who led a group of exiled Jews back to Jerusalem after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. If so, the Chronicles can be dated around 450 BC. They repeat many of the details recorded in Samuel and Kings, with a few notable additions.

The message today also highlights the establishment of Jerusalem as the official capital of Israel. This too is an extremely significant occurrence in Jewish history. The importance of Jerusalem to both God and the nation of Israel cannot be overstated.

Finally, this message documents David’s war with the Philistines. These were his former allies, as he had lived in Philistia and fought on their behalf only 10 years earlier. Now, having returned to Israel, David would have to expel these dreaded adversaries from their occupation and continual aggressive encroachment.

I. DAVID IS ANOINTED KING (2 Samuel 5:1-5; 1 Chronicles 11:1-3, 12:23-40)

David had lived in and reigned over Judah for 7½ years. During this time the nation of Israel was divided between 2 kings. With the death of Ish-bosheth and Abner, and the ending of the bitter civil war, the people finally put aside their disagreements and came together once again. This renewed unity paved the way for the coronation of David as the second king over the entire nation of Israel.

Representatives from all 12 tribes, including a delegation of Levites, traveled to Hebron. Some brought large quantities of food to be used for a celebration. They held a festival for 3 days, during which time David was anointed as the new king of Israel. Many of those who came were soldiers. The Bible provides specific details and numbers about this. These men joined those already loyal to David thereby increasing and greatly strengthening what had been a decimated

Israeli military. For the first time in a long time there was great joy in Israel.

David was 30 years old when he first became king in Judah. As mentioned previously, his reign lasted 7½ years. This means that he was 37½ when he became king over all of Israel (including Judah). This would have been around 1000 BC. He ruled over the united nation for 33 additional years. Thus, he was king over Judah and Israel for a combined total of 40 years.

II. JERUSALEM BECOMES THE CAPITAL (2 Samuel 5:6-16; 1 Chronicles 11:4-9, 14:1-7)

During his lifetime King Saul reigned primarily from his hometown of Gibeah. Though he lived and worked there, Gibeah was never officially named the capital of Israel. The new king David was residing in Hebron, a city of Judah, which itself was not an ideal capital city for the entire nation of Israel. David wanted to establish a capital that was more centrally located and had a more significant religious and strategic value. Following the LORD's direction, David chose Jerusalem as the capital of ancient Israel.

For many centuries Jerusalem had been inhabited by the Jebusites. These people were descendants of the Canaanites. Following the conquest of the Promised Land during the days of Joshua, the children of Israel were unable to drive them out of the city. Thus, the Jebusites had remained in Jerusalem all this time. In order for Jerusalem to become the capital of Israel, the Jebusites would have to finally be defeated.

Jerusalem was a well fortified city. When David and his men approached, the Jebusites confidently believed their walls could not be breached. They mocked the armies of Israel, stating that they could successfully defend their city with only the blind and the lame. David shrewdly sent his men throw a shaft that provided water to the city. By so doing, he bypassed the city walls. Once inside, David's soldiers easily overthrew the Jebusites and took the city.

Once it had been secured, David and his family moved to Jerusalem. The King of Tyre sent lumber, carpenters, and stone masons to build a lavish house for David. David and his men completed several additional building projects to repair and enlarge the city. After settling in Jerusalem, King David took more wives and concubines, and had several more children. Both he and the nation of Israel became greater and greater.

III. THE PHILISTINES DEFEATED (2 Sam 5:17-25 & 23:8-38; 1 Chron 11:10-12:22 & 14:8-17)

Over the years David had developed a large following of "mighty men". Many of them sided with him during his flight from Saul. Still others defected from Israel and joined him while he was living in Ziklag. The most notable of these are listed by name and some even have war stories written about them in Scripture. David's mighty men, along with the thousands who had volunteered for military service at Hebron, constituted a large and formidable army.

A sizable population of Philistines had occupied northern Israel dating back to the death of King

Saul. Finally David's forces were significant enough begin driving them out. Perhaps wanting to strike first, the Philistines set up for war in the valley of Rephaim just outside of Jerusalem. King David prayed asking God what to do, and the LORD answered to attack. David met the Philistines head on and defeated them soundly. He then collected and destroyed the idols they'd abandoned and named that place Baal-Perazim which means "Lord of the Breakthrough".

There is an interesting scene described in Scripture that may have been associated with this battle. The Philistines had deployed a garrison of troops in Bethlehem, which is also also near the Valley of Rephaim. David commented that he'd like a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem. Hearing this, 3 of David's mighty men risked their lives and broke through the Philistine lines simply to bring the king some water. Talk about devotion!

After they'd reorganized and regrouped, the Philistines returned to the Valley of Rephaim again. This time God told David to to circle around behind them and wait until he heard the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees. This sound has been interpreted by some as God leading His angelic armies out before David and his men. They confronted the Philistines and struck them down from Geba as far as Gezer. This was the beginning of David's territorial reclamation of Israel.

CONCLUSION

Over the centuries Jerusalem has been recognized as a sacred site by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. As such, the population and diversity of the city has increased substantially since Biblical times. Jerusalem is considered to be the "most holy city" in the world.

In the Bible, Jerusalem is called by many different names. These include Salem, Jebus, Mount Moriah, Zion, the city of David, and many others. According to Jewish writings, Jerusalem has over 70 distinct Hebrew names. The name Jerusalem has been interpreted into English as "Home of Peace" or "Abode of Peace".

Jerusalem is the cite of numerous Biblical events. The temple was built there and remained in some form or fashion from the time of Solomon until after the most of the New Testament had been written. Jesus was executed on a cross there, the church was established there and then spread throughout the entire world, Jesus will someday return there and set up his millennial kingdom, and in the end times God will reveal the New Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the city of God and is the eternal capital of Israel. As Christians, we should pray for peace in Jerusalem and lovingly support the people who live there. It is a special place, unlike any other city in the world, and we as Christians must recognize and defend its unique significance.

The Ark & the Temple

Originally Preached - 9/2/2018

And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" - Exodus 33:14-16

After 7 years of national division and civil war, David was finally crowned king over all of Israel. He relocated to Jerusalem and displaced the stubborn Jebusites who'd controlled the city for centuries. Once David conquered and secured Jerusalem he officially named it as Israel's capital. He then began numerous and extensive building projects to improve the city. Among these, David had a luxurious house built for himself made from the finest imported materials.

David also led the armies of Israel on a military campaign to subdue and cripple the Philistines forces. He recognized that they were his greatest threat and decided to take courageous action against them. Under David's bold leadership, Israel was able to defeat the Philistines in numerous battles and drive them out of Israeli territory. David reclaimed some of the land that had been occupied by the enemy and was able to extend the borders of Israel beyond their previous limits.

Thus far under King David's rule, Israel was enjoying great growth and success. Unlike his royal predecessor, David realized that the nation's prosperity was not the result of his own impeccable leadership. He knew that God was responsible for Israel's well-being and attributed all of her good fortune to the LORD. David had personally experienced God's faithfulness through years of peril and turmoil, and had developed a deeply committed faith in Him.

This morning's message is titled "The Ark and the Temple". In the passages we will cover today, David's desire to bless the LORD is clearly revealed. God had been so good to him for so long, and David wanted to show his gratitude. Whatsmore, David understood that Israel's future rested in God's hands, not in his own.

I. MOVING THE ARK (2 Samuel 6:1-11; 1 Chronicles 13)

The Ark of the Covenant was arguably the most important artifact in all of Israel. Originally fashioned during the days of Moses, God's glorious presence was manifest upon the Ark. As such, the Ark was kept shrouded within the Holy of Holies during the days of the tabernacle. It was sometimes carried into battle by the Israelites and was often consulted by the priests and kings. The Ark of the Covenant represented the LORD's presence, and David desired that it be kept permanently in Jerusalem.

During the judgeship of Samuel, the Ark had been taken by the Philistines after a successful battle. God sent devastating curses and pestilence upon them until they gave it back to Israel. Upon its return the Ark was shuttled around to a few different places before finally ending up in Kiriath-jearim (also called Baal-judah), specifically in the house of Abinadab. It had remained there for at least 20 years.

David sent a delegation of men to retrieve the Ark of the Covenant. They arrived at the house of Abinadab and placed the Ark on a new cart in order to transport it to Jerusalem. As they were proceeding to the capital city David and all of Israel was celebrating joyfully. Along the way the oxen who were pulling the cart stumbled, causing the Ark to suddenly shift. Perhaps instinctually, a man named Uzzah who was escorting the Ark reached out and touched it. The LORD became exceedingly angry and struck Uzzah, who immediately fell dead.

The king's mood quickly changed from happiness to fear. Seeing what had happened, David was upset with God and decided that moving the Ark to Jerusalem might not be such a good idea. So he diverted the Ark of the Covenant to the house of Obed-edom, where it stayed for 3 months. While it was there, the LORD blessed Obed-edom and his family.

Touching the Ark of the Covenant was a direct violation of God's law and the clearly stated punishment for doing so was death (Numbers 4:15). Uzzah, who was a Levite, should have known and understood this well. What's more, the presence of God dwelt upon the Ark and to touch it would be a defilement of His holiness. Though Uzzah acted innocently and without malice, his lack of appreciation for God's law and glory led to his sudden demise.

II. THE ARK ARRIVES (2 Samuel 6:12-23; 1 Chronicles 15-16)

After a few months had passed, David again decided to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. This time, however, he was careful to follow the methods required by God in order to transport it. He assembled a large gathering of Levites and delegated responsibilities to them in accordance with Mosaic Law. Some were to carry the Ark on poles, just as had been done during the exodus. Others were to sing and play instruments as the Ark entered the city. Meanwhile the priests were to be offering sacrifices to the LORD.

The Levites brought the Ark from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem. There was great fanfare and celebration throughout the city. David was so elated that he danced about publicly in the streets. One of his wives, Michal, the daughter of Saul, saw David's antics and was appalled by his "undignified" behavior. She later confronted him about it, but he dismissed her rebuke. Michal was childless until the day of her death, presumably because she ridiculed David for his uninhibited joyfulness that day.

When the Ark arrived, it was placed in a special tent that David had set up just for it. Additional burnt offerings and peace offerings were made to God. Next the king blessed all of the people who had come to mark the occasion. He also distributed various types of cakes to everyone in

the crowd. Finally the king dismissed them to their homes.

In the days that followed, David appointed several Levites (under the leadership of Asaph) to minister before the Ark daily. They were to give continual praise and thanksgiving to the LORD. A special song was composed, compiled of verses from some of David's previously written psalms, to memorialize the event. It is noteworthy to mention that 12 of the Psalms recorded in the Bible are accredited to Asaph.

III. DAVID'S SINCERE PLAN (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17)

Sometime later King David had a troubling thought. While he was dwelling in a beautiful and elaborate house, the Ark of the Covenant which represented the very presence of God was residing in a measly tent. David decided that something must be done about this, so he approached the prophet Nathan with a plan to build a temple for the Ark. Nathan initially thought that this was a good idea and told the king to run with it.

That same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan. God told him that he did not want David to build a temple. In fact, instead of David building a house for God the LORD promised to build an eternal house from the line of David. God pledged to not only bless David during his lifetime, but also to establish his throne forever. The Davidic Covenant, as it is known, was accomplished through Jesus Christ - a distant descendant of David. His reign as the King of kings and Lord of lords shall never end.

After Nathan delivered God's message to David, the king suspended his plans to build a temple. Instead he turned to God in sincere and heartfelt prayer. He thanked the LORD for his faithfulness, kindness, and blessings. He humbly expressed awe that God would secure his kingdom forever. He asked the LORD to continually protect and bless His people Israel.

CONCLUSION

King David was not a perfect man, as we have already seen and will continue to discover throughout this series. He was, however, a righteous man who had a mature faith in God. David realized that he would not succeed, nor would the nation of Israel endure, unless God was present and active among them. Knowing this, David felt strongly that the Ark of the Covenant, which again represented the manifest presence of God, be located in Israel's capital. It was this belief that led him to move the Ark to Jerusalem.

What can we learn from David's conviction? It's simple really. We will never realize completeness and true satisfaction apart from God's presence in our lives. Our families will not flourish apart from God's presence in our homes. We as Christians will be ineffective and fruitless apart from the presence of God in our churches. Our neighborhoods will be weakened by the absence of God in our cities. Our people will be corrupted and led astray apart from God's presence in our nation. Destruction and condemnation will inevitably come apart from

God's preserving presence in our world. It is God's presence, or the lack therefore, that will determine our future.

One of the most important things that King David ever did was to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Doing so revealed his priorities, and should teach us a valuable lesson about what ours should be. And though David never built a temple for the Ark, his desire to do so showed his deep love for the LORD. He was truly a man after God's own heart.

David's Victories

Originally Preached - 9/9/2018

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” - Colossians 3:12-13

Far too many churches overlook the importance of the Old Testament. They focus almost exclusively on the New Testament, the gospels, the epistles, and the advancement of the early church. This perspective fails to appreciate how the Old Testament provides context for and validation of the New Testament. The law, history, wisdom, and prophecy of the Old Testament provide a framework which allows Christians to better understand the teachings and completed work of Jesus Christ.

There are parallels between the Old Testament nation of Israel and the New Testament Church. Both were/are called to represent God and to make him known throughout the world. They were/are commanded to obey the LORD's decrees and to follow His will. Both were/are to recognize God as their supreme authority and to bring glory to His holy name. Though there are also notable differences between them, the similarities between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church are significant. We as Christians today can learn much from the successes and mistakes of God's Children during the Old Testament.

In our current series, “The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel”, we have been learning about the origins of the Jewish nation. We have seen how the 12 tribes joined together to form a single monarchy. We have looked at the turbulent and often misguided reign of King Saul. Now we are discussing the early portion of David's kingship. Thus far he has expelled many of the adversarial occupants of Israel, established Jerusalem as its capital, worked to revitalize the city, moved the Ark of the Covenant there, and received God's promise to establish his throne forever. Things seem to be going quite well...

This morning we will read and discuss more good news for David and Israel. The people were moving in the right direction, renewing their allegiance to God, and enjoying His bountiful blessings. These were bright and joyful days for the Israelites.

I. SUCCESS (2 Samuel 8; 1 Chronicles 18)

During the first half of King David's reign he enjoyed tremendous military success. He defeated the Philistines and took control of their chief city Gath. He conquered the Moabites, killing many of them and forcing the survivors to pay tribute to Israel. David advanced north-eastward to the Euphrates River and attacked King Hadadezer. The Arameans of Damascus sought to help Hadadezer, but David defeated them all and took much spoil. They too became servants of

Israel and had to pay tribute.

Toi, the king of Hamath, had been an enemy of Hadadezer. When Toi heard that David had defeated Hadadezer he sent his greetings, blessings, and many articles of gold, silver, and bronze. David took this gift, along with the many items he had taken from his defeated enemies, and dedicated them all to the LORD.

David also advanced southward into Edom. He subdued the Edomites, and stationed garrisons of soldiers there also. They became servants of Israel as well. Thus, David made a name for himself throughout the region. He and the leaders of his administration ruled justly and righteously over the people. Most importantly, God was with David wherever he went.

II. MORE SUCCESS (2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 19)

Sometime later the King of Ammon died and David wanted to extend his kind condolences to the new king. David sent messengers to comfort Hanun, but the Ammonites perceived them to be spies. So Hanun humiliated these Israeli messengers by shaving their heads and cutting their clothes. When King David heard what had happened to his servants he became quite upset. He sent his army to wage war against Ammon.

Fearing that they might need some help, the Ammonites hired many Arameans to come and assist them in their battle against David. Joab, the leader of Israel's army, divided his troops into 2 groups. He led his detachment against the Arameans while his brother Abishai led his detachment against the Ammonites. As the battle progressed, the Aramean mercenaries fled. Seeing this, the Ammonites retreated into their city in defeat.

The Arameans who'd escaped from the battle in Ammon later regrouped and were joined by others from beyond the Euphrates River. They gathered together at Helam. David sent his army to confront them, and his forces were victorious yet again. Having been soundly defeated a second time, the Arameans made peace with and became subservient to Israel. They did not offer military assistance to the Ammonites anymore.

III. EVEN MORE SUCCESS (2 Samuel 12:26-31; 1 Chronicles 20:1-3)

Having dealt with the Arameans, David sent his armies back to Ammon. They besieged its major city of Rabbah and overthrew it. David took a large amount of spoil from the city, including their king's crown. He then ravished many of the cities and Ammon and they became subordinates of Israel as well.

David had overcome the Arameans to the north, the Edomites and Amalekites to the south, and the Ammonites and Moabites to the east. No other kingdoms were able to compete against David and his mighty men. They seemed invincible!

IV. DAVID'S KINDNESS (2 Samuel 9)

David wanted to show kindness to the family of Saul as a tribute to the memory of his dear friend Jonathan, so he asked if there were any surviving descendants of the slain king. Ziba, a man who'd had actually worked for King Saul several years earlier, told David that one of Jonathan's sons - Mephibosheth - was still alive and living in Lo-debar. Mephibosheth was crippled in his feet due to a boyhood injury he'd suffered after hearing of his father's death during the Battle of Jezreel (2 Samuel 4:4).

King David brought Mephibosheth to Jerusalem and promised to treat him well. David restored to him the land that had once belonged to his grandfather Saul. He further assigned Ziba and his 15 sons to be the servants of Mephibosheth. He extended an open invitation to Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table, which he did on many occasions during his life. David treated Mephibosheth like his own son for their remainder of his life.

CONCLUSION

In our lesson today, we saw how David reached out in sympathy to the Ammonites after their king had died. He sent messengers to encourage and comfort them. However, the Ammonites rejected David's kindness and were suspicious of his motives. It was only then that David sent the armies of Israel to destroy their cities and people. In much the same way, God is reaching out with lovingkindness to the lost people of this world. We all have a chance to receive salvation through the person of Jesus Christ. But to those who reject God's redeeming grace, punishment will come in due time. Retribution will not wait forever...

We also saw that David's kindness was showered upon Mephibosheth, an otherwise forgotten and obscure character. Mephibosheth did nothing to earn or merit David's generosity, yet it was freely given to him. In fact, Mephibosheth was shocked that David even took notice of him. In the same way, God treats us with undeserved goodness and invites us to eat at His table. He accepts the redeemed as His own children. He challenges us to show such kindness to others.

May God teach us how to boldly stand for the truth of His word while simultaneously loving those who violate it, ourselves included. May we learn from David's example how to be fearless warriors for the LORD while also exhibiting the kindness of Jesus to those who desperately need it. May we find the proper balance between grace and truth, while compromising neither.

David's Great Sin

Originally Preached - 9/16/2018

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.” - Psalm 51:10-13

Last Sunday we read about the many military successes that David and Israel enjoyed during the early years of his reign. They pushed the Philistines out of Jewish territory, crushed the Moabites and forced them to pay tribute, overcame the Amalekites and Edomites and placed garrisons among them, twice defeated King Hadadezer and the Aramaeans, and destroyed the principal cities of Ammon. With each victory David's fame grew and the boundaries of Israel's influence expanded. Unfortunately, all good things must end (at least in this life).

If you recall from our previous message, David sent the armies of Israel to fight against the Ammonites because they had humiliated his messengers. The fearful Ammonites hired many Aramean soldiers to help them fight against Israel. During the battle, these Arameans fled leaving the Ammonites to retreat safely back within the walls of their city. Israel temporarily abandoned its attack on the Ammonites and instead pursued the Arameans. After defeating the Arameans, the armies of Israel returned to continue their campaign against Ammon.

King David chose not to travel with his army on this particular occasion, but rather to stay in Jerusalem while they were away besieging the Ammonite city of Rabbah. Perhaps he could enjoy some alone time to relax and simply revel in his extraordinary success. Maybe some time off would do him good. But, as they say, “idleness is the Devil's workshop.”

Today's sermon is titled “David's Great Sin”. It is the 19th installment of our current series. The passages we will discuss are fairly well known among Christians - you've probably heard them before. I hope that our familiarity with this story doesn't prevent us from listening to and hearing God's voice afresh as we study these chapters once again.

I. THE CRIME (2 Samuel 11)

One evening King David was looking out from his rooftop balcony over the capital city. He happened to see a beautiful woman, whose name was Bathsheba, while she was bathing. Captivated by her appearance, David sent messengers to find her and bring her to his house. He then slept with her, although he knew that she was married to another man. Afterwards Bathsheba cleaned herself up and returned home. In the days that followed it was discovered that she was pregnant with David's child.

David tried to cover his tracks by sending a message Joab, his commander on the battlefield in

Ammon. The king requested that Uriah, a valiant warrior in Israel's army and Bathsheba's husband, return immediately to Jerusalem with a report on how things were going. When Uriah arrived, David twice urged him to go home and spend some time with his wife. He hoped that they would be intimate, which would explain Bathsheba's pregnancy. But Uriah, being a noble soldier, refused to lay with his wife while his brothers-in-arms were entangled in war. Thus, David's scheme to hide his sin failed.

The frustrated king sent a letter to Joab ordering him to place Uriah on the frontlines, to advance into the fiercest battle, and then to withdraw, thereby leaving Uriah exposed so that he'd almost certainly be killed. Unknowingly, Uriah carried his own death warrant back to Joab in Ammon. The general did as he was commanded and Uriah was killed. When David received news that Uriah was dead, he had Bathsheba brought back to his house. He married her and later she had the son that they'd conceived together.

During this entire shameful episode David committed several sins. First, he was overcome with lust and committed adultery. Second, he deceptively sought to cover up what he'd done by telling lies. Third, when all else failed, he conspired to have Uriah murdered in order to prevent his misdeeds from becoming known. At this point, David probably thought he was in the clear - but he wasn't. The truth always seems to come out at some point.

Sin has a way of compounding or growing. Whenever someone does something wrong, they often commit more sins in order to hide their original misstep. The situation just gets worse and worse. David's story is a prime example. This is why, when a person sins, they should immediately confess, ask for forgiveness, and seek to make it right. Otherwise, the problem will keep getting bigger.

II. THE CRITIQUE (2 Samuel 12:1-9)

Sometime after David's great sin the LORD sent Nathan to confront the king. Nathan was a prophet and one of David's closest advisors. He told David a story about a rich man who had many sheep and a poor man who had only one. The poor man loved his pet sheep dearly and treated it as if it were his own child. One night a traveler stopped at the rich man's house requesting something to eat. Rather than taking a sheep from his own large flock, the rich man took the poor man's only lamb and prepared it for the traveler. The poor man was heartbroken.

When David heard Nathan's story, he became furious. He declared that the rich man deserved to die and should be forced to make restitution fourfold for his lack of compassion. As the king fumed, Nathan revealed that David was the rich man he'd been talking about. He explained that God had provided David with great wealth and with many wives. He could have slept with any one of them. But instead he took poor Uriah's only wife, laid with her, and ultimately killed him to conceal what he'd done. David was the guilty party, and his secret was out!

People are naive to think that they can keep their sins secret. God knows everything about

mankind. He knows their thoughts, their actions, their words - everything! There is nothing hidden from Him. A person might be able to deceive others for a while, but the LORD is not fooled. At some point even a person's most secret sins will be exposed to the light of day and will have to be answered for.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES (2 Samuel 12:10-25)

After reprimanding David for his sinful behaviors, Nathan went on to pronounce some of the consequences which the LORD would impose. These would come because David "had despised God" through his misconduct. It is important to recognize that sin is always a betrayal of God, not just other people or oneself. Thus, the LORD is justified in punishing those who violate or rebel against His righteous commands.

The first consequence was that there would be perpetual strife, violence, and treachery within David's family from that day forward. Secondly, one of David's own family members would someday take his wives and lay with them, just as David had done with the wife of Uriah. While David had slept with Bathsheba secretly, this future transgression would be done openly. Thirdly, and more immediately, the child that would be born of David's adulterous relationship would die as an infant. Despite these coming consequences, the LORD graciously forgave David of his sins and assured him that they had not nullified his own salvation.

In the months that followed Bathsheba gave birth to a little boy. As predicted, the child became very sick. David grieved terribly - wailing, praying, and fasting for his newborn son. A week passed and the baby died, but David's servants were afraid to tell him. When they did, to their surprise David's demeanor changed. He immediately cleaned himself up and worshipped God. They asked the king why he was no longer acting sorrowful. David answered that once his son had died, there was nothing left that he could do but move forward. This passage has been used to argue that when babies die they go to Heaven, which might explain David's behavior. Later Bathsheba bore David another son and they named him Solomon.

Sin always comes with consequences. While the LORD will lovingly forgive the repentant sinner of their guilt, He does not erase the lingering repercussions of their sin. A person who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is freed from eternal condemnation, but is still subject to the earthly and temporal consequences of sin. And, as seen clearly in this story, these consequences usually have an impact on more than one person.

CONCLUSION

Following this tragic episode in David's life, he joined his soldiers at Rabbah (where he should have been to begin with) and together they defeated the Ammonites. As we close the message today, let's quickly review a few of the lessons we touched on this morning.

One sin typically leads to another, and another, and so on. All too often people try to hide what

they've done wrong by committing additional sins. These unconfessed sins build up, which makes the the situation even worse. Though it may be difficult, it is important to admit what you've done wrong and to ask forgiveness for it. The cycle of sinfulness cannot be broken apart from confession and repentance.

It is foolish to think that you can keep your sins hidden. God knows and sees everything! So, if the reason you have not fessed up is because you think no one knows, you're wrong. God does! One day each person will stand before Him and give an account of everything they've done in this life. Wouldn't you rather ask for the LORD's forgiveness today, rather than trying to explain your sins away after its too late?

Finally, God can and will forgive the sins of those who ask Him - including such things as adultery, deception, and murder. There is no sin that can't be forgiven, other than rejecting God's loving offer of salvation. That said, there will be consequences in this life as the result of sin. We will never live the abundant life that God has for us in the here and now if our lives are characterized by frequent and unconfessed sin.

In the weeks to come, we will see the consequences that were imposed upon David and his family come to pass. They will bring personal hardship and derail the success that he'd previously enjoyed as king. That said, God would still honor His unconditional covenant with David to establish his throne forever through Jesus Christ.

Family Turmoil

Originally Preached - 9/30/2018

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” - Ephesians 6:4

I like watching football. Have you ever seen a game in which one team seemed to have all of the momentum going their way? They were getting all the calls, making all the plays, and catching all the breaks. It appeared as if the outcome was settled, and then all of a sudden something happened and the momentum completely shifted. The same team that could do no wrong moments before now couldn't move the ball, stay set on a snap count, or stop their opponent's offense. Their composure and poise just vanished, and they fell apart.

This example serves as a fitting comparison to King David's reign over Israel. He had achieved tremendous military success and subdued most of Israel's enemies. He had conquered and established Jerusalem as the eternal capital. He had built himself an elaborate house and completed several other building projects throughout the city. He had relocated the Ark of the Covenant, upon which God's manifest presence dwelt, to a tent in Jerusalem. He was revered and respected by all and everything was going so well - until the night when he saw Bathsheba bathing and did something that he should never have done...

Today's message is the 20th in our current sermon series titled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". Over the next few weeks we are going to read and study passages that describe the hardships and difficulties that David faced during the later part of his kingship. Remember that these problems arose as direct consequences of David's great sin. The first of these, and our topic today, was the breakdown of his family.

I. RAPE (2 Samuel 13:1-22)

Amnon was David's first born son. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel. Absalom was David's third born son. His mother was Maacah, the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur. These 2 boys were both born while David was living in the city of Hebron during Israel's civil war. Thus, they were likely in their mid twenties to early thirties by this point. Tamar was Absalom's sister, also the child of Maacah and the daughter of David. She was, therefore, Amnon's half-sister. The exact time and place of her birth is uncertain.

Amnon was infatuated by Tamar's beauty and lusted deeply for her. He was so distressed that he told his friend Jonadab of his feelings. Jonadab devised a plan in which Amnon could entice Tamar into his bedroom so that he might be alone with her. Amnon pretended to be ill, asked that Tamar come and attend to him, lured her into his chambers under false pretenses, propositioned himself to her, and when she refused forcibly raped her.

Having gratified himself, Amnon's attitude toward Tamar immediately and dramatically changed. He was filled with hatred for her, and had her thrown out of his house. He had not only violated her sexually, but then also cast her aside and locked her out. Tamar was completely devastated by what had happened to her. The victim of a horrible assault, she felt overwhelmed with grief and unspeakable shame.

Tamar fled in tears to her brother Absalom's house where she lived in desolation and silence for the next few years. Absalom loathed his half-brother Amnon for what he'd done, and patiently calculated his revenge. When David heard what had transpired, he became angry and upset but apparently took no action. Perhaps he felt as though he didn't have the moral authority to intervene due to his own past sexual sin with Bathsheba. Whatever the case, David allowed the situation to fester unresolved.

David's family was in complete turmoil. It was steeped in bitterness and animosity. Some members became so resentful that they wouldn't even talk to each other. The situation was already dire, but would soon become even worse...

II. RETALIATION (2 Samuel 13:23-39)

After 2 full years had passed with still no punishment of Amnon, Absalom took it upon himself to avenge his sister's rape. He held a festive celebration in conjunction with the shearing of his sheep and asked his father David and all of his brothers, including Amnon, to come. Though David declined the invitation, all of Absalom's brothers went.

Absalom commanded his servants to wait until Amnon was merry with wine and then to attack and kill him. This is exactly what they did. When all of the other brothers saw what happened they fled in fear. It was initially reported to David that all of his sons had been killed, but the message was soon corrected to say that only Amnon had been killed.

David's surviving sons returned to Jerusalem where they joined David and his servants in bitter weeping. Meanwhile, Absalom fled to his mother's homeland in Geshur. He remained there for 3 years. During all this time David was heartbroken over Absalom and longingly wished for his return. That said, he never made any recorded attempts to go find him and/or bring him home.

An awful sexual sin was followed up by the murder of another person. Sound familiar? Though the circumstances were somewhat different, and some might even argue that Absalom was justified in the killing of Amnon, still the parallels between these events and the sins of David are striking. This is especially true when one considers what God had spoken to David through the prophet Nathan about the consequences that would result from his misconduct.

III. RECALL (2 Samuel 14)

Joab, David's military commander, noticed that David was visibly burdened by Absalom's long

absence. He arranged for a woman to come with an elaborate story that might inspire the king to take action. This woman, who was from a nearby village named Tekoa, approached David and told him of her 2 sons. They had fought, and one of them had killed the other. The surviving son then fled to a place of refuge. The woman's family wanted him returned and executed for his crime. However, she was a widow and wanted her only remaining son to live and carry on the family name. She asked David to ensure his safety and the king agreed.

Then the woman from Tekoa compared her story with David's situation. She stated that God does not hatefully banish those who offend Him, but rather seeks their restoration. She proposed that David should bring his son Absalom back to Jerusalem. David smartly figured out that it was Joab who had orchestrated this meeting. Still, he ultimately concluded that both she and Joab were right and ordered that Absalom be recalled.

Joab went to Geshur, found Absalom, and brought him home. However, when Absalom returned and settled in Jerusalem, neither David nor Joab would talk to him for the next 2 years. Though Absalom summoned Joab on multiple occasions, he did not respond. Finally Absalom set Joab's field on fire in a desperate attempt to get his attention. When Joab confronted Absalom, he explained that he'd only done it so as not to be ignored any longer. Absalom demanded an audience with his father David, and finally the king came and spoke to him.

CONCLUSION

David felt very strongly about everything that had happened. He was extremely angry that Amnon had raped Tamar. He was deeply saddened that Absalom had murdered Amnon. He was terribly grieved during Absalom's long stay in Geshur. David was truly heartbroken by everything that had transpired, yet he didn't actually do much about it. He allowed things to happen without directly addressing them. He barely intervened, but mostly just watched things play out hoping that they'd get better on their own. They rarely do...

While I'm reasonably sure that David prayed for his family (to some extent) during these difficult days, I find it noteworthy that the Bible never actually says that he did anywhere in these 2 chapters. The text explicitly states that David wept, tore his clothes, mourned, and so on but never mentions him crying out to God or praying. Sometimes, especially when dealing with adult children, prayer may be all that you can do for them. Yet prayer seems to be absent from or at least unemphasized in David's response.

David was the father of his household and therefore bore the God-given responsibility of disciplining and instructing his children. Granted, this can be more difficult to do when they (and you) get older. Still, his silence and inaction led to continued and worsening turmoil in his family. Now I don't claim to know how fathers and parents can resolve every familial conflict, but I know that David's approach didn't work. Feeling bad is not enough - you have to act as the Lord leads.

Absalom's Conspiracy

Originally Preached - 10/7/2018

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." - Revelation 3:20

We began studying the fallout from David's sin with Bathsheba in our sermon last week. David's oldest son Amnon raped Tamar, one of the king's younger daughters, and was later killed. Absalom, another of David's sons, committed this murder to avenge his sister and afterwards fled the country. Eventually Absalom was brought back to Jerusalem and finally spoke with his father David. The whole sordid mess lasted for 7 long years.

Despite David's feeble attempt to reconcile with his son, Absalom remained furious about everything that had happened. As the months passed his anger became increasingly directed toward his father David, who had passively sit and watched for years as his family fell apart. Absalom began thinking to himself that David was unfit to be king, and that he'd be a much better leader in Israel than his dad was. And so it began... Absalom's plan to oust his father by overthrowing the government.

Today's message is titled "Absalom's Conspiracy". The story spans 5 full chapters of the Bible. Due to the large amount of ground we will cover today, I will not have time to delve into every detail recorded in these chapters. I will summarize the events that took place on this occasion, but encourage each of you to read these chapters for yourself. By doing this, you will discover some information that I will likely leave out of this morning's message.

I. ABSALOM'S RISE (2 Samuel 15-16)

Absalom began undermining King David's authority by judging the peoples' cases at the city gate. Over the course of time, he endeared himself to many who lived in and all around Jerusalem. Having built up a large following, Absalom traveled to Hebron where he made final preparations for a coup against his father. Many people, including some of David's closest advisors, joined Absalom in his conspiracy.

When David received word that Absalom was planning to overthrow the government by force, he decided to flee from the capital city. Those loyal to David joined him in this mass departure. The priests and Levites wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant too, but David ordered that it remain in Jerusalem. As he was leaving, David met his dear friend and counselor Hushai on the Mount of Olives. He instructed Hushai to remain in Jerusalem, to feign allegiance to Absalom, and to serve as his spy.

During his flight David met Ziba, the man who'd earlier been assigned to be Mephibosheth's servant. Ziba lied to David by claiming that Mephibosheth had forsaken him and taken sides

with Absalom. David went on Bahurim, where a disgruntled man cursed him openly and threw rocks at him. David tolerated the abuse and continued his escape.

Meanwhile Absalom and those who'd joined him in the conspiracy entered Jerusalem without incident. Hushai faked his allegiance to Absalom, and covertly inserted himself into his inner circle. Ahithophel, who had formerly been a servant of David, was now serving as Absalom's chief counselor. He advised Absalom to publicly sleep with the concubines which David had left behind in Jerusalem. This was the fulfillment of yet another punishment which God had spoken against David through the prophet Nathan.

II. ABSALOM'S FALL (2 Samuel 17:1-18:18)

Ahithophel volunteered to lead a force of men in pursuit of David, hoping to find and kill him before he had time to rest and regroup. But Hushai reminded Absalom of David's fierce reputation as a mighty warrior, and advised him to wait until they could muster up a larger army before making any assault. Upon consideration Absalom followed Hushai's advice, which left Ahithophel feeling quite humiliated. In shame, Ahithophel returned to his home and committed suicide.

Meanwhile Hushai sent a message to David to inform him of Absalom's plan. The message was almost intercepted when a young boy saw David's messengers and told on them. They had to hide in a well to avoid being caught. When these messengers finally delivered the warning, David and his men crossed over the Jordan River and came to a place called Mahanaim. They were met there by many sympathizers, who gave them food and other needed provisions.

Hushai had bought David enough time to get organized. Once prepared, David divided his army into 3 companies and sent them out to meet Absalom's forces. He instructed them to deal gently with his son. By this point, Absalom had amassed a large army as well. The 2 sides met and battled against one another in the Valley of Ephraim. The fighting was severe and over 20,000 men died. David's men were victorious. During the contest, in direct defiance of David's orders, Joab killed Absalom after finding him caught hanging from a tree by his hair.

III. DAVID'S RETURN (2 Samuel 18:19-19:43)

As the fighting came to an end, Joab sent 2 messengers from the battlefield to give a report to David who had stayed back in Mahanaim. One of them outran the other. The first to arrive told David that his men had won the war and the conspirators had been defeated. When the second messenger showed up, he added that Absalom had been killed. David, who had a long history of grieving over the death of his enemies, was heartbroken to learn of his son's death.

Joab was disgusted by David's mournful behavior. When his men returned from the fight, David did not show them any honor or make any attempt to commend their bravery or celebrate their victory. Instead he just lamented over his slain son Absalom. Joab approached David and

scolded him for disrespecting his army in such a shameful way. He warned David that his own people would soon forsake him if he didn't get it together.

So David composed himself and took up his rightful place as leader. During the conspiracy, the people of Israel had been divided. Now that it was over, most of them wanted David to return to Jerusalem. However, many of those in Judah - who had given much assistance to Absalom - were hesitant to have David back on the throne. In order to win back their allegiance, David named Amasa as his new military commander in place of Joab. Amasa had been Absalom's general during the attempted coup. Seeing this, Judah welcomed David back.

Shemei and the men of Judah hurriedly came to the Jordan River and assisted David as he crossed back over into Israel. Rather than having them executed, the merciful king forgave Shemei and many other conspirators of their treachery. Several others met with David as and even after he returned to Jerusalem, including Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth told David that he'd never sided with Absalom, and that Ziba's claims about him were all lies. A large group of men from Israel also greeted David at Gilgal as he returned home.

CONCLUSION

Absalom's conspiracy to overthrow his father David ultimately ended in failure. Sadly, Absalom himself was killed during the attempted coup he led. Though David had vacated the throne temporarily, he soon returned and continued his reign as king. David was extremely gracious and lenient towards those who had conspired against him, perhaps because he did not want to do any further damage to the nation.

I have often wondered why David fled from Jerusalem so readily. When you consider his past bravery and valor, it seems odd that he would just abandon the capital rather than boldly defending it. Jerusalem had strong city walls and was quite well fortified, which would have likely made any attempted invasion very difficult for Absalom. But David and his loyal followers abruptly left, essentially handing Jerusalem over to the conspirators. I think there is a lesson to be learned from David's peculiar decision.

After hearing the whole story, it is clear to me that David's forces were stronger than Absalom's. I have come to believe that David did not withdraw from Jerusalem primarily out of fear, but rather because the majority of the people there wanted him to leave. In other words, he wasn't forced out but rather chose to go because he wasn't wanted. He could have asserted his strength against the will of the majority, but he didn't. Likewise, after the conspiracy ended David did not immediately return to Jerusalem. Instead he made attempts to appease the men of Judah and Israel so they would welcome him back. Again, he waited to be received voluntarily rather than returning belligerently.

Jesus is infinitely more powerful than the conspirator Satan is, yet Satan reigns in the lives of many people. Why is this so? I believe it is because Jesus respects and honors each

individual's will. If a person prefers to serve someone or something other than Jesus, he will voluntarily withdraw. This doesn't make him any less powerful. Fortunately for the us, even after he leaves the Lord lovingly remains closeby and patiently waits to be invited back. He affords sinners with occasional reminders of his nearness. Still, Jesus will not enter into a person's heart and grant them salvation apart from a sincere invitation.

Perhaps you have rebelled against God and rejected his son Jesus. Many years ago you may have sensed his presence and influence, but now he seems distant and silent. I have good news! Even though he respected your past wishes by leaving you to wallow in your own sinfulness, the Lord is still near and eager to return. No power can stop him. Will you repent of your sins today and welcome Jesus into your life? He is patiently waiting for you to say yes.

David's Troubles Continue

Originally Preached - 10/14/2018

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him." - Nahum 1:7

Over the past several months we have been studying about Israel's united monarchy. As stated previously in this series, after several centuries of local and regional governance under various judges the 12 tribes of Israel united to form a single nation under the headship of a king. This united kingdom lasted for about 120 years before splintering into 2 separate nations.

David was the second king to reign over united Israel. His rule can be divided clearly into 2 distinct halves. The first part was filled with great success and prosperity - which we discussed earlier in this study. Then David committed an awful sin. After this, his kingship was fraught with strife and difficulty.

Last Sunday we read about Absalom's attempt to overthrow the government and this morning we will learn of even more hardships that followed. In light of this, I have titled today's message "David's Troubles Continue". It is the 22nd sermon of this current series.

I. SHEBA'S REVOLT (2 Samuel 20)

Following Absalom's failed conspiracy, David returned to Jerusalem to continue his reign. He was welcomed by several leaders from the tribe of Judah as he crossed over the Jordan River back into the country. Their disingenuous greeting troubled several men from the other 10 tribes of Israel who jealously believed that David favored them because he himself was a Judahite. Sheba, a scoundrel from the tribe of Benjamin, rallied a group of Israelites to join him in a revolt against David.

Upon his arrival to the capital city David put aside the concubines that he'd left there during Absalom's conspiracy, presumably because they had been violated. Then he ordered Amasa, his new military commander, to quickly muster together some fighting men to deal with Sheba and his revolutionaries. But Amasa was taking too long, so David sent a group of men under the leadership of Abishai and Joab instead. Amasa met up with Joab and Abishai at Gibeon.

Joab had been David's longtime friend and general, until being abruptly replaced by the conspirator Amasa. Joab hated Amasa for this, and therefore struck him in the belly with a sword. As Amasa laid on the road dying in a pool of his own blood, Joab rallied all of the troops to himself. Under Joab's leadership, they continued their mission to put down Sheba's revolt. Amasa's lifeless body was removed from the roadway and tossed into a field.

Joab's men came to the walled city of Abel Beth-maacah. Sheba and his rebels had taken

refuge there. Joab laid siege upon it, seeking to topple the walls and invade. A wise woman who lived there asked Joab why he sought to destroy their city. Joab explained that he was pursuing Sheba who'd hidden himself inside. Hearing this, the woman summoned the men within Abel Beth-maacah. They searched for, found, and decapitated Sheba, then tossed his head over the wall to Joab. Thus, Joab called off his siege and he and his army returned to Jerusalem. Sheba's revolt was squashed and Joab reclaimed his place as the general of Israel's military.

One of the lessons that can be drawn from this story is that things often go much easier if you ask for help or at least explain your motives. Granted, this is a morbid example but it still applies. By explaining himself to the woman and asking for her assistance, Joab was able to accomplish his mission more quickly and with considerably less effort.

II. GIBEONITE REVENGE (2 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8)

Unfortunately, a severe famine fell upon the nation of Israel which lasted for 3 years. The LORD spoke to David and explained that the famine was the result of a sin committed by King Saul decades earlier. Apparently Saul had ruthlessly killed some Gibeonites in an attempt to remove them from Israel completely, thereby violating an ancient treaty that dated back to the time of Joshua. Hoping to end the famine, David met with the Gibeonite leaders and asked what they would accept as restitution for King Saul's past sin. They requested that 7 of Saul's sons be given to them to be hanged.

In keeping with their request, David turned 7 of Saul's remaining sons/grandsons over to the Gibeonites, not including his friend Mephibosheth. The Gibeonites killed them all by hanging them from trees. Rizpah, the mother of 2 of those who'd been executed, came and protected their exposed bodies from being devoured by birds or other scavengers. David was moved by her actions, and ordered that the bones of Saul and Jonathan be excavated and returned from Jabesh-Gilead to Israel. David then took the remains of Saul and Jonathan, along with those of the 7 sons of Saul who'd been killed, and buried them together in the country of Benjamin in their family grave.

The debt of Saul's sin against the Gibeonites was paid and the famine finally ended. In the months that followed, war resumed between Israel and the Philistines. Over the course of several battles, David's men killed the last of the Philistine giants - thought to be the descendants of Anak.

As seen elsewhere in Scripture, this story shows how the sins of one person can have consequential and disastrous effects on others even years after the fact. It is also an example of God's just requirement that sins must be paid for. The LORD doesn't just forgive debts without payment. This is what makes Jesus' death so important. We can be forgiven only because Jesus offered himself as the restitution for our sin.

III. DAVID'S CENSUS (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21)

David decided to take a census in Israel. He put Joab in charge of conducting it, despite Joab's initial objections to doing so. The census took 9 months to complete as Joab traveled throughout the kingdom taking count. When it was complete, the number of eligible fighting men numbered in Israel was 800,000 and the number in Judah was 500,000. When these amounts were added to the men already enlisted in the standing army, the totals were even higher. The tribes of Benjamin and Levi were excluded from the census.

For some unknown reason, this action greatly angered the LORD. Various theories have been suggested as to why God was displeased with David's census. Nevertheless, God sent the prophet Gad to present David with 3 choices of punishment for numbering the people. Israel could either suffer from 3 additional years of famine (remember that they had just come out of one), 3 months of defeat at the hands of their enemies, or 3 days of plague and pestilence. David was distressed, but opted to suffer at the hand of God rather than those of men.

God sent a severe plague upon Israel and some 70,000 men died. As the destroying angel approached the city of Jerusalem, David cried out to God for mercy. Gad told David to go and build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (also called Ornan) the Jebusite. When David arrived, Araunah offered to give his property to David for free but the king insisted on paying for it. David stated that he would not give a sacrifice to God that cost him nothing. David bought the threshing floor and oxen, built an altar, and there made burnt and peace offerings to God. The LORD was moved and the plague ceased. Later, David paid even more to purchase all of the acreage around the threshing floor.

One of the lessons that can be drawn from this chapter speaks to the nature of an acceptable sacrifice. Notice that David was unwilling to offer God something that didn't cost him anything. All too often people give God menial or meager gifts that don't really require any sacrifice from them at all. Such giving doesn't please the LORD. Christians should give sacrificially while trusting that God will provide for their every need.

CONCLUSION

Rape. Murder. Estrangement. Conspiracy. Revolt. Famine. Plague. These 7 words describe David's life and Israel's condition in the years following his sin with Bathsheba. The strength and overall health of the nation had deteriorated significantly. It is interesting to see how the well-being of an entire country can be so profoundly affected - either positively or negatively - by the actions and behaviors of their leadership.

Let's close today's message by reviewing what we've learned. First, simply asking for help can save you a lot of time and trouble. Second, God is just and therefore demands payment for our sins. Third, pleasing and acceptable giving to God requires some degree of sacrifice. May we take each of these lessons to heart as we aspire to live for Jesus this week.

The Psalms of David

Originally Preached - 10/21/2018

'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' - Matthew 6:9-13

Over the course of the past several weeks we have closely studied the David's life. We have seen him grow and mature from his earliest days as an obscure shepherd boy into the renown and widely beloved king of Israel. We have read of his great successes and his costly failures. We have seen David on both his good days and his bad days, and have realized that he - just like us - was an imperfect and broken man who needed God in his life.

In addition to his many exploits and harrowing adventures, David was also a prolific songwriter and poet. David wrote several songs that were inspired by particular events he'd experienced, and others that were more general in nature. Many were written to be played on the harp, which appears to have been David's favorite instrument. David wrote music throughout his entire life and many of his songs have been preserved in the pages of the Bible.

No study of David would be complete without mentioning the psalms that he composed. While the primary focus of our current sermon series is on the history of the united kingdom of Israel, it seems appropriate to dedicate at least one message to David's psalms. Perhaps in the future we can do an entire series exclusively on the book of Psalms. For now, we will summarize the psalms and look at those included in today's text. Our message this morning is titled "The Psalms of David".

I. THE PSALMS OF DAVID

As we've learned already in this series, David was a skilled musician who loved to sing and play music. He was also a gifted composer who wrote many beautiful songs and poetic melodies. Most of these, with just a few exceptions, are included in the book of Psalms. Over the course of his life David wrote about 75 psalms. These can be divided generally into 4 categories. It is important to note that many of the psalms contain elements from multiple categories.

The first of these categories is prayer. Most of the songs that David wrote are primarily prayers set to music (approx. 35). There are several prayers for deliverance, protection, and rescue from David's enemies. There are prayers seeking God's mercy, guidance, sanctification, and help. In some of his psalms David asks the LORD to pardon him of past sins that he's committed. There are also prayers for prosperity, victory, personal vindication, and peace in Jerusalem. In some of them, David prays that God would destroy or punish his enemies and/or the wicked. Still others are more general prayers that express his trust, suffering, or distress.

The second category is thanksgiving and praise. Several of David's songs explicitly express praise and gratitude to God for the wonderful things He has done (approx. 10). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, one of the most repeated themes is deliverance and protection. David often thanks God for saving him from the hands of his enemies. He also praises the LORD for His mercies and favor, among many other things.

The third group consists of psalms about God. These are not necessarily praises ascribed to God, but rather songs that describe His characteristics (approx. 20). There are psalms about God's glory, works, word, favor, voice, omnipresence, omniscience, and goodness. David names the LORD as his Provider, his Protector, his Deliverer, his Portion, and his Shepherd. He describes God as a refuge, a helper, a sustainer, a satisfier, and so on. In a few of his psalms, David prophetically writes about the coming Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The fourth category includes all of David's other psalms. These are varied declarations of some sort or another (approx. 10). There are expressions of anguish, sadness, complaining, and lament. David writes about the folly of men, the futility of evil, and the vanity of life. He describes the wickedness of men and their insecurity outside of God. There are other psalms about the excellence of unity and blessedness of forgiveness. David also declares his trust in the LORD and professes his uprightness.

II. A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE (2 Samuel 22)

The words of this song are duplicated almost word-for-word in Psalm 18. Apparently it was slightly edited before being included in the book of Psalms. David wrote this magnificent psalm to praise God for delivering him from the hands of his enemies. As he looked back over his life, David remembered all of the times that God had protected him and rescued him from danger.

God protected David from wild beasts while he watched over his father's flocks as a young boy. God saved David from the hands of the mighty giant Goliath while he was just a teen. As a young man, God delivered David on multiple occasions as he fled from the jealous king Saul. As king, the LORD faithfully protected David from numerous enemies including the Philistines, the Arameans, the Ammonites, and many others. God even spared David from the conspiracy of his own son. David's life was filled with numerous instances in which God delivered him from some peril or difficulty.

After a brief introduction, the first stanza of this psalm describes David's precarious situation which leads him to cry out to God for help. The second stanza portrays God's supernatural response. The third declares David's deliverance from his enemies. In the stanzas that follow, David praises the LORD for His goodness, His strength, and His lovingkindness. This psalm is one of many in which David thanks God for deliverance.

Most of us here this morning do not share in the same type of battles that David often had. We

are not leading armies into the fray or engaging in direct hand-to-hand combat with adversaries. That said, we still face dangerous and strong enemies every day. Our fight is not with flesh and blood but rather with powers and principalities in dark places. Many of us are fighting against sickness and disease. Others are battling addictions and bad habits. We need protection every day from the enemies of God and the fallenness of the world around us. For this reason, we can easily relate to and treasure the psalms of David.

III. DAVID'S LAST SONG (2 Samuel 23:1-7)

While this passage is called "David's Last Song", it almost certainly isn't the last words that he spoke. Perhaps it is so named because it is the final song contained in the books of Samuel. As we will see next week, David still has a few years left as king before turning his reign over to Solomon. During these final years, he spoke many more words and gave his son a lot of wise counsel. Thus, these were not David's last words but are important nonetheless.

In these verses, David declares that he has ruled over Israel righteously and in the fear of God. He proclaims that the LORD has made an everlasting covenant with him, promising that a descendant of David would rule over Israel forever. This covenant was fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who was born of the line of David. Jesus is the King of kings, who reigns forevermore. This brief psalm closes with a description of what will happen to the worthless and wicked.

The same God who made a covenant with David centuries ago has made promises to us as well. We need to delight in these promises and to rest in the assurances of God. We need to live with confidence that God keeps His word. We must surrender our lives to Him, receiving the forgiveness that only Christ offers, and serve Him faithfully everyday. God will deliver those who place their trust in Him!

CONCLUSION

In addition to his numerous accomplishments both before and after he became king, David is also famous for the many beautiful psalms that he wrote. These songs express great joy and triumph, deep sorrow and loss, and a host of other feelings and emotions. As we read and sing these wonderful psalms, it gives us deeper insight into the heart and mind of David.

Next Sunday we will resume our study of the history of Israel and the united kingdom. We will read about David's work in the final years of his life and how he tried to prepare his son Solomon for the throne. We will see David's focus and energies return to an idea that he'd had many years ago. Until then, may you all have a blessed week!

The Coregency

Originally Preached - 10/28/2018

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate. - Psalm 127:1-3

This morning as we continue our series, "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel", we move into the book of 1st Kings. It is traditionally held that the prophet Jeremiah wrote and/or compiled the writings that make up 1st and 2nd Kings (originally they were a single book). Jeremiah lived and ministered some 350 years after the reign of King David. 1st Kings begins where 2nd Samuel left off. It's opening chapters describe the ascension of David's son Solomon as the third and final king of united Israel.

Before moving into 1st Kings, let's take a moment to remember how 2nd Samuel ended. King David had conducted a census, which caused the LORD to become very angry. A severe plague struck Israel for 3 days killing thousands of people. As it approached Jerusalem, the prophet Gad advised David to buy the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and to build an altar there. David followed Gad's counsel, bought the property, built an altar, and offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the nation. The LORD was satisfied with David's appeal and the devastating plague ceased.

This event prompted David to remember the plans he'd made years earlier to build a temple for God in the city of Jerusalem. It would serve as a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant. At that time the LORD told him that he was not the right man to build the temple. Instead, his son would someday do it. Hearing this, David put his plans on hold. But now, in light of the sacrifices he'd made on Araunah's threshing floor, David became convinced that this was the location where God's temple should eventually be built. He spent his final days as king preparing his son Solomon to build the temple on this site.

I. PREPARATIONS AND PERSONNEL (1 Chronicles 22-27)

David had grown old and knew that his reign would be ending soon. In these waning years, he focused his attention and energies on preparing his son to construct God's temple. David gathered a large number of laborers and materials to complete the project. He charged Solomon with the task, and instructed his loyal advisors and Israel's leaders to help his son do the job. David prayed that Solomon would be prosperous and successful in building the temple.

David knew that God had chosen Solomon to succeed him. He therefore publicly named Solomon as the new king of Israel. But since Solomon was still young and inexperienced, David continued reigning with his son for a short while. During these months, David tried to prepare

Solomon for the kingship. He encouraged his son and offered him sound advice that he'd gained over the past several years. The 2 of them worked closely together, with David gradually ceding his authority to Solomon as he grew more confident in his son's ability.

Possibly with Solomon's assistance, David went ahead and made personnel assignments for those who would be working in the temple after it had been completed. He numbered the Levites and then assigned them by family with specific responsibilities and duties. These were revised and modernized somewhat from the bygone days of the tabernacle because the temple was to be a stationary structure. David also defined the role and function of the musicians who would serve in the temple. He named people to serve as gatekeepers for and to guard the treasures of the temple. He further assigned officers and judges to conduct outside duties. David named commanders for Israel's army, chief officers for each of Israel's tribes, and various other overseers and counselors.

II. PLANS AND PRAYERS (1 Chronicles 28:1-29:25)

Having made all of these arrangements, David called for a large assembly of Israel's leaders and prominent citizens to gather in Jerusalem. When they all arrived, David told them of his desire to build a great temple and how God chose Solomon to do it instead. He urged them all, especially his son, to be obedient to God's will and serve Him wholeheartedly. Then David gave Solomon detailed written plans and/or drawings for how to build the temple and all of its furnishings. These plans were given to David by the direct inspiration of God.

Although he had already given much, David generously committed to dedicate even more of his personal wealth and treasure to the temple. He encouraged all of those gathered at the assembly to do likewise and many consented. A large offering was gathered to help finance the temple and everyone rejoiced greatly. David prayed over the people and they made numerous sacrifices at the site where the temple was to be built.

During this grand celebration that was held in anticipation of the temple's construction, the people formally anointed Solomon as king again. This time, however, Solomon was named in place of his father rather than alongside him. In other words, David's reign was now officially ended and the brief coregency was no more. Solomon was made the lone king over Israel.

III. PLOTS AND POWER (1 Kings 1-2; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30)

Apparently young Solomon did not immediately exert his authority as the new king. In the days that followed, David's oldest surviving son Adonijah exalted himself in place of Solomon. Joab, David's longtime military commander, and Abiathar the priest sided with Adonijah in his bid to replace Solomon as the rightful king. Adonijah held a large banquet in Jerusalem at which he made his claim to be the new ruler of Israel. It was an elaborate power grab.

By this point, David was quite old and required full-time attendant care. He did not know what

Adonijah had done nor was he able to stop it himself. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and Nathan the prophet approached the aged king in his bedroom and informed him of Adonijah's rebellious behavior. David was quite concerned and ordered his men to go and anoint Solomon as the new king before Adonijah was successfully able to steal the throne. Not long after this, David died.

When Adonijah's guests heard that David had made Solomon king, they all abandoned him. Adonijah's desperate attempt to usurp the kingship failed miserably. As a matter of fact, not long afterward King Solomon had both Adonijah and Joab killed. He also permanently dismissed Abiathar from the priesthood, thereby fulfilling God's promise to remove Eli's house (descendants) from priestly service. Solomon also killed Shimei, one of his father's David's fiercest critics, because he had violated the king's terms. By taking these extreme measures, Solomon eliminated his enemies and firmly established himself as the new king of Israel.

CONCLUSION

David had ruled as king over Israel for 40 years. He lived a long and productive life, died in his old age, and was buried in the capital city of Jerusalem. He spent the last few years of his reign preparing his son Solomon to be Israel's next king and making arrangements for the building of the temple. Though David did not live to see the construction of the temple, it was his greatest dream. I'm certain he envisioned it in his mind and smiled. God chose Solomon to actually build the temple, but David certainly paved the way for it to happen.

To me, this is quite reminiscent of Moses and Joshua. After a long and difficult exodus Moses longed to lead the Hebrews into the Promised land, but God did not allow it. Instead, Moses died on a nearby mountain top while his successor Joshua took the people across the Jordan River. That said, Moses was instrumental in bringing the children of Israel to the edge of Canaan and preparing them to possess it. Moses prepared the way for Joshua, in much the same way that David did for Solomon.

I believe there is much we can learn from both of these stories. Sometimes God wants us to look to our elders and listen to their wise counsel. He uses them to prepare us for what lies ahead, and may even call us to continue or complete initiatives that they began. We become the legacy of those who went on before us. Other times, God wants us to carefully impart our knowledge to those who will follow in our footsteps. We must help prepare them for the day when they will be called to lead. In this way, the mantle of leadership is passed from one generation to the next.

Another important lesson is this. We, like Solomon, are not called to make our own plan. As Christians, it is our purpose to execute the plan that was already given to us by our Father...

Solomon's Wisdom

Originally Preached - 11/5/2018

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. - James 1:5

The title of this morning's message is "Solomon's Wisdom". It is the 25th sermon of our current series on the history of the united monarchy. We've called this "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". The events that we'll discuss today took place during the beginning years of Solomon's reign. This would date them somewhere around 970 BC.

If we assume that David married Bathsheba sometime during the middle of his 40 year reign, and we know that Solomon was born to her not long thereafter, we can conclude that Solomon was around 20 years old when he became the king. That's pretty young to become the ruler of a nation. In the United States, a person has to be at least 35 years old before they can serve as president. His young age might explain why David spent so much time mentoring and preparing Solomon before he died.

Also this morning we will move from 1st Chronicles into 2nd Chronicles. As stated earlier in this series, both were composed and/or compiled by Ezra during the post-exilic period. Originally they were a single book. 1st Chronicles ends with the death of David and 2nd Chronicles begins with the reign of Solomon.

This message highlights the importance of wisdom. It is something that we as Christians need more of. Unfortunately, we have a knack for making foolish choices and decisions that regularly bring about disastrous consequences. I pray that God will impress upon each of us here today the enormous value of godly wisdom.

I. WORSHIP AT GIBEON (1 Kings 3:1-5; 2 Chronicles 1:1-7)

Early on during his reign, King Solomon formed an alliance with Egypt and married Pharaoh's daughter. He brought her to live in Jerusalem. Over the course of time, Solomon formed many such alliances with other nations and took on many wives. Though he loved God, Solomon gradually compromised his faith in order to appease these foreign wives and pagan nations.

The temple in Jerusalem at which offerings could be made by the priests had not yet been built. Therefore, the people of Israel often made sacrifices in various and scattered locations called the "high places". Unfortunately, many of these high places were established for idol worship. Though David had moved the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the tabernacle itself and all of its other furnishings (including the bronze altar) were still set up in Gibeon. This was known as the "great high place".

Solomon and a large assembly of people went to Gibeon to worship God. While he was there, the young king offered 1,000 burnt offerings on the bronze altar. The LORD appeared to him in a dream that night and told Solomon to ask for whatever he wished. God promised to grant Solomon's request.

Notice that Solomon went to Gibeon in order to worship God. Making the effort to actually go somewhere to worship is very important. After the temple was constructed (in the centuries that followed), the Jews were expected to journey there 3 times a year in order to make sacrifices. Why couldn't they just do it in their own home towns? These extensive pilgrimages were commanded in the Mosaic Law. I believe that going to and coming from God's house is an often overlooked expression of worship.

II. THE KING'S REQUEST (1 Kings 3:6-15; 2 Chronicles 1:8-13)

Solomon was thankful for the blessings that God had bestowed upon his father David. He was also pleased that God had chosen him to follow in his father's footsteps as the new king. As Solomon dwelt upon the enormous responsibility of leading Israel, he felt ill-equipped for such a huge task. Therefore, Solomon asked the LORD for wisdom, understanding, and discernment in order to judge his people righteously.

God was delighted by Solomon's humble request. Rather than seeking personal wealth or fame, the king simply wanted the wisdom necessary to lead Israel well. In keeping with His promise, God gave Solomon the wisdom and discernment he'd requested. In addition, the LORD also gave Solomon great riches and honor. Solomon was one of the wisest and wealthiest men who ever lived. God also told Solomon that He would prolong his life if the king remained obedient.

After receiving God's response, Solomon awoke from his dream. He and those with him returned from Gibeon back to Jerusalem. When he arrived, Solomon came and stood before the Ark of the Covenant. He offered additional burnt offerings and peace offerings there. He also held a feast for his servants to celebrate the wonderful gifts God had given to him.

When we pray and ask God to give us those things which He desires to give, other blessings surely follow. Solomon requested and was given godly wisdom, but he also received great fame and fortune. Had he selfishly requested fame and fortune, he might not have gotten any of it. If we focus on seeking those things which are pleasing to God, He will provide for us bountifully in other ways as well. But if we focus solely on seeking those things which are pleasing to us, we may have to do without.

III. A PROBLEM SOLVED (1 Kings 3:16-28)

Solomon was extremely wise and skilled in resolving problems and passing judgments. One day 2 women appeared before the king. Both of them were harlots who lived together in the same house. No one else lived with them. Both of the women had recently given birth to newborn

infants. Sadly, one of the infants had died during the night when its mother accidentally slept on it. Before morning arrived this woman intentionally switched the babies, thereby stealing the surviving baby and replacing it with the dead one. Now these 2 women were both claiming to be child's true mother.

Solomon had to decide which woman was telling the truth and which was lying. After all, they both couldn't be the baby's mother. So Solomon asked that a sword be brought to him. Then he proposed cutting the living infant in half and giving a part to each woman. The child's true mother shuddered at the thought that her son would be killed and urged the king to just give him to the other woman. Meanwhile the lying woman was indifferent and thought that the king's decision was acceptable. Their differing reactions to his proposed solution made it clear who the true mother was. After identifying her, Solomon gave the baby to its actual mother.

When word of this judgment and possibly others spread throughout the kingdom, all of Israel feared King Solomon for his great wisdom and keen ability to administer justice.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap up the message today, I want to take a moment to think seriously about Solomon's solution to the dispute between these 2 women. He proposed that the baby be cut in half so that each woman would receive an equal share. Killing the infant sure seems like a senseless and cruel way to resolve this argument, doesn't it? Surely he didn't actually intend to do this... right? Well, apparently these women believed he would. Otherwise they'd have not reacted in the manner that they did. Fortunately we didn't have to find out whether Solomon was serious or not!

Sometimes the wisest decisions may seem on their face to be bizarre or even callous (such as cutting a baby apart). This is because wisdom and compassion are not always in agreement. I'm not saying that Solomon was heartless or that he had no empathy. On the contrary, I believe he was a very kind and caring man. But he knew that sound decisions must be based on reason and logic, not on emotion alone. Many peoples' choices are based almost entirely on their impulses and feelings rather than on what is actually best. Such decision-making is often childish and foolish. Wisdom is a sign of spiritual maturity.

The Bible teaches us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. In other words, no person can be truly wise without having a dependent faith in God. This is because all wisdom comes from God. Scripture also says that anyone who does not believe in the existence of God is a fool. It goes on to say that believers should desire wisdom more than any other treasure. In light of these truths, how wise are you? If you're like me, there's plenty of room for growth... Perhaps we should pray that God would grant us more wisdom.

Solomon Prospers

Originally Preached - 11/11/2018

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. - 3 John 1:2

Near the beginning of his reign over Israel, Solomon traveled to Gibeon in order to worship God at the site of the old tabernacle. He offered 1,000 burnt offerings on the bronze altar - that's a lot! While he was there, the LORD offered to give Solomon whatever he requested. The young king asked for understanding and wisdom to lead his people well. God granted this wish, but also rewarded Solomon with tremendous wealth and prosperity.

This morning we continue our extensive study on the history of united Israel with a message called "Solomon Prospers". It is the 26th sermon of this series. We will consider the first few years of Solomon's kingship in which he and all of Israel experienced remarkable success. This was the golden age of ancient Israel.

I. SOLOMON'S OFFICIALS (1 Kings 4:1-19)

When Solomon became king, he surrounded himself with various officials who served in the royal court. Many of their names are documented in the Bible. Several of them were the sons of men who had previously served during David's administration. They functioned as priests, secretaries, recorders, military leaders, chief deputies, household managers, directors of forced labor, and personal friends/advisors.

Solomon also named 12 men who shared the responsibility of providing for the king's household one month of each year. Their names and the regions they represented are listed in the Bible. One of these men was named Ben-Hur. He hailed from the hill country of Ephraim. This passage is the only instance in which the name Ben-Hur, which literally means the "son of Hur", appears in the Bible. This man was a deputy of King Solomon, and therefore lived almost 1,000 years before Jesus' incarnation as a babe in Bethlehem.

The famous movie "Ben-Hur" was based on a book written by American author Lew Wallace. It was originally published in 1880. It is a work of historical fiction that was set in Jerusalem during the time of Christ. While it is certainly an epic and adventurous story, those who read or watch it should know that it's hero, Judah Ben-Hur, is a make-believe character who is not the same person mentioned in the Bible. Though it is fiction, "Ben-Hur" is one of the most rewarded and recognized pieces of Christian literature ever produced. Interestingly, when Lew Wallace began writing the book he was not a believer. He became a Christian as the direct result of researching and writing the story.

II. SOLOMON'S SUCCESS (1 Kings 4:20-28; 2 Chronicles 1:14-17)

During Solomon's reign, Israel was the strongest and greatest kingdom in the Middle East. Its boundaries extended to their farthest reaches. It encompassed and ruled over several lesser kingdoms from the Euphrates River (in modern-day Syria) southward through Philistia and all the way to the border of Egypt. These kingdoms all paid tribute to King Solomon.

During this time, Israel strengthened its military by purchasing and importing thousands of the world's finest horses and chariots. Solomon enlisted 12,000 men to serve as horsemen in his army. The king and his household lived in luxury and enjoyed ample provisions every day. He became enormously wealthy. Solomon and all of Israel was at peace, and the nation was filled with rejoicing and celebration. Silver and gold were plentiful, and the economy was humming. Many consider these years to be the greatest period in the history of Israel... and they were, from a purely earthly perspective.

III. SOLOMON'S WISDOM (1 Kings 4:29-34)

Solomon's prosperity was not limited to just material things. God have given him incredible understanding and discernment. Solomon's wisdom became known far and wide. Solomon was far wiser than all of the other great minds of his day, including Ethan the Ezrahite and Heman. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and composed 1,005 songs. People came from great distances to hear him speak and to listen to his insight on various topics.

The book of Proverbs consists primarily of Solomon's wise sayings, along with a few others that he presumably collected and edited. At least 2 of the psalms, specifically Psalm 72 and Psalm 127, were short songs written by Solomon. His most famous song, the Song of Solomon, stands alone as a distinct book of the Bible. It is an allegorical drama about the deep love shared between a bride and her groom.

It is interesting to note that 2 of Solomon's wise contemporaries, namely Ethan the Ezrahite and Heman (both mentioned earlier), also made minor contributions to the book of Psalms. Heman assisted in writing Psalm 88 and Ethan is the author of Psalm 89.

The wisdom of Solomon is preserved today in his Biblical writings. As previously stated, he is the main author Proverbs, he contributed at least 2 of the Psalms, and he wrote the Song of Solomon. Later in his life King Solomon also penned the book of Ecclesiastes, which we will consider again later in this sermon series.

IV. SOLOMON'S ALLIANCE (1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2)

A few years into his kingship, Solomon formed an alliance with Hiram king of Tyre. Hiram had been a dear friend of Solomon's father David and was willing to assist in the building of the Jewish temple. Tyre and Sidon were 2 of the major cities in ancient Lebanon (Phoenicia). This nation was famous for its grand cedar and cypress trees. In keeping with their alliance, the

Sidonians cut and exported great amounts of timber to Israel for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. In return, Solomon provided large quantities of food to King Hiram and his people. Hiram also sent a skilled artisan named Hurim-abi to help with the design and fine details of the temple.

To do the work, King Solomon conscripted 30,000 men into forced labor. He sent them in shifts back and forth to Lebanon. He also identified and utilized the 153,600 foreigners who lived in Israel to cut, quarry, and transport large stones from the mountains into the city. These large and costly stones were used to lay the foundation of the temple (and perhaps of other building projects as well). Solomon's laborers, Hiram's laborers, and many others all worked together preparing the materials to build God's house.

CONCLUSION

Before we conclude the message today, there are a few miscellaneous observations that I'd like to point out...

Solomon appointed several people to serve him and the nation in the royal court. Leaders should always surround themselves with advisors and counselors who will help them to do their jobs well. These people must be trustworthy and dependable. Subordinates might not always agree with their leader, but they should be willing to support and defend his or her decisions regardless of their personal views - unless of course these decisions are clearly sinful. In such cases, servants must have the courage to lovingly confront their leaders.

For a few decades Solomon and Israel achieved enormous success. Who could have guessed that less than 50 years later, this great nation would be divided and broken? Beloved, the prosperity of this world may be awesome for a while but it won't last forever. For this reason, the greatest achievements are those that are pleasing to God and which pay eternal dividends. This is why Jesus teaches us to store up our treasures in heaven where they will never rust or be stolen.

Finally, we see that Solomon formed a partnership with Hiram in order to complete the temple. Working together in partnerships is important if we intend to achieve big things for God. Christians can accomplish so much more when they work together. That is why Southern Baptist churches promote voluntary membership in local associations, state and national conventions, and various other collaborative alliances. These groups are able to do more together than they could alone. That said, members should always be free to leave if they don't agree with the theological positions of these organizations.

Next week we study the actual construction of Solomon's Temple. This was the most magnificent building project in Israel's history. It was also the greatest highlight of King Solomon's reign. I hope you will join us next Sunday for this exciting message.

The Temple's Construction

Originally Preached - 11/18/2018

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. - 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Saul, the first leader of the united Kingdom of Israel, was a troubled man. He struggled with pride and jealousy. He spent much of his time and the nation's resources pursuing a personal vendetta. David, the second and most beloved king of Israel, was a man after God's own heart. That said, he still committed a terrible sin that brought about disastrous consequences in his life. During their respective reigns, both of these kings spent a significant amount of time at war with various enemies such as the Philistines, Amalekites, Ammonites, Moabites, and others.

Unlike his predecessors, King Solomon - the third and final ruler of the united kingdom - enjoyed a long and sustained period of peace. This allowed Solomon to focus upon developing Israel's economy and improving its infrastructure. As a result, many building projects were completed during his reign. The most important of these, of course, was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple that Solomon built stood from approximately 960 BC until 586 BC, a period of about 374 years. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

In today's message, we are going to discuss the building of Solomon's temple. We will also learn about many of the artifacts found inside and outside of the temple. In addition, we will briefly touch on another of Solomon's most notable building projects - his own palace.

I. THE TEMPLE'S DESIGN (1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3)

During the fourth year of King Solomon's reign, some 480 years after the exodus, work on the temple began. It took 7 years to complete. The temple was built following the same basic layout as the tabernacle and consisted of 2 main rooms. The outer room or "Holy Place" was about 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. The inner sanctuary or "Holy of Holies" was square - 30 feet long and 30 feet wide. There was also a porch at the entrance of the temple that measured 15 feet by 30 feet.

The temple's walls had framed windows which provided for natural light inside. Along the outside of the temple and all around it were 3 stories of side chambers. These rooms were accessible through an outer door on the right side of the temple. Winding stairs allowed people to move up and down between the floors.

The walls and floor of the temple were made with cedar and cypress wood. Everything was overlaid with pure gold. Various designs were engraved into the golden walls such as cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. Beautiful hinged doors separated the rooms. 2 large gold-plated

cherubim sculptures were fashioned and placed in the inner sanctuary. The entire temple complex was a magnificent work-of-art.

II. THE TEMPLE'S FURNISHINGS (1 Kings 7:13-51; 2 Chronicles 4)

A skilled craftsman from Tyre came to assist Solomon with the temple's furnishings. He designed and built many of the articles that were used outside of the temple. He erected 2 large bronze columns which stood on the temple's porch on either side of the main entrance. These pillars were named Jachin and Boaz.

He built an altar that was 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 15 feet tall. He also made a large circular laver that measured 15 feet in diameter. It set upon the backs of 12 oxen, 3 facing each of the cardinal directions. He crafted 10 portable carts with basins on each, so that water could easily be transported in smaller quantities around the temple grounds. The altar was used to make sacrifices and the lavers for cleansing. All of these items were made of bronze and featured elaborate engravings. He also made numerous shovels, bowls, and other utensils.

Solomon built the furnishings that were located inside the temple. He crafted 10 golden lampstands and placed 5 on either side of the Holy Place. He made a golden table (possibly more than 1) upon which the showbread was placed. Solomon also built a golden altar which was used to burn incense. Finally he made numerous bowls, snuffers, and other golden items that were used by the priests. All of these items were similar to those that had been used in the tabernacle centuries earlier.

III. THE ROYAL PALACE (1 Kings 7:1-12)

Next to the temple, Solomon built a royal palace for himself. It took 13 years to complete and was made with many of the same types of materials as the temple had been. It included the house in which he lived, an attached house for his wife (the Pharaoh's daughter), a hall of pillars, a throne room, and an armory which was called the house of the forest of Lebanon. There were courtyards around the different buildings within the palace and a walkway that led up to the temple.

Scripture indicates that Solomon built the LORD's house before building his own. Certainly the king had an adequate place to live while the temple was being constructed, but he didn't yet have an elaborate palace. Solomon made God's temple the priority. Perhaps many of us would like to live in luxury someday, but let's put the LORD first. If we will do that, an eternal mansion awaits us in glory...

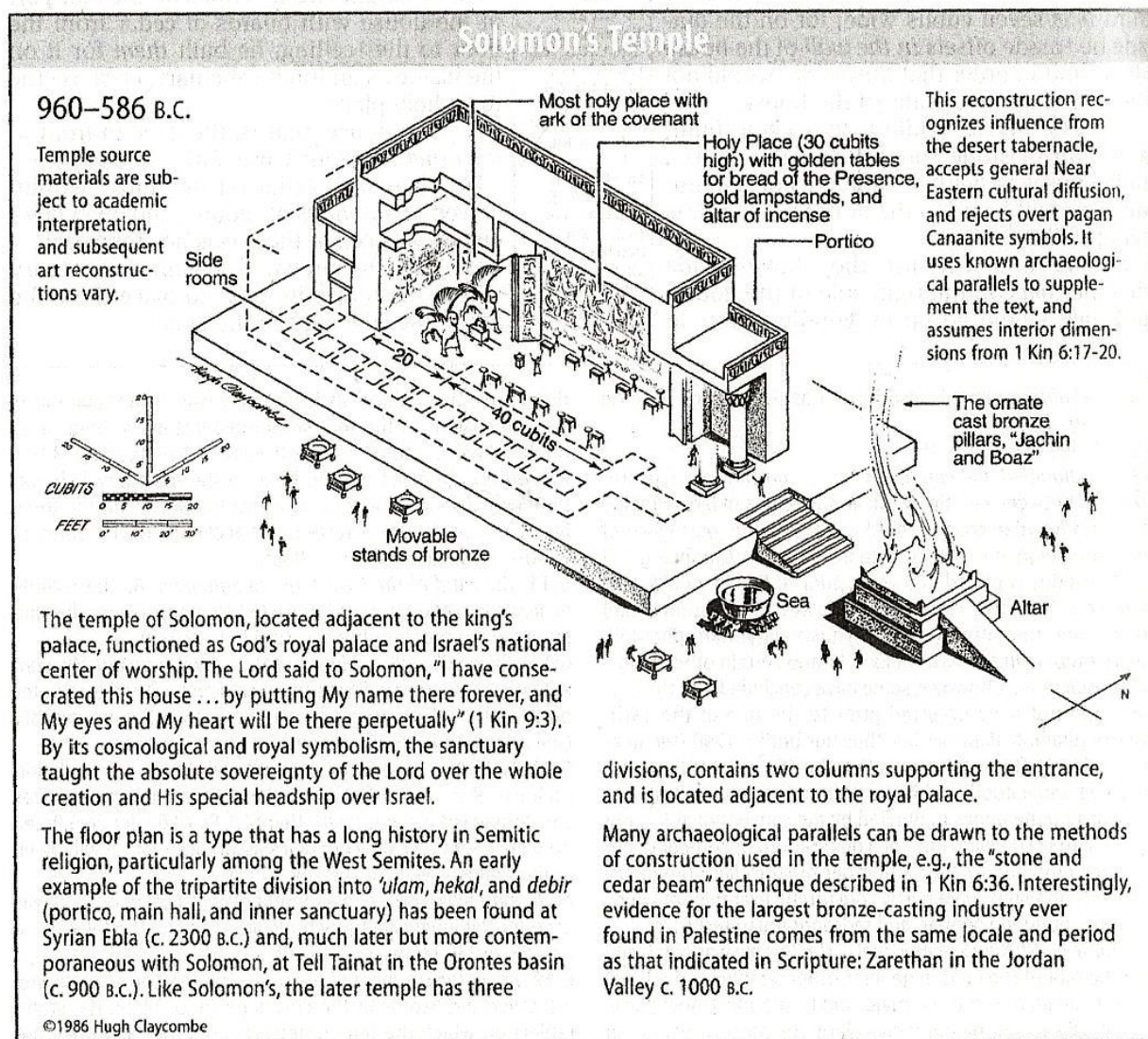
CONCLUSION

The construction of Solomon's temple took 7 years and the construction of his palace took another 13 years. Altogether these projects persisted for 20 years - half of Solomon's reign! As

you might suspect, the completion of these buildings was King Solomon's most significant accomplishment - especially the temple. It formally replaced the tabernacle as Israel's central place of worship and was the fulfillment of King David's dream.

In his letters, the Apostle Paul compares the physical temple in Jerusalem with the temple of our bodies. Just as He was manifestly present in the temple and the tabernacle during the Old Testament period, since Pentecost God's presence abides within Christians through the person of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the ancient Jewish temple foreshadows the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the life of a New Testament believer. Amazing!

Upon its completion, Solomon held a special ceremony to dedicate the temple. We will explore these festivities more deeply next week. Until then, remember that if you're a born again Christian your body is the temple of God - so take care of it!



The Dedication of the Temple

Originally Preached - 11/25/2018

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. - Romans 12:1

Solomon led the laborers of Israel as they built the first temple in Jerusalem. It took them over 7 years to complete and was finally finished around 960 BC. When the construction ended, King Solomon organized and conducted a massive ceremony to worship the LORD and to dedicate the temple to His service. This event included several different components, details of which have been preserved on the pages of Scripture.

The message this morning is titled "The Dedication of the Temple". It took place immediately after the temple was finished and before Solomon's palace was built. It was a national celebration which marked an important moment in Israel's history. The temple was more than just a building, but rather it became the center of Jewish life and religion.

As usual, the sermon outline today has 3 main points. Each of these will highlight various aspects of the temple's dedication. We will see over the course of our study that it was a spectacular event. Are you ready? Let's dive right into it...

I. THE ARK'S ARRIVAL (1 Kings 8:1-9; 2 Chronicles 5:1-10)

When work on the temple was done, Solomon assembled all of Israel's prominent elders and leaders together in Jerusalem. He ordered that the Ark of the Covenant, which resided in a special tent in Jerusalem where David had placed it some 40 years earlier, be brought up to its new home. The Levitical priests carried the Ark through the city and up to the temple. It was a grand procession.

When they arrived, the priests took the Ark into the inner sanctuary of the temple. They placed it between the 2 large cherubim that stood in the Holy of Holies. The outstretched wings of the cherubim formed a covering for the Ark. The only artifacts inside the Ark were the 2 tablets on which the 10 commandments were written. Apparently the budding rod of Aaron and the small jar of manna that had once been placed inside the Ark of the Covenant during the days of Moses were either lost or removed.

The Levites also carried up many other smaller items from the tabernacle that David had dedicated before his death. These included silver, gold, and numerous holy utensils. All of these things were placed in the temple's treasury.

Almost all of the major furnishings of the temple were new. Though they had the same functions as their older counterparts from the tabernacle, each piece had been remade and modernized.

Most were given an elaborate upgrade. The only original item of significance found in the temple was the Ark of the Covenant. It was the same Ark that Moses had crafted at Mt. Sinai and placed in the tabernacle a few centuries before. Perhaps in this generation of modern, state-of-the-art, auditorium-style megachurches it would be wise to remind ourselves that not everything has to be new. In fact, the most important things are often the oldest.

II. THE KING'S ADDRESS (1 Kings 8:12-61; 2 Chronicles 6)

Solomon made an elevated platform which he used on this special occasion. It was situated in the midst of the temple courtyard. Solomon stood on it so the people could see and hear him more easily. He told the crowd that his father David had originally planned to build a temple for God. However, the LORD forbade him from doing so and pledged that someday his son would complete it instead. This celebration formally recognized the fulfillment of God's promise.

After delivering his opening speech, Solomon knelt down on his knees, spread his hands out to heaven, and offered an audible prayer of dedication. Solomon asked God to honor the covenant He'd made with his father, ensuring that a descendant of David would always sit on the throne of Israel. He urged the LORD to hear and heed all of the prayers that would be offered in the temple over the years to come. He pleaded with God to be ever-merciful with His people and to forgive and restore them whenever they acknowledged and turned from their sin.

When he finished praying, Solomon stood up and spoke a blessing over the people. He praised God for faithfully keeping His promises to Israel dating all the way back to the days of Moses. The king then implored everyone to devote themselves wholly to the LORD, and to walk in obedience to His commands and statutes. By doing so, they would continuously enjoy His divine favor.

Isn't it nice when a king, president, or other national leader unashamedly and publicly prays on behalf of their nation? King Solomon was not the model of righteousness by any means, but despite his many imperfections he boldly led Israel in prayer on this momentous occasion. May the LORD continually grant us with leaders who will courageously and openly seek Him in prayer for the protection and welfare of their people.

III. THE LORD'S APPROVAL (1 Kings 8:10-11,62-66 & 9:1-9; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 & 7)

Solomon and the assembly offered numerous burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings. Due to their exceedingly large number, not all of the sacrifices were able to fit on the bronze altar. Solomon consecrated the middle of the temple courtyard in order to make the surplus offerings there. Meanwhile the priests and Levites sang praises to God and played their instruments joyfully.

As everyone watched the festivities, fire fell from heaven and consumed the huge burnt offering and the sacrifices. A thick cloud filled the temple so that the priests were unable to enter or

minister inside. In these moments the shekinah glory of God filled the temple, just as it had the tabernacle many years before. Seeing this, all of the people bowed down and lowered their faces to the ground while voicing praises and worship to the LORD. This was the most important moment of the entire celebration as it demonstrated God's approval of all that had been done. God's manifest presence now dwelt among Israel in the temple, specifically upon the Ark of the Covenant which resided within the Holy of Holies.

In addition to all of these events, Solomon observed a feast in Israel that lasted for 14 days. People came from the farthest reaches of the nation to see the new temple and to participate in the grand celebration. After 2 wonderful and historic weeks, the dedication ended and all of the people returned to their homes to resume their lives.

Several years later, after he finished building his palace, the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and told him that He'd heard the king's solemn prayer. God made the following promise - "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." But the LORD also warned that if they forsook Him to follow other gods, He'd uproot them from Israel and make the temple obsolete.

CONCLUSION

Let's conclude today's message with a question...

What good is a church if God's glory does not reside within it? This is why the presence of the Holy Spirit is so important to the vitality of a congregation. Though the Spirit resides within the life of each individual Christian, He should also be welcomed and present during the corporate worship and ministry of the church. Churches that lack the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit are often cold, listless, and self-absorbed.

Just like in the days of Solomon, today we desperately need the glory of God to fill our local church buildings. Every time we walk in the doors we should sense and be awed by the abiding presence of Holy Spirit. Sadly, this is often not the case. More than any other reason, I believe that the absence of the Holy Spirit accounts for the deadness and precipitous decline of the modern church. Sorry to end on such a sour note.

Well folks, we only have 2 sermons left in this series. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel! I hope you will join us next week as we consider some other happenings that took place during the latter half of King's Solomon's reign. Until then, may God bless you.

Solomon's Renown

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Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. - Matthew 4:23-24

Before we begin today, let me briefly summarize King Solomon's reign up to this point. When he was a young man, probably around 20 years old, his father David died leaving Solomon as the new ruler of Israel. Early on, he felt inept and unequipped to fill such an important role. When the LORD appeared to Solomon, the young king asked for wisdom and understanding. God granted this request and soon Solomon began to excel.

He oversaw the construction of the first temple in Jerusalem. It was a glorious structure that took over 7 years to complete. When it finally was done, Solomon held a 2-week celebration during which he dedicated the temple. The glory of God filled it and His manifest presence dwelt upon the Ark of the Covenant which had been placed inside. After this, Solomon spent another 13 years building his own palace and its surrounding courtyards.

This morning and next week we will discuss some of the events that took place during the final 10-15 years of Solomon's reign. As you might expect, he continued building in Jerusalem and throughout Israel. Reports of his remarkable wisdom and success spread so much that he became famous among the nations.

I. EXPANSION AND COMMERCE (1 Kings 9:10-28; 2 Chronicles 8)

King Hiram of Tyre had been a great ally and helper of Solomon for many years. Solomon decided to give 20 cities in the region of Galilee to Hiram. When Hiram came to inspect these cities, he was not impressed. He referred to them collectively as Cabal, which is roughly translated "the good-for-nothing land". Still, his friendly relations with King Solomon continued undeterred.

Solomon continued his emphasis on construction and expansion. He built, or perhaps rebuilt, the millo in Jerusalem. The millo was a large terraced fortification, sometimes thought of as a citadel, which served to defend the city. He also repaired the old and erected new walls around Jerusalem. In addition to this, he also built or rebuilt several cities throughout Israel. Some of these were residential cities which were settled by regular people, while others were designated as storage cities to house Solomon's chariots, horses, and horsemen.

King Solomon also built a fleet of ships which were stationed in Ezion-geber. This important port

city was located on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba which empties into the Red Sea. King Hiram of Tyre sent skilled sailors to partner with those from Israel. Together they engaged in commercial importing and exporting by sea. These ships sailed to and from Ophir (which is believed to be in either India or Ethiopia) and brought huge quantities of gold, almuq trees, and precious stones. They also went to Tarshish and returned every 3 years with gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.

All of the labor required to build these cities, ships, and so forth required an enormous workforce. King Solomon identified and required all foreign citizens of Israel to serve as forced laborers. In essence, he enslaved these people and used them to complete numerous tasks. These included the remaining Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites who dwelt in the land. Apparently Solomon demanded much from these workers, and his treatment of them eventually became a major and divisive issue in Israel following his death.

II. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12)

The ancient city of Sheba is believed by most Bible historians to have been in either Ethiopia or modern-day Yemen. Regardless of its location, the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's great wisdom and wealth. Intrigued, she and her large entourage traveled to Jerusalem to see and experience it for herself. When she arrived and met with King Solomon, the queen was blown away by his hospitality and remarkable insight. Solomon's great fame and reputation throughout the world was well deserved.

The Queen of Sheba gave Solomon 120 talents of gold, a great number of precious stones, and an abundance of spices. In return, he gave her a large bounty as well - all that she requested. After her visit, the queen and her servants returned to their homeland. It has been speculated by some that King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba had a child together in secret. Others theorize that they are, in fact, the lovesick male and female characters described in the Song of Solomon. While this is interesting to consider, it can't be proven.

During her visit, the Queen of Sheba apparently asked Solomon about the source of his knowledge and riches. He told her that they had come from God through His abundant blessings. The queen listened intently, and as a result of Solomon's testimony she placed her faith in God. Centuries later Jesus contrasted the queen's receptiveness and belief of Solomon's wisdom with the Jew's stubbornness and doubt of His own. Jesus referred to her as "the Queen of the South" (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31).

III. WEALTH AND POWER (1 Kings 10:14-29; 2 Chronicles 9:13-28)

During the reign of Solomon gold was so abundant that silver lost its value. The king had hundreds of shields made of gold and placed many of them in his newly built armory. He crafted an elaborate throne made of ivory and overlaid in gold. The elevated throne featured 6 steps with lion statues on each side of each step facing inward towards each other and 2 additional

lions on either side of the king's chair. It was unlike anything that had ever been made before! All of the king's drinking vessels were made of gold as well.

Solomon became the wealthiest and most powerful king in all the earth. Curious seekers came from everywhere to hear his wisdom and behold his kingdom. They continuously brought gifts such as silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses, mules, and more. As mentioned earlier in this series, Solomon greatly increased the number and quality of chariots, horses, and horsemen in Israel's army. He definitely followed the popular mantra "Peace through strength".

Though not specifically mentioned in today's passage, it seems timely to mention that near the end of his reign Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. In this book, he reflected upon all of the numerous accomplishments and accolades that he'd enjoyed over the years. For his entire life Solomon revelled in enormous wealth, fame, wisdom, power, and pleasure. He had and did whatever he wanted. In the book of Ecclesiastes the aging king concluded that - in the end - all of it was worthless. Solomon stated that true meaning and significance could only be found in God and not through the pursuit of worldly things.

CONCLUSION

Both Solomon and Jesus became very popular, but for somewhat different reasons. Solomon was known for his earthly riches, while our Lord lived a meager and modest lifestyle. People came in droves to hear Solomon's wisdom, and later crowds gathered to hear the wise teachings of Jesus. They wanted to see all that Solomon had built and done, just as their descendants wanted to see the miracles that Jesus could do. The world was curious about the prosperous kingdom that Solomon had built, just as it was about the Kingdom that God that Jesus made accessible to sinners.

While both men were famous during their lifetimes, we can learn an important lesson from how each of them approached their acclaim. While Solomon embraced and lauded in his celebrity status, Jesus rejected and shunned His whenever possible. Solomon used his success to pursue personal ambitions and pleasures, while Jesus used his fame to spread the message of salvation. Solomon's adoration and lavish pursuits eventually led to disastrous results for he and all of Israel, which we will study about next week. Christians should practice the humility of Christ rather than the prideful exuberance of Solomon.

Next Sunday we will finally finish our in-depth study of ancient Israel's united kingdom. This has been a fascinating and transformative series for me. I've learned much about God, His people, and myself. I have been amazed by the many truths that we've found hidden in His word. May you all have a blessed week!

Solomon's Demise

Originally Preached - 12/9/2018

And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." - Luke 10:27

This morning we will conclude our in depth series entitled "The United Church - A Study of Ancient Israel". Over the past several months we have explored the history of Israel during the reigns of King Saul, King David, and King Solomon. During this time, the 12 tribes of Israel were united as a single nation. Over the course of its 120-year existence, Israel rose from relative obscurity to worldwide prominence. But, as the expression goes, what goes up must come down...

In today's final message, we will discover the chain of events that ultimately resulted in the splintering of Israel into 2 separate kingdoms. Despite all of his great success, Solomon's choices during the closing years of his kingship spelled doom for the nation. This closing message is called "Solomon's Demise".

I. SOLOMON'S SIN (1 Kings 11:1-8)

King Solomon had virtually everything in great abundance - including women. Many were of foreign descent and worshiped pagan gods. In addition to the Egyptian daughter of Pharaoh (for whom Solomon had built a house all her own), he also married Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women. In all, the king had 700 wives and 300 concubine. His affectionate love for them and desire to please them all eventually led Solomon to compromise his faith.

In his old age Solomon's heart turned from God and his devotion to the LORD waned. He began to chase after false gods, including Ashtoreth (the goddess of the Sidonians) and Milcom (the idol of the Ammonites). Solomon built a high place on the mountain east of Jerusalem for Chemosh (the idol of Moab) and for Molech (the god of Ammon). He did this so that his foreign wives would have special places to burn incense and make sacrifices to their gods.

Solomon did not fully abandon his faith in Jehovah, the God of Israel. Rather, he simply incorporated the worship of additional gods into his religious practice. His all-inclusive faith was non-threatening and non-offensive to those he wished to appease. This approach is still prevalent today. Modern culture advocates that there are many roads to heaven, and many legitimate gods that can be served. Now you can call me old fashioned or narrow minded if you want to, but I will stand on the authority of the Bible which plainly states that there is only 1 true and living God - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All others are false gods or idols that should not be worshiped.

II. GOD'S ANGER (1 Kings 11:9-13)

God had personally appeared to Solomon twice - once in Gibeon during the early part of his reign to grant him wisdom and again several years later in Jerusalem after the palace had been completed. Despite these 2 previous appearances, Solomon had turned his heart away from the LORD and followed idols. God was justifiably furious.

As punishment for his idolatry and worshiping of false gods, the LORD told Solomon that He was going to tear the kingdom of Israel away from him and give it to his servant instead. However, because of His deep love for David, God said that He'd wait to take action until Solomon's son became the new king. God added that the entire kingdom would not be lost, but that 1 of the tribes (actually it was 2 - Judah and Benjamin, though Benjamin was quite small) would remain. This provision was made for the sake of God's covenant with David.

Solomon's sin brought about God's judgment and subsequently Israel was divided into 2 distinct kingdoms. Unfortunately, sin often causes the people of God to separate. Whether it be broken homes, split churches, or warring conventions, Christians have always had a problem with unity. We allow sin to divide us and turn our hearts against one another. Like Solomon, we chase after other gods and incur the LORD's righteous judgment.

III. SOLOMON'S ADVERSARIES (1 Kings 11:14-40)

As Solomon drifted further away, the LORD raised up adversaries against him. Hadad was from the royal line of Edom. Decades earlier, when David's military (under the command of Joab) routed and killed most of the Edomites, young Hadad was whisked away into Egypt. Just a boy at the time, Hadad grew up hating Israel. Pharaoh showed favor to Hadad, and even allowed him to marry his sister-in-law. After David and Joab had both died, Hadad returned to Israel and became an enemy of Solomon's.

Rezon was the son of Eliada. For some unknown reason, he apparently he deserted or perhaps fled from his king Hadadezer. After David's army soundly defeated Hadadezer's forces, Rezon formed his own band of marauders. He and his men lived in Damascus, where he reigned over Aram. Rezon and his men regularly raided and tormented the citizens of Israel.

The most notable of Solomon's adversaries was Jeroboam. He was a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and a gifted servant of the king. Jeroboam was one of the leaders and overseers of Solomon's forced laborers. One day a prophet named Ahijah approached Jeroboam and informed him that God planned to take the kingdom of Israel away from Solomon because of his sin. Ahijah prophesied that Jeroboam would become the new king of Israel, which would include only 10 of the original 12 tribes. When King Solomon heard this prophecy, he sought to execute Jeroboam. Fearing for his life, Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he remained until Solomon's death.

IV. SOLOMON'S DEATH (1 Kings 11:41-43; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31)

King Solomon reigned over the united kingdom of Israel for 40 years. He is remembered for his wisdom, wealth, power, and fame. Solomon completed numerous building projects and expanded the boundaries of Israel to their farthest reaches. Of course, the most important accomplishment of Solomon was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. Many details of his life were preserved in the writings of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo. After his death, Solomon was buried in Jerusalem. His son Rehoboam became the new king.

CONCLUSION

Following Solomon's death, God's warning and Ahijah's prophecy came true. 10 of the 12 tribes rejected Solomon's son Rehoboam as king. Instead, they appointed Solomon's former servant Jeroboam (who'd recently returned from Egypt) as their leader. These 10 tribes retained the name Israel and became known as the Northern Kingdom. Only 2 of the 12 tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam. They took on the name Judah and became known as the Southern Kingdom. In the centuries that followed, the children of God were divided into 2 distinct and separate nations.

At some future point, we will conduct an extensive study of the divided kingdom years. It was during this time that many of the well-known Old Testament prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, lived and ministered. There were numerous kings, some of them good but most of them bad, who ruled over God's people in both Israel and Judah. It promises to be a fascinating study and is something for us to look forward to. But for now... let's wrap up our discussion of Israel's united years.

One of the greatest dangers to our faith in God is earthly success and prosperity. When things are going well, we often lose sight of God and forget our desperate need for Him. We begin to foolishly believe that we've got a handle on things ourselves and that we don't really need the Lord's help. When our dependence or reliance on God begins to fade, trouble is right around the corner - you can count on it.

Another danger to our faith is compromise. We must not cater to the gods of this world and/or assimilate pagan practices and traditions into Christianity. Doing so is an insult to God and invites His divine judgment upon us. I am not saying that Christians should be rigid and inflexible or without regard for others' beliefs, but rather that they should be uncompromising and unyielding as it pertains to the bedrock truths of the Bible.

Sin always leads to division. It separates people from God and makes salvation necessary. Jesus Christ bore the fullness of mankind's sin on the cross, died to forgive it all, and rose from the grave to forever conquer death. As this series comes to an end, let me invite you to become united with God through a personal relationship with Jesus. Place your faith in Him today.