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THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

First series: From Moses to Solomon

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CONTENTS

MOSES	3
ABIMELECH	5
SAUL (1)	7
SAUL (2)	9
DAVID (1).....	11
DAVID (2).....	13
DAVID (3).....	15
ABSALOM.....	17
ADONIJAH.....	19
SOLOMON (1)	21
SOLOMON (2)	23
SOLOMON (3)	25
SOLOMON (4)	27
SOLOMON (5)	29

MOSES

“Moses commanded us a law, the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.”

Deuteronomy 33:4-5

Calling Moses a king may seem unusual, yet God’s inspired Word here calls him king in Jeshurun, and earlier, the man of God. Jeshurun, meaning “the upright [people],” is a term God uses to designate His people Israel. We read repeatedly how the people and their heads came to Moses to ascertain God’s will. God’s ideal king would rule God’s people according to the mind of God.

In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 God gives instructions regarding the king whom He would eventually give Israel. God’s thoughts about a king were far different from man’s. As far as a mere man can do so, Moses measured up to God’s standards. But when God looks forward to a king for His people, He really looks on to the Lord Jesus, His absolute ideal. Here the king was to be one whom God would choose from among his brethren, not a foreigner. Moses and Christ both met this standard. The king was not to multiply horses to himself nor lead the people back to Egypt for this purpose. He was not to multiply wives to himself, lest his heart turn away, nor was he to greatly multiply silver and gold to himself. Both Moses and Christ measure up to these criteria.

The king was to write out a copy of God’s law for himself, have it with him, and read it all his life. While Moses was used to write the law, our Lord Jesus could say in prophetic language, “Thy law is within My heart” (Ps. 40:8). Moses turned

aside from God's word on one occasion, and his heart was lifted up above his brethren (Num. 20:7-12). Consequently he could not prolong his days nor enter the Promised Land. Christ, the meek and lowly One, in perfect contrast to Moses even washed His disciples' feet. "Of His kingdom there shall not be an end" (Lk. 1:33).

ABIMELECH

“Then said all the trees to the thorn-bush, Come thou, reign over us. And the thorn-bush said to the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, come, put confidence in my shadow; but if not, fire shall come out of the thorn-bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon...And Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.”

Judges 9:14-15,22

“There is a time when man ruleth man to his hurt.”

Ecclesiastes 8:9

Abimelech’s tragic story is an example of what God does not want in a king. What a contrast this proud “thornbush” is to Him of whom God says, “I have anointed My King upon Zion, the hill of My holiness” (Ps. 2:6)! Indeed, he more nearly resembles the one whose boastful “I will” we hear five times in Isaiah 14:12-20 — Lucifer, the arch-rebel we know as the devil.

The Lord Jesus tells us that the devil was a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44). Abimelech, Gideon’s son by a concubine at Shechem, came to power by persuading the men of his home town that it would be more to their advantage to have him rule over them than Gideon’s other 70 sons, none of whom were seeking to rule. Having gained his countrymen by political persuasiveness, he hired thugs, killed his brothers, and was made king by the men of Shechem. Understandably, God’s will was not sought in the matter at all. Jotham, Gideon’s youngest son, alone escaped being killed. He proceeded to propound to the men of Shechem the allegory of the trees choosing a king, predicting the disaster and doom that would come to them and their wicked usurper king.

Abimelech's rule lasted only three years. It was truly a matter of man ruling man to his hurt. God could not bless a kingdom set up in such a way. Both Abimelech and the men of Shechem had left Him out of their calculations. Both came to a tragic end. Today men do likewise. They too will find that God will not be mocked.

SAUL (1)

“When thou wast little in thine eyes...Jehovah anointed thee king over Israel...Why then didst thou not hearken to the voice of Jehovah?...Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice.”

1 Samuel 15:17,19,22

Saul, a tall, choice, handsome young man, looked every inch a king. When Samuel at God’s direction anointed him king, he made a good start. Samuel told him several signs that would happen to him. One was that he would meet a company of prophets, “and the Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man” (1 Sam. 10:56). This happened, and was a surprise to all who had known him, for clearly, Saul had not been known for spirituality before this. When he was publicly pointed out as the king God was giving His people, he initially behaved himself in a modest way.

Although the Spirit of God had come upon him, we do not find his heart changed. The Spirit empowers him, and he defeats enemy armies. But to be turned into another man proved to be merely an outward thing with Saul. He could act decisively against the foe. He was religious, too, in a public way, just as many political leaders are today. But true obedience to God and His word was simply not a part of his character. This was his ruin.

In chapter 13, he does not wait the full week for Samuel to come to offer the burnt offering, but offers it himself when he sees the people scattering from him. In chapter 14, he begins to consult God, but brushes this aside when he sees the activity in the camp of the Philistines increasing. In chapter 15, against

the Lord's command he spares the Amalekite king and the best of their sheep and oxen, blaming his disobedience on the people. God is still seeking the humble obedience that characterized His Son in all those to whom He entrusts responsibility today.

SAUL (2)

“Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he committed against Jehovah, because of the word of Jehovah which he kept not, and also for having inquired of the spirit of Python, asking counsel of it; and he asked not counsel of Jehovah; therefore He slew him, and transferred the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.”

1 Chronicles 10:13-14

In 1 and 2 Chronicles, God’s review of His earthly people’s history, He gives us Saul’s genealogy but devotes only a chapter to his story. The chapter first tells us how Saul died, and then why Saul died. The first reason given us is Saul’s disobedience to God’s word. Repeatedly he violated God’s direct commands. In Psalm 119:4 we are told, “Thou hast enjoined Thy precepts, to be kept diligently.” God will not brook disobedience to His word.

When Saul did not keep God’s word, God set him aside. Saul refused to accept this. Although he knew that David was the man of God’s choice who would ultimately prevail, he struggled to maintain his throne. Samuel eventually died. God no longer communicated with Saul by prophets, Urim, or dreams.

Saul was facing a desperate situation. Again the Philistine hosts had invaded the land and were set for battle. Distressed, Saul found a witch and asked her to bring Samuel back from the dead to tell him what to do. In earlier days he had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. In direct disobedience to God’s Word (cf. Deut. 18:9-14 and Lev. 19:31), he now sought help from satanic sources. God—not Satan—answered

him in a way that shocked the woman and prostrated Saul with fear.

Unlike many people, the Bible treats the power of Satan, the arch-deceiver, seriously. There is no fellowship between God and Satan, between light and darkness. Dabbling in the occult is not an innocent pastime but a wicked abomination to God and a danger to those engaging in it. Christian, stay away from the occult!

DAVID (1)

“He chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the suckling-ewes, He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. And he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and led them by the skillfulness of his hands.”

Psalm 78:70-72

Just as He prepared many other godly leaders among His earthly people, Israel, so God in His infinite wisdom and love trained David in quiet obscurity as a shepherd. The youngest of Jesse's eight sons, David was not deemed important enough to call to the sacrifice when the prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem. The first time he is mentioned, his father said of him, “Behold, he is feeding the sheep” (1 Sam. 16:11). When Jesse sent him to take food to his older brothers in the army, “David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took his charge and went, as Jesse had commanded him” (1 Sam. 17:20). And how touchingly he describes a shepherd's care in Psalm 23!

In heart David was a shepherd throughout his entire life. When he saw the angel smiting among the people after he had ordered that they be numbered, he said, “It is I that have sinned...but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray Thee, be on me” (2 Sam. 24:17). Our blessed Lord told those who came to arrest Him, “If therefore ye seek Me, let these [His disciples] go away” (Jn. 18:8). Indeed He was, as He stated in John 10:11, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

After the fall of Saul and his house, Israel unanimously came to David, recognizing him as their shepherd. “Even when

Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel"; they told him, "and Jehovah thy God said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be prince over My people Israel" (1 Chr. 11:2). Such was the man after God's heart!

DAVID (2)

“David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be built for Jehovah must be exceeding great in fame and in beauty in all lands: I will therefore make preparation for it. And David prepared abundantly before his death.”

1 Chronicles 22:5

In Psalm 132 we learn that even while still a shepherd boy at Ephratah (Bethlehem-Judah) David had wanted to prepare “a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob.” His lifelong ambition was to build a gorgeous temple worthy of God to house the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s presence with His people. Before David’s day the ark had been captured by the Philistines and had afterwards been kept in homes, rather than in the tabernacle.

When David was ready to build, God did not permit him to go ahead with this cherished project, for he had been a man of war and had shed much blood. God appreciated, however, that this had been his heart’s ambition. He promised to build David a house (looking on to Christ) and promised to give him a son, Solomon, a man of peace who should build the temple. God prized the love of David, this man after God’s heart, for His worship.

Rather than giving vent to disappointment over being thwarted in his ambition, David did all that he could do to prepare for the temple’s construction. The Spirit of God gave David, the man of God, the temple’s pattern and detailed directions for the personnel and worship there. David laid up immense stores of gold, silver, and other materials that would be used in the construction. And beginning from Solomon’s

youth, David took time to train this son, teaching him the importance of acquiring wisdom, and acquainting him with God's purpose for his life. How essential that Christian parents today teach and emphasize to their children God's will and purposes for their lives!

DAVID (3)

“David said...Abide with me, fear not; for he that seeks my life seeks thy life; for with me thou art in safe keeping.”

1 Samuel 22:22-23

“The Spirit came upon Amasai...and he said, Thine are we, David, and with thee, thou son of Jesse: Peace, peace be to thee! And peace be to thy helpers! For thy God helps thee. And David received them, and made them chiefs of bands.”

1 Chronicles 12:18

For years David was the object of a relentless manhunt. He had killed Goliath, the Philistine giant, his victory had been sung by the Israelite women, he had behaved himself wisely, and God had caused him to prosper. He had acquired the friendship of Prince Jonathan, Saul's son, but through all this he had also incurred the insane, deadly jealousy of King Saul who repeatedly tried to kill him. Our Lord Jesus too was hated without a cause.

Not only Abiathar the priest, whose family and relationship had been killed at Saul's command, but many in Israel who were suffering at this time—in distress, in debt, and of embittered spirit—found refuge with David. They gathered around him and he became a captain over them (1 Sam. 22:2). With him as their leader this motley crew became David's mighty men. Their number grew to 400, then to 600, and eventually to a host of many thousands. Their loyalty to David united them together.

We see this loyalty beautifully expressed by Amasai. His words apply to us as Christians, too. First we must come to

Christ. Once His, we should also be with Him. Amasai and his companions had come out, had separated themselves to David. David had asked whether they came peaceably to him to help him. To wish peace to David likewise involved peace to his helpers. Thus when we take our place with the Lord in His rejection, we must be willing too to work together with others already following and serving Him.

ABSALOM

“Absalom hated Amnon, because he had humbled his sister Tamar...Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel...Absalom sent emissaries into all the tribes of Israel, saying, When ye hear the sound of the trumpet, ye shall say, Absalom reigns in Hebron...The people increased continually with Absalom.”

2 Samuel 13:22; 15:6,10,12

Absalom was King David's third son. He was handsome and vain, especially about his long, thick hair—which he cut and weighed annually—and which eventually proved his downfall. When Amnon, his half-brother, was not punished for what he did to Absalom's sister, Absalom hated him and plotted to kill him. He succeeded in this and escaped the punishment he had merited for murder.

Having gotten away with murder, his sights were now set on a greater goal—to become king over Israel. Methodically he set out to accomplish this. Impress the people! Chariots and horses and fifty men to run before him! At the same time, get up early, meet and deceptively greet those coming to King David, and insinuate that they would not get the justice they deserved from him. Steal the hearts of the Israelites with smooth words, and get Ahithophel, that esteemed counselor, on his side. Cloak all this with pious words about offering sacrifices and serving Jehovah. A masterful politician! “And the conspiracy gathered strength and the people increased continually with Absalom.”

All went according to plan. David and those loyal to him hurriedly fled from Jerusalem. Absalom and his forces moved in. His successes foreshadow the rapid rise of the Antichrist in the soon-coming Tribulation. David's life was in imminent

danger. But Absalom had not reckoned with God. “Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness” (Prov. 20:20). Absalom’s army was routed and his proud ambitions came to a miserable end in a great terebinth tree.

ADONIJAH

“Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king; and he provided himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father had not grieved him at any time in saying, Why doest thou so? And he was also a very comely man; and his mother bore him after Absalom.”

1 Kings 1:5-6

“Every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that abases himself shall be exalted.”

Luke 14:11

It is sad to see Adonijah, David's fourth son, following the bad example set by his older brother, Absalom. Vanity and pride and a lack of parental firmness in discipline led him to exalt himself. Against God's express word that Solomon was to be king and David's command to the princes of Israel to help Solomon, he now attempted to secure the throne, even drawing some of David's long-time followers into his plans and preparations. How tragic when parents let their children do as they please, never holding them to account. What a dreadful harvest such sowing brings!

“I will be king!” Does this not remind us of the “I wills” attributed to Lucifer in Isaiah 14? It was his goal to have the first place in all things, the honor that God has purposed for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18). To attain his goal, he led many other angels astray in open rebellion against God. But his power has been defeated at Calvary by that glorious One who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He will soon be abased to the depth of hell.

Adonijah's attempted coup was thwarted at the very height of the conspirators' celebration. His guests scattered. Seeking safety, Adonijah caught hold of the horns of the altar. While he gained temporary respite thereby, he soon demonstrated that neither his heart nor his ways had changed, so he was executed.

SOLOMON (1)

“In that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said to God...Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this Thy great people?”

2 Chronicles 1:7-8,10

As Solomon grew up, his father David taught him the importance of wisdom and insisted that he acquire wisdom (Prov. 4:1-9). Before he died, David acknowledged his son's wisdom and urged him to act according to his wisdom in matters where David recognized his own failures (1 Ki. 2:6,9). Parents today should also encourage their children to acquire true wisdom and should commend them when they demonstrate godly wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we are told over and over.

Solomon evidently took his father's word to heart. We notice his wisdom in his first recorded decisions after he ascended the throne. We especially see it as God asks him to choose what He should give him. A truly wise man will realize his own lack of wisdom and will seek it at the fount of wisdom—God Himself.

Solomon did not request wisdom out of vanity or for personal advantage. He realized what a tremendous responsibility the Lord had entrusted to him, young and inexperienced as he was. He wanted wisdom so as to be able to rule God's great people well. May we too seek wisdom from above to function well in our daily tasks, family needs, and in the responsibilities God entrusts to us among His people! God will be delighted to honor such requests. James 1:5-6 assures

us that God is pleased to grant wisdom to all who request it of Him in faith, nothing doubting.

God bestowed upon Solomon wisdom and knowledge, and very great understanding and largeness of heart, and additionally, riches, wealth, and honor. The wisdom of God was in him to do justice. Kings came to hear his wisdom, for his fame spread to all lands.

SOLOMON (2)

“Solomon had made a platform of bronze...in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and he kneeled down on his knees before the whole congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward the heavens, and said, Jehovah, God of Israel! there is no God like Thee, in the heavens or on the earth.”

2 Chronicles 6:13-14

What a wonderful example Solomon here sets for us! This great and glorious king, whose presence all the kings of the earth sought, to hear his wisdom, publicly kneels on his knees before the Lord and acknowledges His greatness and faithfulness. Of Solomon we are told, “And Solomon loved Jehovah” (1 Ki. 3:3). May God grant us more such leaders who truly love the Lord and who publicly honor and acknowledge Him! This is true wisdom!

Solomon goes on to make several specific requests of the Lord in connection with the temple which he had spent seven years in building. This temple was probably one of the most gorgeous and costly buildings that man has ever erected. God had given David its pattern. Built of top quality materials by skilled workmen, it was completely covered with gold on the inside and outside.

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from the heavens and consumed the sacrifices. The cloud of Jehovah’s glory filled the house of God so that the priests could not stand to do their service. When the people saw all this they too “bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshipped and thanked Jehovah: for He is good, for His loving-kindness endureth forever” (2 Chr. 7:3). A

tremendous volume of sacrifices was then offered: 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep!

Conditions are quite different today! Technological changes do not necessarily produce blessing. The American court system has for years attempted to keep God and the Lord Jesus from public honor and acknowledgement. The results are most sadly evident.

SOLOMON (3)

“He spoke three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spoke of the trees, from the cedar-tree that is on Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of cattle, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes.”

1 Kings 4:32-33

Solomon had asked God for wisdom and an understanding heart to judge God’s people, and to discern between good and bad. The wisdom that God gave him “excelled the wisdom of all the sons of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men” (1 Ki. 4:30-31). We see in the details mentioned here the breadth of this wisdom. Solomon’s understanding of biology reminds us of Adam who was given dominion over the earth and whose first task was to name the animals. In Scripture the thought of naming someone or something is usually associated with having knowledge of and a position superior to that being named. How interesting it would be to have a biology textbook written by Solomon. It would certainly have given glory to the great Creator-God rather than propounding evolutionary nonsense.

God has preserved many of Solomon’s 3000 proverbs in the book of Proverbs—an insightful book he wrote for his son—which is still highly relevant for young people today, and for us all. Other wise sayings of Solomon’s are given us in Ecclesiastes, a book in which he looks back on his experiences in life. It views man’s life “under the sun” in contrast to what the New Testament gives us when it presents the Christian as blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.

The emptiness of living for this world only is clearly seen in Ecclesiastes.

Out of the 1005 songs Solomon wrote, we have only one, but that is “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s,” a song magnifying Christ, the true Bridegroom, the delight of His people’s hearts.

SOLOMON (4)

“King Solomon loved many foreign women...When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods...And Jehovah was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from Jehovah the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, not to go after other gods; but he kept not what Jehovah had commanded.”

1 Kings 11:1,4,9-10

Unbelievable! we say. No, it's absolutely true. God gives us this sad account in His Holy Word. It is there for our warning and for our correction. How could Solomon, with all his God-given wisdom, have done something like this? What can we learn from his experience to help us avoid his disastrous mistakes?

One good clue lies in a proverb of his, where he tells us, “He that confideth in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). God had given His earthly people explicit instructions that their kings were not to multiply wives to themselves. Solomon, who in his younger years loved the Lord and built Him a magnificent temple, took 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines besides these! Perhaps he rationalized that there were reasons of state behind some of these alliances, but God tells us clearly that “to these Solomon was attached in love.” Solomon's problem was a matter of the heart! He disobeyed and his heart was turned away.

Not only had God given warnings and unequivocal instructions in the Law, but He had personally appeared to Solomon twice and had commanded him not to go after other gods. Wife after wife seems to have persuaded him to build a

high place for her idol. We can hear them in our minds: “Oh, Solomon, honey, you built such a gorgeous temple for your God. Can’t you build just a little high place where we can worship mine?” Before long, “the hill that is before Jerusalem,” the Mount of Olives, was defiled with these high places and remained so 350 years until the reign of Josiah.

SOLOMON (5)

“Jehovah said to Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done by thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes which I commanded thee, I will certainly rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant: notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it, for David thy father’s sake; I will rend it out of the hand of thy son...I will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen.”

1 Kings 11:11-13

In the latter part of his life Solomon did not fully follow Jehovah. His wives turned away his heart after other gods, and he built high places for them where they burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Intermarriage between believers and unbelievers today too will have similar disastrous consequences. Seldom does the believer pull the unbeliever upward; the normal pattern is for the unbeliever to drag the believer downward with calamitous results personally, in the family, and even beyond.

Again God spoke to Solomon, but now in judgment. He had warned Solomon of the ruinous outcome of turning from following Him and keeping His commandments to serving and worshipping idols. He must now act in faithfulness to His word. In Galatians 6:7 we read, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow that also shall he reap.” Neither Solomon’s wisdom nor his wealth nor his power could avert God’s just judgment. The kingdom would be torn from him and given to his servant.

God ever acts in faithfulness to His word and in consistency with His character. So here, in accord with His word to David, whom He calls “My servant,” and for Jerusalem’s sake which He had chosen, God refrains from executing His judgment during Solomon’s lifetime. God also tempers its

severity. He would not take away the entire kingdom, but would give Solomon's son one tribe, and so maintain a lamp for David always in Jerusalem.