

YEAR OF
BIBLICAL
LITERACY

1. Week 14: The Rise and Climax of the Kingdom

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

Daily Reading for Week:

- 2 Samuel 13-15, Psalm 90
- 2 Samuel 16-18, Psalm 91
- 2 Samuel 19-21, Psalm 92
- 2 Samuel 22-24, Psalm 93
- 1 Kings 1-3, Psalm 94
- 1 Kings 4-7, Psalm 95
- 1 Kings 8-10, Psalm 96

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Video: 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings
- Read: 2 Samuel 7 and 23:1-7; 1 Kings 2:1-4, 9:1-9, and 10:23-29

3. Focus of time together:

To understand the climatic significance of David and Solomon's kingships within the story of Israel's covenant relationship with God and to reflect on the true nature of this kind of "golden era" of prosperity.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Our goal this week is to practice honest critique of ourselves, our community, and our culture in light of any challenging themes or ideas we see in the Scriptures. As you read, discuss, and pray, try as hard as you can to keep from being defensive. Desire growth and reform more than self-protection; and therefore, risk seeing things about yourself and society that can be hard to look at.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation, 12 minutes):

If you could choose anyone you know to be king (or president), who would it be and why?

6. Opening Prayer:

Read David's praise song in 2 Samuel 22 (which is also Psalm 18) aloud as an opening prayer.

7. Intro to Discussion:

After the request for a king in 1 Samuel — and God's cryptic warning through Samuel about the tragic nature of what they were really asking for — God raised up Israel's first king, King Saul. Almost from the very beginning, Saul's life and reign fell apart. Therefore, God chose and anointed the shepherd boy David to be Saul's future replacement. Over many tumultuous years, David remained loyal to Saul despite Saul's multiple attempts to kill him. David's loyalty and leadership caused much of the nation to call him their leader despite King Saul's kingship. This caused the first nationwide political cracks that would later lead to the tragic Judah-Israel divide and civil war.

Eventually, Saul died and David was announced as king over all of Israel. The ugly beginning of the monarchy now took a sharp turn for the better. David was faithful to God, defeated Israel's enemies, restored worship and justice in the nation, finally overtook the previously occupied city of Jerusalem to become his capital city, and even brought the Ark of God back from the Philistines. The Hebrew Scriptures describe David not as perfect (see stories of Bathsheba, Uriah, the census, etc.) but as faithful, loyal, and incredibly merciful. He trusted God and led with justice and righteousness over God's people. Tellingly, 3,000 years later, most Jews today still point to David as Israel's greatest leader. And because David was exactly the kind of leader God had hoped Israel would have and appreciate, He made a covenant promise with David to bless him by keeping the royal line within his family, so long as each generation loved and obeyed the Lord as David had.

God's conditional covenant promise to Israel at Sinai to bless them so long as they obeyed His Torah provided the framework for reading through Joshua and Judges. It constantly put the questions before us, "Did Israel obey God? Will they obey as the story moves on? And will God be forever merciful to them, or will He eventually bring about the consequences He warned them about in the desert?" This covenant with David provides the exact same lens through which to read 1 & 2 Kings. Will the kings of

Israel follow in David's footsteps by worshiping God alone and obeying His commands? And if not, how long until something really bad happens?

Even further, Samuel's lament to Israel in 1 Samuel 8 warns them to "be careful what you wish for." More specifically, he warns them to be careful *how* you go about seeking that which you want. God doesn't disallow them a king or even challenge their desire for material prosperity, but He deplores their effort to seek success through the same means and methods as the violent nations around them. So when David dies and his son Solomon is made king, and he leads Israel to the pinnacle of its success and prosperity, the sense of joy and celebration is couched in a tone of foreboding. According to all we've seen from Israel thus far, will they really be able to sustain this success? More precisely, in the midst of long-awaited peace and prosperity, will they be able to sustain faithfulness? Will wise, rich, and increasingly lavish King Solomon really stay true to Yahweh, or will he go the way of all the other nations? And further, is this success a long-term result of being faithful to God, or is it rather a temporary perk of playing by the rules of the world, in which case the threat of punishment and collapse lurks around the corner? In other words, is this the beginning of a new and permanent state of grace in which Israel will be exalted over the nations forever, or will this "golden age" rather prove to be a tragically short blip in history in which they "played Egypt" for a season and therefore went the way of the Egyptians?

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (40 minutes):

Questions for Listening to Scripture:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. Reflect back on your readings in 1 & 2 Samuel. What kind of actions and choices justified the Scriptures' assessment of David as a righteous man and leader?
2. Think about the fact that Israel's most exalted king, whose life is given more detailed attention than any other Old Testament character, is also the person who created about half of the Psalms (such as the praise song of Psalm 18). What connection can you make between the internal character and heart expressed in the prayers of the Psalms and the external character and heart illustrated in David's life and actions?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. Read Deuteronomy 8:10-18. What does this warning about forgetting God in the long-awaited time of prosperity say about the danger of Israel's "golden age"? What about the danger of prosperity in general?
2. Read 1 Kings 10:14-29. Considering Moses' warning in Deuteronomy 8 and Samuel's warning in 1 Samuel 8, what kind of attitude should we have toward this new era of "progress" and prosperity established under Solomon?
3. Should we celebrate this prosperity as the blessing of God or be concerned that it is the result of a new kind of Jewish pharaoh figure?
4. If you put yourselves in the shoes of an ancient Jew, who would you prefer as your king: David or Solomon? Would you want the prayerful musician-king who humiliates himself by worshiping God in his underwear, or the kind of global political and economic powerhouse who establishes you and your people above the other nations and exacts from them such wealth that "silver becomes like just another stone," no matter what the cost?

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion (20 minutes):

Questions for Self-Examination:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

- 1) Take 3 or 4 minutes to reflect on the parts of your life where you are currently experiencing prosperity. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you brutal honesty and clarity as to the nature of your prosperity. Do you think you have gained prosperity because you and your part of society have faithfully followed the commands of God to live humbly, justly, mercifully, and lovingly? In what way might you be "winning" right now, not because you are being faithful to God, but because you are reaping the benefits of being part of a society that is exacting wealth from others through violence, power, injustice, or oppression?
- 2) Next, take 2 minutes to try to discern the specific communal, societal, or global costs of your prosperity. If you acknowledge any such costs, pray a prayer of confession, admitting the specific costliness of your life, naming any negative effects your lifestyle has on others. If you can't recognize any such costs, pray to God to open your eyes to such realities.
- 3) Finally, take 2 minutes to reflect on how God might be inviting you to sacrifice your own personal prosperity in order to alleviate these costs. Soberly count the cost of such repentance. Then pray honestly, either declaring to God your will to

make certain changes or telling Him honestly that you're not willing to make those changes at this time.

10. Closing (15 minutes):

Close your small-group time with a brief unity prayer, expressing what you've heard each person share with God.