

## **ROUTE 66: THE CHRISTIAN WAY**

### **WEEK 5: THE UNITED KINGDOM: SAMUEL, KINGS, CHRONICLES**

Week 5 gives us sight of a signpost pointing us towards 6 books about the kings of Israel. It is a part of the route we have to travel along three times because as one scholar had put it, there is a “tectonic shift” in God’s ordering of the history of His kingdom. This period covers approximately 460 years and during that time three major changes took place. Firstly, the primary centre of worship moved from Shiloh to Jerusalem. Secondly, covenant kingship came into being. Thirdly, Israel was transformed from a tribal confederacy to a unified kingdom, capable of bringing neighbouring states under its jurisdiction. And the key players orchestrating this seismic shift in the fortunes of the Israelites were Samuel, David and Solomon. So, it seems the right thing to do, to see these men as the landmarks on this part of the route.

Samuel is our first landmark. He is a much under-rated figure in the Old Testament.

**1 Samuel 7:12-13 (NIV) Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” 13 So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.**

**1 Samuel 3:19 - 4:1 & 7:15-17 (NIV) The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. 21 The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. 1 And Samuel’s word came to all Israel.....Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. 16 From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. 17 But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord.**

Stories about him usually centre on the prayer of his mother Hannah for a child, whom she vowed would be dedicated from infancy to the service of Yahweh. The story of the boy Samuel hearing God’s call in the night is also familiar. But the adult Samuel played a central role in the history of his people. He was the last judge/military leader of Israel. He was its chief priest and he was a prophet. In comparison both to both Eli’s and his own sons, as a priest, Samuel was a man of impeccable integrity and he fulfilled the obligations of all the roles of his priestly office.

Chapter 4:1 tells us that Samuel’s word came to all Israel and it can be seen from chapter 7:16 why this was said of him. He made this annual circuit in spite of the difficulties of travel in those days even as he advanced in age. In chapter 7 also we read of his role as judge for the people came to him when they were threatened by the Philistines. Such was his influence that God restrained them throughout Samuel’s lifetime.

In his role of prophet, Samuel was both a king-maker and a king-breaker.

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**1 Samuel 8:4-7 (NIV) So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” 6 But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.**

When Israel demanded a king, Samuel prophesied about the hardships kings would impose on the people, but as we know they refused to listen and Samuel was led by God to anoint Saul as Israel’s first king.

**1 Samuel 10:9-10 (NIV) As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. 10 When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their (NIV) prophesying.**

**1 Samuel 10:25 (NIV) Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. Then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes.**

The prophetic influence in this choice is recorded in chapters 9 and 10 of 1 Samuel. Samuel was closely involved in every detail of Saul’s appointment as king and even in compiling the regulations that governed kingship. Since prophets, were the voice of God, these were regulations not to be dismissed or ignored.

**1 Samuel 15:26-29 (NIV) But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!” 27 As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbours—to one better than you. 29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”**

**1 Samuel 16:13 (NIV) So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.**

**1 Samuel 28:16-19 (NIV) Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has departed from you and become your enemy? 17 The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. 18 Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today. 19 The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”**

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Saul found this out to his cost because it was his disobedience to God's command to destroy the Amalekites that led to Samuel informing him that God had rejected him as king. Saul did repent, but the damage had been done. His reign lasted until David had grown to manhood and had proved his prowess as a warrior and leader of men, when he was an outlaw fleeing Saul's threat to kill him. Chapter 25 of 1 Samuel records the death of Samuel and even after his death, Samuel was still important to Saul. Through the witch of Endor, a medium, Saul contacted Samuel's spirit in direct contravention of an explicit command in the Mosaic law. Saul and his sons died at the hands of the Philistines in fulfilment of Samuel's prophecy.

Both in life and in death, Samuel was directly involved in who became king of Israel. His role in this set the precedent of the role of future prophets in the lives of kings. The principle established was clear. If kings listened to the prophets who spoke the word of God, their reigns would prosper. Ignore them and suffer the consequences.

David's landmark stands head and shoulders above every other royal landmark in the Old Testament. It is like a beacon shining a light which reveals every motive and action that does not accord with the ethos of his reign. We are given more information about David than any other king in the Old Testament, but what stands out on this landmark are the reasons why he was considered as 'a man after God's own heart.'

**1 Samuel 17:45-46 (NIV) David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. .... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.**

**1 Samuel 23:1-2 (NIV) When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," 2 he inquired of the Lord, saying.....**

**1 Samuel 30:7-8 (NIV) ..... and David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? .....**

**2 Samuel 2:1-4 (NIV) In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?" he asked. The Lord said, "Go up." David asked, "Where shall I go?" "To Hebron," the Lord answered. .... 4 Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.**

These texts make it clear that David recognised God was to be given the credit for his military success. Like Joshua, he fought the battles God wanted him to fight and as a result, victory in each case was assured. And once this reputation had been established and Saul and his sons had been killed, David did not use this power to make himself king. Although he knew he had been anointed by Samuel as Saul's successor, he waited until the Lord decreed the circumstances by which this would come about.

As a result of abiding by God's direction in his rise to kingship, David was able to weld the 12 tribes into one unified kingdom. Led by David they became one of the most powerful nations of the time and extended their territory by conquest and influence even beyond the

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borders of the land promised to Abraham. And David succeeded to do what the tribe of Judah had failed to do when they entered Canaan. He captured Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Canaanite Jebusite tribe. Territorially and politically David achieved in his one lifetime what God's people had failed to do in the 300+ years of the time of the Judges. This was the level of power and prestige that every other king of the Israelites aspired to, but never achieved. David became the epitome of military kingship, and the iconic kind of king that the Jews still hope to emerge to raise their nation again to that height of power.

What people of the time and since did not recognise was that David's earthly exploits were the manifestation of the divine power behind the throne. David was a man after God's own heart because he did recognise this. And because he did, he took all the steps necessary to ensure that the worship of God took precedence over all other religious practices. The centre of worship moved from Shiloh to Jerusalem. While the pagan religions still existed, David elevated the worship of God to what we could term the established religion of his kingdom. Chapters 15 and 16 of 1 Chronicles detail how he did this.

**1 Chronicles 15:1-4 & 11-12 (NIV) After David had constructed buildings for himself in the City of David, he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. 2 Then David said, "No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, because the Lord chose them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister before him forever." 3 David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the Lord to the place he had prepared for it. 4 He called together the descendants of Aaron and the Levites:.... Then David summoned Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab the Levites. 12 He said to them, "You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it.**

**1 Chronicles 16:4 (NIV) He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to extol, thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel:**

A place was prepared in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant which was brought publicly to the city. He re-established the Aaronic priesthood and the descendants of the Levites to officiate in the temple business. All the Mosaic rituals and sacrifices of tabernacle worship were to be revived. Only the Lord, the God of Israel was deemed worthy to be extolled, thanked and praised. David's song in chapter 16 does just that. Like the other psalms David wrote, it perfectly conveys David's wholehearted commitment to God and his deep knowledge and understanding of the Person and attributes of God.

Making his nation great, extending his kingdom and giving God the glory for it were important hallmarks of David's kingship. Although he was not permitted to build a temple in Jerusalem, the last covenant in the Old Testament was made with David.

**2 Samuel 7:8-17 (NIV) "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: .....Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. .... I will also give you rest from all your enemies. "'The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over**

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**and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ....16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” 17 Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.**

It was a covenant which would one day take what David started to its spiritual climax. God had made this covenant even with the knowledge that David would sin.

**2 Samuel 12:9-13 (NIV) Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’ 11 “This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.” 13 Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” 2 Samuel 12:13-14 (NIV) Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. 14 But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.”**

David’s sin led to the murder of an innocent man and adultery. When Nathan the prophet faced him with the seriousness with which he had offended, David listened to what God was saying to him through the words Nathan used. His reaction was that of a man admitting his guilt and being ashamed of it. David recognised he had sinned against the Lord and Psalm 51 is a measure of his genuine repentance of that sin. Given that David’s sin involved breaking two of the Ten Commandments, it was inevitable that serious consequences would follow. His son by Bathsheba died and for the rest of his life, he had family problems.

**2 Samuel 13:1, 14, 28 (NIV) In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David..... 2 Samuel 13:14 (NIV) But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.**

**2 Samuel 13:28 (NIV) Absalom ordered his men, “Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, ‘Strike Amnon down,’ then kill him. Don’t be afraid. Haven’t I given you this order? Be strong and brave.”**

**2 Samuel 15:10-13 (NIV) Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’” .....**

Absalom’s murder of Amnon in revenge for the rape of Absalom’s sister Tamar, was forgiven and he was allowed to return to Jerusalem. Not long after he rebelled against David resulting in David having to flee from the city. When Absalom entered Jerusalem he fulfilled the prophecy Nathan had given when he charged David with his sin over Bathsheba. David’s retaliation against the rebels led to Absalom’s death, something which even David’s own men

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rebuked him for mourning. Nevertheless, his grief was a measure of his love for his son and his willingness to forgive even rebellion against him. That was not the end of David's family troubles for towards the end of his life his son Adonijah tried to usurp the throne.

**1 Kings 1:5 (NIV) Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.**

**1 Kings 1:43-46 (NIV) .....“Our lord King David has made Solomon king. 44 The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king's mule, 45 and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. .... 46 Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne.**

Nathan warned Bathsheba of this development and she went to David reminding him that he has sworn that her son Solomon would succeed him. Once again a prophet becomes instrumental in king-making and giving another example of how crucial their role was in directing the king's actions. By following the advice of Nathan and involving Zadok the priest, David had given legitimacy to Solomon's succession. The testimony of priest and prophet was a signal to the nation that Solomon was king by God's will.

**1 Kings 15:5 (NIV) For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.**

David's reliance on his prophet and his priest to the end of his life is the key reason why he was a man after God's own heart. Perhaps only with one exception (Josiah), David's reign was the only time in the Old Testament when king, priest and prophet were working in perfect harmony. Re-establishing the priesthood and public worship on the lines laid down at Sinai and heeding the words of God as they were spoken by the prophet were the guarantors which kept David obedient to God's will in his personal life and gave him his prominent place as an iconic model of kingship in his nation's history far into the future. This verdict on his life recorded in 1 Kings is an apt summary of David's relationship with God. His last recorded words show this was a relationship that he wanted his successor to inherit and those words bring us to our third landmark on this part of route 66.

Solomon took on the mantle of kingship having been given the wisest advice his father could give him

**1 Kings 2:2-4 (NIV) "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man, 3 and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go 4 and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.'**

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The verdict given on David's life was to be the standard by which all future kings would be judged. David lived by the Law of Moses, which by the time of Solomon was nearly 400 years old. We are left in no doubt by this stage of the Israelite nation's history that Mosaic Law was not going to go away. And since kings were the leaders of the nation, they had to lead by example. David had shown them the way. It was achievable, so there was no excuse.

**1 Kings 3:5-10 (NIV) At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. ....7 "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David..... 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" 10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.**

And Solomon's reign started with all the advantages David's had lacked. Territorially and politically Solomon was secure. God had promised he would experience peace throughout his reign. In addition to wisdom God promised wealth, honour, long life and that Solomon would have no equal during his lifetime. The promise was conditional, however, on Solomon keeping God's decrees and commands as David his father had done.

**1 Kings 8:6-11 (NIV) The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. .... 9 There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. 10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.**

**1 Kings 9:1-3 (NIV) When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, 2 the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 The Lord said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.**

A close look at this part of the landmark reveals that Solomon made the right start to his reign. His great achievement was the building of the temple. The details given are as comprehensive as those given for the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness centuries before.

These verses emphasise why the temple became so important to the Israelites as a nation. Like the tabernacle, this was the tangible symbol of God's presence with His people. 1 Kings chapter 8 records Solomon's prayer and dedication of the temple and everything he said

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accords with God's will for his reign. In chapter 9 God confirms His presence in words that sum up His whole Being. They convey the sense that God has given Himself fully to the upholding of all His covenant promises to His chosen people. But, in verses 6-9 God issues a terrible warning that will eventually prove to be prophetic in nature. If either Solomon or his successors ignore the Mosaic covenant, He would reject the temple and Israel would come to a disastrous end as a byword and an object of ridicule.

Had Solomon heeded these warnings, this landmark wouldn't have started to show signs of collapse. Solomon's piety gave way to self-indulgence. Wealth was flaunted in spending 20 years in building a palace, when it had only taken 7 years to build the temple. When the magnificence of the temple is considered, one has to wonder at what the palace must have looked like. No wonder the Queen of Sheba was amazed. Solomon indulged every whim, but as the Ecclesiastes, the book he is credited with writing shows, it all became meaningless to him.

**1 Kings 11:1-6 (NIV) King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. 2 They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. 3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. 4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. 5 He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.**

Solomon was the first king of whom it was said that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. The reign that had begun with great promise ended in the wedge that was to eventually lead to the disaster God had warned would befall the nation. Idolatry and apostasy replaced the worship of Yahweh as the prevailing ethos of the kingdom. The 40 year period of peace ended when Edom, Egypt and Aram attacked. From within the kingdom rebellion was led by Jeroboam and, although God had promised that Solomon would end his days as king of a united nation, the seeds of division had already been sown.

The first part of the kings' highway stage of route 66 sets the pattern for two further stages. Over and above the personal stories of the three men who provided us with the landmarks, is the control of God working through the circumstances of their lives to show what is and is not acceptable to Him in terms of personal conduct and religious observance. Kings, priests, prophets and people were all equally accountable under the Mosaic Law and all would be judged accordingly, as the end of Solomon's reign demonstrates. As in the times of the Judges, God continued to speak in various ways during this first phase of Israel's monarchy, and regardless of what the future would hold, He would continue to speak until that time when no-one was prepared to listen to Him. When that happened, the highest to the lowest in the land would know they had been the authors of their own fate. The kings of the Northern Kingdom whom we will encounter next week were the first to discover that fact.

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