

4 A king anointed (Judges – 2 Samuel)

Any questions from last time? We saw how Joshua led the tribes into Canaan, and gave them their land. He concluded by challenging them to keep serving God after his death:

Joshua 24:15–29 (NIV)

¹⁵ “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ...

As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

¹⁶ Then the people answered, ... ¹⁸ “We too will serve the LORD ...”

²⁹ After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD died.

So what happens after Joshua's death? Do they serve the LORD?

Well, it turns out that it's not so easy to live as a kingdom of God in a world where others are trying to capture you and force you to serve them.

Israel struggles without human leaders. That's the Book of Judges.

4.1 Struggling without a king (Judges)

Deborah is the definition of a powerful woman.

Gideon defeats a multitude with so few.

Samson is the superhero.

The judges are *the Avengers* of the Old Testament.

These “judges” did not sit on a bench to bring justice.

They were freedom fighters who brought justice by overthrowing enemies that were trying to crush Israel: *avengers* in the Marvel Studio sense.



The Avengers (Marvel Studios)

There were twelve judges, not counting Abimelek who appointed himself to lead. They were: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar (Judges 3), Deborah (4–5), Gideon (6–8), [Abimelek (9)], Tola, Jair (10), Jephthah (10–12), Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12), and Samson (13–16).

The cycle of servitude

This is the basic story line for each episode:

Judges 2:10–19 (NIV)

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, **another generation** grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ...¹² They **forsook the LORD**, ...

¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of **raiders** who plundered them. ... ¹⁵ The hand of the LORD was against them ... They were in great distress.

¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a **judge** for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived ...

¹⁹ But **when the judge died**, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors ...

Do you see what's wrong here? Sheep without a shepherd wander. When the leader dies, they wander off, becoming enslaved to other herders. A superhero provides **no succession plan** for the care of God's people, no long-term solution.

That's the same problem the world faced in Genesis, before God appointed human leaders. People began to do what was right in their own eyes instead of following God's knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3). They took power over a brother's life (Genesis 4), so violence corrupted God's world (Genesis 6:11). To stop the violence, God put the power of life and death in people's hands (Genesis 9:6). It was a double-edged sword: governments helped bring justice, but they also used the power of death to conquer each other. They tried to take heaven's power into their own hands (Genesis 10–11).

Israel was called to be different. The Sinai covenant established them as a nation under God's leadership where **God is king**. But without human leaders, they kept suffering at the hands of the nations with their power-hungry leaders.

Truth is, it's not only nations that lust for power. When God raises up a human leader for his people, they lust for power too.

Self-serving superheros

Remember **Gideon**? With just 300 people, Gideon led an astounding rescue. Everyone could see it was God's strength, not human might, that saved them. But what happened afterwards was tragic. Israel asked Gideon to be their king:

Judges 8:22–23 (NIV)

²² The Israelites said to Gideon, "**Rule over us**—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian."

²³ But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. **The LORD will rule over you.**"

You can see what the Israelites want to do. Making Gideon king would give them a succession plan, just like other nations.

Gideon realizes how wrong this would be. Israel is not like other nations. The Sinai Covenant established them as a nation ruled by the LORD and not by human power.

Despite Gideon's good theology, power is so seductive! Gideon asks them to craft a golden symbol of his power, shaped like the vest the priests wore. Even if he can't take the title, he wants the adulation and the power. It's devastating:

Judges 8:27 (NIV)

Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town.

All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

Gideon's son craved for power too. **Abimelek** means "my father was king." (*Abi* = "my father." *Melek* = "king.") Abimelek is making a dynastic claim: if my father was king, I should be king.

Actually, Gideon had many sons. He had been living like a king of the ancient world. To ensure none of his brothers could be king, Abimelek slaughters them: *He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his seventy brothers* (9:5).

One escaped. Jotham gives the only speech in the whole jam-packed action story of Judges. Jotham questions why they're so desperate for a king as to accept a guy who kills for power. He calls his brother Abimelek a *thornbush* in God's garden: he promised them protection, but he's as deadly as a bushfire (9:15).

Everything goes downhill from here. **Jephthah** kills his own daughter to win (11:30-39), so it's no surprise when he kills 42,000 Ephraimites too (12:4-6).

Eventually, we hear about a child of promise, a leader empowered with God Spirit (13). **Samson** has the greatest strength imaginable, but he uses it all for himself. He marries a Philistine (the enemy). He'll kill before he pays his gambling debt (14). He squanders his power for revenge (15). Instead of being devoted to the LORD, he's in bed with the enemy (using Philistine prostitutes). He never leads God's people, or liberates them. His tragic life ends in slavery, like a suicide bomber taking his own life in revenge (16).

Abusing his strength for money, sex, and power, Samson is the ultimate superhero failure.

Sinking without leaders (Judges 17 – 21)

Judges is wonderfully subversive. It engrossed us with the legendary stories we want to hear, but the twist in the tale is realizing our superheroes cannot deliver justice.

We want revenge: that looks right in our own eyes. Samson was the master of revenge, the master "avenger." But what looks **right on our eyes** is not what's right in God's eyes. He doesn't care what God wants as he sleeps with enemy: *Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes* (14:3, 7, ESV).

That was the trouble with God's people when there was no human leader to bring them back to what God said was right: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6).

And what a disastrous society that makes! When God's people ignore what God said about their relationship with him (17–18) and do whatever is right in their own eyes, violence takes over. **WARNING:** Judges 19 contains graphic material dealing with abusive sex and murder.

The horrific crime occurs at Gibeah, a town in Benjamin's territory. When the other tribes hear about it, they attack Benjamin (20) and almost destroy the tribe (21). So at the end of Judges, God's people are no longer fighting their enemies: they're destroying each other!

The final verse recaps the point of the book. Without a shepherd, the sheep wander off to do their own thing: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (21:25 ESV).

The Book of judges is setting up the need for kingship. That's exactly where the story goes next, as Samuel appoints Saul to be the first king (1 Samuel 8–10). But Judges has one more subversive twist.

Do you remember the name of the town in Benjamin where the horrendous crime occurred, the violent pack-rape of the Levite's concubine? Judges wants us to remember. It told us the name twenty-two times! (Judges 19:12, 13, 14, 15, 16; 20:4, 5, 9, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 25, 29, 30, 31, 34, 36, 37, 43)

Why? What was so significant about *Gibeah*? Well, you wouldn't want a leader from that violent mob, do you?

Guess where does Israel's first king comes from? Check out 1 Samuel 10:26.

4.2 Struggling with a king (1 Samuel – 2 Samuel)

Ruth is the next book in our Bible, because she was the great-grandmother of King David. Ruth's thrilling story of genuinely caring love is all the more amazing because she was a Moabite. So how did she end up in the royal line of Israel?

Ruth's story comes later in the Hebrew Bible, in a section called the Writings (*Kethuvim*). I think Ruth has a special point to make there, so we'll touch on Ruth in our final week. For now, we'll follow the flow of the story in the Hebrew Bible, straight from Judges to Samuel.

Why do they want a king?

Even the priests were corrupt now (1 Samuel 2:12-36), so God spoke to his nation through a **prophet**. A prophet is not a psychic who predicts the future. A prophet is someone who hears God is saying (*the word of the LORD*) or sees what God is revealing (a vision or dream). Samuel was a prophet (1 Samuel 3).

You'll have to think as they did to make sense of what they did. They need their heavenly king to lead them into battle, to defeat their enemies. But how do you take God into battle? They pictured God as seated on the ark, his throne: *enthroned between the cherubim* (4:4). They pick up the ark as if it was a carriage for the king, so God leads them to war.

It didn't end well: the Philistines captured the ark. Israel felt like they'd lost God! But they learn that God is quite capable of taking care of himself. The Philistines return the ark, because Israel's God feels like bad luck for them (5-7).

Samuel is effectively the last judge (7:16). How will they manage when he dies? They ask Samuel to solve the **succession** issue by appointing a human king to lead them into battle, *like the nations* (8:5).

But Israel is not like the nations. As God says to Samuel, *It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king* (8:7).

Samuel warns how costly it is to have a human king:

1 Samuel 8:11-22 (NIV)

He will take your sons ... ¹³ **He will take** your daughters ...

¹⁴ **He will take** the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves ...

¹⁵ **He will take** a tenth of your grain and of your vintage ...

¹⁶ Your ... servants and ... cattle and donkeys **he will take** for his own use.

¹⁷ **He will take** a tenth of your flocks, and **you will become his slaves**. ...

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be **like all the other nations**, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and **fight our battles**." ...

²² The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."

Samuel the prophet anoints Saul as king (9:16; 10:1). **Anointing** is a prophetic act declaring that the heavenly sovereign has chosen this person to represent his regal authority on earth. Israel is now being led by *the LORD and his anointed* (12:3, 5).

Power corrupts the first king (Saul)

Initially, Saul was not looking for power: he tried to hide (10:22). Yet, when he is given power, it corrupts him (13:13-14). Saul disobeys the one he was anointed to represent, so God sacks him: *Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king* (15:23).

God appoints David as king instead:

1 Samuel 16:13–14 (NIV)

¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him ...

and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. ...

¹⁴Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul ...

Now, if Saul had any integrity, he would step down. But Saul cannot let go of power. He tries to kill David, the one God has anointed (19).

But David refuses to take Saul down, even when he has the opportunity. He keeps recognizing Saul as the LORD's anointed (24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23), even though David himself is the LORD's anointed now. David was setting the example for his people: assassination is not the path to power.

The irony is that spiritually abusive leaders today often hold onto power by misquoting, "Touch not the Lord's anointed," as if that should silence any critique of their leadership. They don't see that God had already rejected Saul.

For the rest of 1 Samuel, Saul is a pitiful leader, desperate to hear from God, but not reigning with God's authority (28:6 ff). Eventually Saul is killed in battle, along with his sons (31). Apparently kingship does not solve the succession problem if the kings are not following God.

Meanwhile, it feels like the LORD is with David and he can't do anything wrong. He hides out in the wild places and fights Philistines, gaining a reputation that only inflames Saul's anger (18:7; 21:11; 29:5).

David is serving, rather than seeking power. That's what God told Saul: *the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people* (13:14).

But what happens when David becomes king? Does he struggle to cope with power too?

David's house will endure, though he mishandles power too (2 Samuel)

David begins as the servant king. He captures Jerusalem from the Jebusites and builds his house there so Jerusalem becomes the capital (2 Samuel 5:6-13). He brings the ark from Shiloh to the new capital (6). David realizes it sends the wrong message when God's throne is in a tent while he himself lives in a palace. The LORD is king over his people, and David is just the under-shepherd who declares, *The LORD is my shepherd* (Psalm 23:1).

David discusses this with his advisor, the one who hears from God: *he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent"* (7:2).

This is brilliant: the king is not drawing attention to himself, but to Israel's true sovereign. God's response (paraphrased) was: "You want to elevate my name? I will elevate your name. You want to build a house for my throne? The house of David will always have my throne."

2 Samuel 7:11–16 (NIV)

The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a **house** for you:
¹²When your days are over 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**. ¹³He is the one who will build a **house** for my Name, and I will establish the **throne** of his **kingdom** forever. ¹⁴I will be his **father**, and he will be my **son**. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶Your **house** and your **kingdom** will endure forever before me; your **throne** will be established forever.

All the kings are now descendants of the house (dynasty) of David, and David's son (Solomon) is to build the house (temple) for God. Solomon will inherit the throne not only from his father David, but from his Father in heaven who gave the kingship to David. And even when a king is disobedient, God will keep entrusting the throne to the house of David.

Any questions about this promise to David?

David is a warrior king. They wanted a king to defeat their enemies, and David does exactly that (8–11). But in the middle of all that bloodshed, David did not treat Saul's son as a threat to his kingship (unlike Gideon's son Abimelek in Judges 9).

Nevertheless, David does misuse the power entrusted to him. Remember Samuel's warning about what kings would do? *He will take ...* (1 Samuel 8:11-17). David does. David takes Uriah's wife, while Uriah is out fighting for David. That's treachery. When Bathsheba becomes pregnant, David orders a manoeuvre that causes Uriah's death (11:14). Who can trust a king like this? In their world, the king made the law and enforce it. No one could challenge the king.

Nathan does. As prophet, he speaks for God's throne. But if the king is following his own desires rather than God's, he might execute the prophet. Nathan pretends to present another case about a rich man taking from the poor. David issues the death penalty. *"It's you!"* Nathan declares! *"You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. ..."* 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"* (12:7-10).

For the rest of 2 Samuel, David is a pitiful character who struggles to manage his own family, let alone the kingdom. With his own infidelity, David struggles to deal with rape among his children, and revenge killing (13). Absalom views his father as too weak to be king, exiling David and taking the throne (14–19).

When Saul was king, it seemed like David could do little wrong. But once David has power, it almost destroys him and his family. It feels like the house of David might be disintegrating, except for the promise God gave that the house of David would endure.

Despite his failures, David is remembered as a great fighter supported by warriors (22–24).



An ancient Egyptian throne

4.3 Summary and significance

Tonight we covered three books that tell the story of human leadership:

- In the time of the **Judges**, people found they could not follow God without human leaders. Whenever they got into trouble God provided a judge to rescue them, but once the leader died, they did whatever was right in their own eyes so they ended up enslaved again. In the end, they're doing unspeakable evil and destroying each other.
- God conceded that they needed human leaders. Through his prophet (Samuel), God gave them a king, anointed to implement God's reign over his people. But Saul was corrupted by the power God gave him, so God sacked him. God anointed another leader, but Saul refused to step down. He limped on as a pitiable ruler without heaven's guidance until he finally fell (**1 Samuel**).
- King David begins as the anointed under-shepherd, leading Israel to exalt their true king. His Father in the heavens promised David that his descendants would have the throne forever, always representing God's reign on earth. But David took Uriah's wife, and then took Uriah's life to cover it up. It decimated his family, reducing David to a sorry leader with a conflicted home life. Despite his failures, we remember David as the king who called people's attention and worship to the heavenly king (**2 Samuel**).

These books have set up for the coming of the **Christ**, the *anointed son of David* (Matt 1:1).

When Samuel *anointed* Saul and David, it was a prophetic declaration that this was the person chosen by heaven to reign on earth. It meant the person was the LORD'S choice as king, **the LORD'S anointed**.

The Hebrew word for anointed is *mā-šîḥ*. When it was translated into Greek they used the word *Christos*, and that's why we use the word *Christ*. When Peter said, "You are the Christ," he was literally saying, "You are the *anointed* ruler, i.e. the one appointed by God to reign" (Mark 8:29).

We lose all that in translation. Just imagine if *the LORD'S anointed* was translated as *the LORD'S Christ* in all these verses: 1 Samuel 2:10, 35; 12:3, 5; 16:6, 10, 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Samuel 1:14, 16 19:21; 22:51; 23:1. No, those verses are not about Jesus; they're about Saul and David. But if we read of these kings as God's "Christ" (anointed ruler) in their time, then when we read about Jesus as the Christ we would instantly understand: "Ah, Jesus is God's chosen ruler for the people of the earth, the king who restores the reign of God to earth." That would make sense of the gospel Jesus proclaimed, the parables he told, the healings he gave, the crucifixion of the king of the Jews, and the resurrection of the Son of God.

"Jesus Christ is a claim not a name" — Matthew W. Bates, *Why the Gospel? Living the Good News of King Jesus with Purpose* (Eerdmans, 2023), page 9.

He is God's solution for the problem that humans don't follow God without a human leader. God's solution is the Christ—the human who brings heaven and earth back into correct relationship again, all that God intended in the beginning, fulfilling the entire Biblical narrative. (Compare Romans 1:1-5).

Questions or comments?

If you're wanting a good book on leadership, see:

Timothy S. Laniak. *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*. (IVP, 2006).

For next week, read 1 Kings 12 and 2 Kings 17.

