

OPENING LECTURE

Well, summer vacation is officially over; the days are getting shorter; school shopping is done, and the kids are back in class. My daughter is well past school age, but we went shoe shopping for her birthday in August. Looking at all the styles available made me think back how many different styles I've worn over the years – penny loafers, ballerinas, sandals, high heels with rounded toes, high heels with pointed toes, skinny heels, spiked heels, and chunky heels. Now it's usually tennis shoes, or flat shoes for comfort.

I guess maybe that falls under the heading of “what goes around, comes around.” Like fat ties and skinny ties, long skirts and short skirts. How suits are out and casual attire is in. Times may change, fashions may change, but Isaiah reminds us that “the Word of the Lord endures forever.” Truth doesn't change. That's why we make such a diligent effort to study and learn the truths from God's Word and why we call our study – People of the Word.

This year we will be studying the books of 1 & 2 Samuel and the first 11 chapters of 1 Kings. It's a period of time that covers the lives of the prophet Samuel, King Saul, King David and King Solomon. At the risk of repeating what most of you know, God has a plan. In the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, we're told about creation, the flood, the call of the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt and in the ensuing years, Joseph rose to power and the twelve tribes of Jacob, also known as Israel, came to Egypt to buy

food. They settled in Goshen and eventually came to endure the hardships of slavery under the heavy hand of Pharaoh.

In the New Testament, the landmark event we look back to is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, it was the Exodus from Egypt and the miraculous deliverance of the Jews by God as Moses led the people out toward the Promised Land. This fledgling nation camped at Mt. Sinai where God gave them His Law and instructed them on how to serve a Holy God instead of the idolatrous practices of the land they came from.

Despite vows of whole-hearted devotion, their disobedience caused a whole generation to wander in the wilderness and die without ever having seen that promised land. But God is the ultimate promise-keeper.

Under Joshua's leadership, they began to enter and conquer. We begin to learn about the enemies of Israel – those who would cause trouble for God's chosen people for years to come, especially as the influence of their idols drew Israel away from God. But God always has a faithful remnant, and we read about those men of valor and principle.

In the book of Judges that leads us up to the era of time covered by our study this year, we have the fateful words in the NIV, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." The New American Standard Version says, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

It was true in 1100 B.C. – and do you think it's still a true reflection of society in 2016 A.D.? "Do your own thing" is more than just a saying, it's the attitude that prevails in the world that we, as Christians, are trying to win

to Christ. Time on the calendar may change, but the heart of man is still desperately wicked and self-centered, thinking “I know what’s best for me.” Israel’s solution was, “Give us a king like the other nations have.”

Over the course of this year, your lecturers are going to be giving you background material on the culture, social/political climate and intrigues of palace life, so I don’t want to elaborate as much on that. Instead, here are some “facts” for orientation and some “food” for thought.

The books of 1 & 2 Samuel were originally one scroll. With the two books of Kings, they comprise a complete history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The division into four books began with the Septuagint. Jewish tradition claims that the prophet Samuel wrote the books that bear his name, while the prophets Gad and Nathan supplied supplementary information concerning the years following Samuel’s death. Jewish tradition also attributes much of the authorship of Kings to the prophet Jeremiah.

The period of time that our study covers is a long one: 1105–931 B.C. It begins with a joyful answer to prayer – the birth of the baby, Samuel. It ends with a sorrowful prophecy – a divided kingdom after the death of Solomon. Time seems like a very fluid thing even though there are 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour. They say a week on vacation is much shorter than a week on a diet. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:1, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity know under heaven.”

We see it all in this era we term the “United Kingdom” and we’re familiar with many of the “stories” from this portion of Scripture . . .

Hannah's prayer for a child, the selection of Saul as the people's choice for a king, Saul's encounter with the witch of Endor, the anointing of David as God's choice for king, the story of David and Goliath, David and Bathsheba, David and Absalom, Solomon's rendering of a wise decision concerning the mother and child, and his wealth displayed to the Queen of Sheba.

Most of us are more comfortable with the narrative portions of God's Word than we are with the poetry portions because it's easier to understand. But ease of reading (and that doesn't necessarily include pronouncing Old Testament names), should not keep us from making application to our own lives. These chapters are full of opportunity to do just that. Speaking of Old Testament biblical names, please don't let that be a stumbling block to your study. We'll all pronounce them the best we can as they appear just as we'll do with the places that are mentioned in our Scriptures. Remember to the Jewish readers, these places were as common to them as how we relate to Burbank, Compton, Orange, or San Diego recognizing that distance separates the cities.

Samuel, quote "the greatest prophet since Moses" (according to Lloyd Ogilvie), was Israel's last judge. He received his call from the Lord at a time when word from the Lord was rare and visions infrequent. The story of the life at Shiloh reveals two movements going on simultaneously in Israel, namely those of degeneration and regeneration. The corruption within the priesthood was appalling, yet within the precincts of the Tabernacle, Samuel was growing in the fear of the Lord.

As Samuel matured to manhood and the role of leadership, he called the people to return to God and put away their strange idols. They obeyed and, by the power of divine intervention, the powerful Philistines were defeated. Samuel built an altar to God in gratitude. He named it Ebenezer, a stone of remembrance. Before all the people he said, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

We don't often sing the old hymns in church anymore, but Robert Robinson wrote *O Thou Fount of Every Blessing* in 1758. The second verse says, “Here I raise my Ebenezer; Hither by Thy help I've come.” Robinson was comparing his own difficult life to the trials of ancient Israel. Can't we all recall a time in our lives, or some dire occasion, when God took us by the hand and led us through dark valleys? We need to erect those stones of remembrance in our memory to remind us of God's faithfulness.

We tend to remember Samuel not for his leadership skills, not for his parenting failures, but for the fact that he was the one to anoint both Saul, and David as Kings of Israel.

Parts of the Word of God are for our instruction in communicating truth; other parts are for comfort and encouragement; others are for witnessing of hope and inciting to the labor of faith, while other portions are definitely for our warning. This latter is the purpose of the tragic record of Saul.

Years ago Walk through the Bible courses were popular. It was a series to teach you the sequence of Bible events through the use of hand and arm gestures and it really was effective. I remember they characterized these

three kings as Saul (no heart) for God; David (whole heart); and Solomon (half a heart). I think maybe those were the gestures.

Saul was a man of good-looks, brains, popularity and apparent humility, taking the kingship of Israel with reluctance. But power and authority can change people. You'd think having Samuel as his mentor, Saul would step right up to the plate. But even though Samuel tried to communicate God's plans to King Saul directly, they simply were not on the same wavelength.

None of God's servants have been without sin. One of Saul's early misdeeds was his intrusion into the priestly office. Samuel had promised to meet Saul at Gilgal on a certain day. When the priest didn't put in an appearance at the appointed time, Saul assumed the priestly duties and offered a sacrifice. It's not hard to discover why Saul acted as he did. He saw the people scattering, his platform of power dissipating, and he tried a desperate measure in order to hold them together, fearful of losing his grasp on the people. It's a fear that strikes many in leadership today. How do I compromise to hold the crowd?

But what was Saul's sin? Was it the fact that he, a king, assumed the office of a priest? Apparently not, for Solomon did the same thing years later and was not rebuked (1 Kings 3:4,15). Saul's sin was not one of presumption, but rather one of disobedience. He knew what God had commanded – **wait**, but he allowed the pressure of the moment to determine his actions, rather than follow the clear word from the Lord. He didn't really believe that God was in control of the situation.

Again Saul was warned. Again, Saul failed to obey when he didn't destroy all of the Amalekites – a direct disobedience to God's command. As a result, Samuel had to become reconciled to the fact that God had rejected Saul and was going to choose another in his place.

Certainly there is much more to the life of King Saul. We'll discover a lot about a man under pressure. That's something we can all relate to today. Pressure – stress – it's the lifeblood of the antacid and tranquilizer industries in America. Remember

The Stress Diet?

Breakfast

½ grapefruit
1 piece whole-wheat toast
8 oz. skim milk

Mid-afternoon snack

Remainder of Oreo cookies
1 qt. rocky road ice cream
1 jar hot fudge

Lunch

4 oz. lean broiled chicken breast
1 cup steamed zucchini
1 Oreo cookie
Herb tea

Dinner

large mushroom pepperoni pizza
large pitcher root beer
Entire frozen cheesecake
eaten directly from the freezer

For some, it's food, not a pill that relieves tension. The real question is not whether we face pressure or stress (we will), but how we handle it. The same pressure that overturns one sailboat, propels another toward its destination. The difference lies neither in the wind or the boat, but in the way the sails are set. To some people, pressure is always negative, always distressing. To others, a very similar set of circumstances may prove to be a creative force leading to release of new power, new dynamic, new joy. Like the shoe salesman sent to a tribe in Africa. He cabled back, "No one wears

shoes! I'm coming home." Another salesman was sent. He cabled back, "No one wears shoes! Send more samples, this is a goldmine!"

Saul chose the negative. His pressures were many: his son, Jonathan, he nearly put to death for eating honey; David won the victory over Goliath that Saul should have had; he suffered sleeplessness and anxiety that only David's music could soothe; and then he turned on him and began the relentless pursuit of his "enemy" David when he wasn't fending off attacks by the surrounding nations. Imagine the life of always fighting battles of one kind or another just in your own strength, without the Lord. People are doing it every day. Saul can teach us much about "what not to do."

Just as our lives intertwine with others, so too Samuel, Saul and David's lives are intertwined. Have you ever noticed how God's sovereignty works in the way He often has a purpose for someone's life and He begins generations before? Godly Ruth (yes, the book of Ruth) had a son, Jesse, who had a son named David. Ruth was David's grandmother. Perhaps we can see where David got his love for God. Never underestimate the influence you have on the young people in your life.

In obedience to the will of God, Samuel went to the home of Jesse of Bethlehem in order to anoint one of his sons, David, to be Israel's future king. David was chosen by God.

We too have a calling of God. We have been chosen for a certain purpose. Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." (John 15:16). This gives us the opportunity to be men and women after God's own heart. He

has chosen us for that task. Let's give ourselves to it entirely and be pleased with nothing less than pleasing Him.

David wasn't anointed king one day and wearing the crown the next. No, it was a waiting game. Our willingness to hear and to do God's will doesn't always mean we should take prompt action. Sometimes God calls to an open heart to tell us "no," or to stop us from proceeding down a wrong path on our own initiative. King David was an expert at waiting for, and following God's lead, at least most of the time. When he obeyed his own advice to "wait on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14), he was blessed; when he went ahead, against, or around God's directions, trouble followed. But David always came back to God.

The story of young David defeating the giant Goliath is probably one of the first Bible stories you heard. It captivates the imagination and the point is strong – one with God is a majority. We all have Goliaths in our lives – the ugly, insurmountable, giant of circumstance that glares at us – daring us to make a move. Fear of failure paralyzes us unless we pray up the reinforcements of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The first step to victory is praying on knocking knees.

The fallout of victory, however, for David was years as a fugitive on the run from a jealous King Saul. During David's life as a fugitive he was learning to discern and obey God's will in spite of the obvious pressures of his circumstances and the attitudes of other people. Preparation for the crown called for the experiences of being both a hero, and a fugitive. We may stop and ask why would God require David to experience those years of

trouble at all? Here are two possible reasons: one involves David, the other involves you.

In the first place, it may have been that David's friendship with God had reached a plateau – a leveling-off point. It is almost a truism that nothing in the spiritual life remains level. There is either an advance or there is a decline. If David was going to go on in his relationship with God, he had to experience God's grace in a deeper way. For that reason, in His love, the Lord allowed David to enter a period of pain and trial. No one really advances in their walk with God in a time of complete tranquility. No one develops muscles of faith and trust when everything is prosperity and peace. David's years as a fugitive brought him to the end of himself. And once he reached his limits of wisdom, and endurance, David found resources beyond anything he had ever experienced. He began to tap the infinite resources of God.

The second possible reason for David's suffering cuts through the centuries to touch each of us today. God gifted David with an ability to turn his soul inside-out. As no one before or since, David was able to record his innermost thoughts in both word and music. David wrote many of the psalms during his difficult years – songs which enable you to look into his heart, feel his anguish, and hear his whispered prayers. In the Psalms you can find hope and joy in the nearness of God, even though the world seems to be collapsing around you. Whatever your emotion, whatever your frame of mind, you can plunge into the Psalms and find a soul mate. You can find your own personal struggles so clearly expressed, it often seems as if you're

reading your own diary. The psalms that came forth from David's trials have drawn believers closer to the God of heaven for nearly 3,000 years.

Take a moment to consider some of the pressures, disappointments, and anxieties you have faced during the past few years. Perhaps you wonder why God didn't intervene right then and lift you out of those stressful situations. Could it be that your own walk with God has leveled-out? Could it be that God wants to lift your friendship with Him to a whole new level?

Perhaps God wants to turn your life into a psalm. There may be others watching. As you reach out to find God's strong hand, others may also want to reach. Perhaps they too will find the "Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort."

David the songwriter of Israel, rejoiced in the Lord of his salvation. David the shepherd, united Israel and protected her with diligent care. David the king, bowed in obedient submission to the Lord of his life. David, longing to be like God, made the heart of his God his pattern.

For most of this year we will be studying the life of David in great detail. It's a wealth of lessons from one man's life: years of solitude as a shepherd; years of struggle as a fugitive; years of success as a triumphant king first in Hebron then in Jerusalem; and years of sin and sorrow as a king in crisis.

David was a warrior, yet his heart's passion was not for conquest, but to build a glorious temple for his God. But God said, "no." Plan, prepare, yes, but someone else will complete the task. That someone was to be Solomon.

As if God were showing that He could bring good out of even a terrible situation, the union of David and Bathsheba resulted in the birth of Solomon. The couple's first child died, but the life of their second child showed great promise even while he was an infant. Nathan, the prophet who confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba, now brought a message of encouragement. The child, Solomon, was deeply loved by the Lord and was given the special name of Jedediah (loved of the Lord).

What a beautiful start to his reign, "(Solomon) loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David." (1 Kings 3:3) If ever there was a king who pointed his people toward the worship of God, it was Solomon. He poured the strength of his youth and all his vast creative energies into the building of an awesome temple for the honor of the Lord's name. At the time of the temple's dedication, he got down on his knees before the whole nation and cried out to God on behalf of his people. How zealous he was to serve Him!

Certainly the time was ripe for Satan to attack. But how? Here was a man to whom God had given the requested gift of wisdom plus the promise of much, much more. He didn't need much materially or spiritually, so how could Satan get a foothold? The answer was preoccupation. The first thing the devil did was get Solomon busy in the Lord's work – building the temple. Now it had been God's plan for Solomon to build the temple, and the structure he raised to the skies in Jerusalem was astonishingly beautiful – one of the architectural marvels of the ancient world. Trouble was, Solomon

never found much time to worship in the temple. He was too busy, too preoccupied with all the additional building projects he had begun.

In Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon describes several of the projects he began after completing the temple: “I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself, I made gardens and for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made ponds of water for myself to irrigate a forest of growing trees.” Building the Lord’s temple had taken seven years. The construction of his own personal palace took 13 years.

Solomon was a prolific writer, too. Most of his words appear in Proverbs where he talks about the rich life of wisdom; then Ecclesiastes that we’ll be studying where he writes about the empty life – a record of the best that man can do, that in the end is just folly; and we’ll read his poetry in the Song of Songs where he writes about the full life of married love. All that writing keeps a man busy.

With his wealth he began to acquire territory. Horses and chariots by the thousands he brought up from Egypt. His navies sailed the most distant seas and brought apes, ivory and peacocks from foreign lands. He gathered gold as tin. Wealth, wisdom, fame and fortune – here was a man who had it all, tried it all.

But 1 Kings 11 writes what could have been his epitaph: He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He intermarried with Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites and these wives led him astray bringing with them their foreign idols. Vs. 4 says, “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods.” A dark end to a promising beginning.

The result was that, for the sake of David, the kingdom would remain intact during Solomon's lifetime; however, God would tear it from the hand of his son, Rehoboam. The kingdom would be divided. That's a study for a couple of years from now – the Divided Kingdom.

These men of Scripture have a significant place in Israel's history, but there are some special women we'll be studying too: Hannah (Samuel's Mother, beloved but barren before God's intervention); There was David's first wife. He was married to Saul's daughter, Michal, who was embarrassed by David's joyful dance before the Lord. Then he married Abigail, (a story of beauty and the beast). This special story of God's sovereignty reminded David about the consequences of revenge. Like David, do we listen when someone else speaks wisdom from God? And then there was Bathsheba (from patio to palace). David made her a widow then made her a queen. And then there was the Queen of Sheba who had to see for herself if Solomon's reputation was true.

The pages of the Bible are alive with people. There are so many more who play a major role in this portion of Scripture. Names I've not mentioned but that we'll become familiar with as we study this year. These people are not just plaster casts or idealized images – but real, flesh-and-blood men and women: children, teenagers, middle-aged, senior citizens; people with hopes, dreams and triumphs; people with heartaches, tragedies and failures; people who laugh, cry, fall in love; people who experience every imaginable problem. People like us.

We know that our Lord Jesus Christ came through the line of David, and we'll be pointing out examples of how we see Christ in these Scriptures.

For all I have said, there is so much more left unsaid. You will thoroughly enjoy and profit from what your lecturers will share with you this year. This is a labor of love for our Lord that we do not take lightly. Just as prayer is so much a part of what we'll be studying this year, you should know that your leaders are serious prayer warriors who seek the Lord's face on your behalf and for each other as we diligently prepare lessons each week. We enthusiastically invite you back as we begin the lessons next week, not for Old Testament history lessons, but for insight and application; to walk in another man's shoes awhile as he struggled with the issues of life. I think we'll find everything old will be new again.