

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 6 – The Old Covenant 3 - God's Place

Key Question:

- If we have sinned against God how can we hope to have a good relationship with Him?

The conquest of the Land of Canaan

[Joshua]

In 1405 BC the people of Israel under Joshua's leadership entered the land of Canaan. God took them through the River Jordan in the same way He took their parents through the sea, by parting the water so that they could walk on dry land. The campaign to conquer Canaan took many years, since the cities of Canaan were difficult to attack and the Canaanites were good soldiers. God gave clear commands to Joshua about how they should fight these wars – they were to destroy the other nations who lived there because these people were very sinful and God wanted to keep the Israelites free from their influence (see Deuteronomy 9:4-5). Unfortunately, the people of Israel did not completely obey these commands, and they left some of their enemies undefeated. These survivors would be a constant source of bad influence over the Israelites – leading them towards sin and idolatry. However, the book of Joshua finishes on a high note:

the LORD gave to Israel all the land He had sworn to give their ancestors ... All of the good promises that the LORD had given Israel came true (Joshua 21:43, 45)

As we read these words we might think that God's Kingdom has finally come – **that God's people (Israel) could now live in His place (the land of Canaan) under His rule.**

The Judges and the decision to have a King

[Judges; I Samuel 1-8; Ruth]

After Joshua died (around 1380 BC) the nation was leaderless, and the people began to forget God and even to worship some of the false gods of the Canaanite peoples. Over the following three centuries Israel entered into a cycle of repeated sin and disobedience. When the Israelites disobeyed God, He allowed the other nations of Canaan to dominate and oppress them. However, each time the people called out to God to save them, God showed His grace by raising up a ruler to defeat their enemies and rescue them. These leaders, who led regions of Israel rather than the whole nation, were called Judges, and they were fascinating people (we read of thirteen of them in the book of Judges). Many of the Judges were not good examples of obedience to God, but God used them despite their faults to rescue His people. The period of the Judges was a mixed time in Israel's history, with many people disobeying God, but others living faithfully for Him (see the book of Ruth).

Eventually the people decided that they wanted to have their own king. They were jealous of the other nations and thought that they would be more successful if they had king who would unite them and give them greater strength. They came to the last Judge, Samuel, and insisted that he should appoint a king over them (I Samuel Chapter 8). Although God had given the Israelites instructions about how to choose a king before they entered Canaan (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20), their request for a king at this time was actually a rejection of Him. They were looking for a king to be the source of their strength instead of trusting in God to be the one who protected them. In reality, their weakness was not because they had no king but because they had disobeyed God. Samuel asked God for His guidance. God told him that the people were actually rejecting Him as their King, and told Samuel to warn them how a king would oppress them by making himself rich on the basis of their hard work. Samuel warned the leaders of Israel, but they still insisted on having a king, and so God told him to anoint a king for them. God's chosen person to be the first King of Israel was Saul, a man from the tribe of Benjamin.

This period of history teaches us an important principle: **God was the true ruler of Israel, and human rulers had to remember Him and lead by listening to Him, obeying His Law and leading the people to worship Him.**

The United Kingdom

[I & II Samuel, I Kings 1-11, I Chronicles, II Chronicles 1-9]

The first three kings ruled for 40 years each:

1. **Saul (king of Israel 1050-1010 BC)** – Saul was very strong and handsome (I Samuel 9:2). After being anointed by Samuel he started out well as king, but he later disobeyed God because of his pride and his fear of peoples' opinions (I Samuel 13:1-15). God rejected him as king and said that another man would replace him (I Samuel 15:24-29).
2. **David (king of Israel 1010-970 BC)** – David was anointed as king when he was still a young boy working as a shepherd for his father (I Samuel 16), but he soon proved himself to be a great soldier. He demonstrated great faith in God when he killed Goliath, a huge Philistine who had been mocking Israel and God (I Samuel 17). Saul later became jealous of David, and chased him for many years, but David refused to harm Saul even though he had several opportunities to kill him. Eventually, Saul was defeated in battle by the Philistines and committed suicide (I Samuel 31). David was made king over his own tribe of Judah (II Samuel 2) and later succeeded in uniting the whole kingdom under his rule (II Samuel 5). He was a great king and had great faith in God. Although he also made many mistakes, he always returned to God. He is remembered as the greatest king Israel ever had. **God renewed His covenant with Israel through David by promising that the kingship of Israel would belong to David's descendants forever (II Samuel 7:12-16).** David brought peace and prosperity to the nation of Israel by defeating many of their enemies. He also wrote many of the Psalms (songs about human experience and about his relationship with God).
3. **Solomon (king of Israel 970-930 BC)** – Solomon, David's son, became king after his death. God gave him great wisdom, and in his early years he was a great king with immense wealth. He did not have to fight wars because his father had been so successful in war. Solomon's greatest achievement was to build the Temple in Jerusalem. In his wise years Solomon wrote much of the book of Proverbs (a collection of sayings teaching us how to live wisely), and later in his life he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes (a philosophy book showing how meaningless life without God is).

David - a Man after God's own heart

God described David as a "*man after His own heart*" (see I Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22). David certainly was not perfect – in fact he committed many shocking sins (for example, he committed adultery and arranged for the woman's husband to die in battle so that he would not be discovered – see II Samuel 11). God accepted David because he desired to worship God, to know Him and to serve Him more than anything else in life. David lived by the **way of faith**, and he genuinely repented of his sins and trusted God to forgive Him. We can see David's relationship described in some of the Psalms that he wrote:

Psalm 139 – David's understanding of God

David knew that God is:

- *All-knowing* (verses 1-6) – He knows all our thoughts, feelings and actions
- *All-present* (verses 7-12) – we cannot escape from His presence or hide from Him
- *The One who created us and has plans for us as individuals* (verses 13-18)

Therefore we should trust in Him and ask Him to search our hearts and show us our sin and His will (verses 19-24).

Psalm 51 – David's true repentance

This psalm shows David's response when he realised he had sinned (after the events recorded in II Samuel 11):

- *God loves him, but he still needs to have forgiveness (mercy) from Him* (verses 1,2,7,9)
- *All sin is firstly against God and God's way is always right* – sin is in the heart of man; we are born with sin (verses 4-5)
- *He needs a new heart that is pure and intends to change his life based on his repentance* (verses 10-13)
- *Sacrifice is pointless unless the heart is repentant but the only hope for forgiveness is through sacrifice* (verses 16-19)

Psalm 23 – David's faith in (dependence on) God

David speaks about his close relationship with God. He uses the picture of a shepherd to describe how he depends on God. The LORD: supplies all he needs (verses 1-3a), guides him through life (verse 3b), comforts and protects him in difficult times (verse 4), gives him fulfilment, dignity and victory (verse 5), and can be trusted in this life and after it (verse 6).

Conclusion:

From David's example we can learn how to begin to have a good relationship with God:

1. **Ask Him to search you and show you His way** (Psalm 139) – this is a good place to begin if you want to know God. Simply ask Him to teach you and to show you His way.
2. **Repent for your sins** (Psalm 51) – to repent means to say sorry from the heart. In repentance we recognise that sin is serious before God and turn away from living our own way to live for God.
3. **Depend on God in faith to lead you, protect you and provide for you** (Psalm 23) – faith means believing God and trusting Him. In faith we surrender control of our life to God and continue to obey Him whatever happens.

The Temple and the city of Jerusalem

Jerusalem was a stronghold of a tribe called the Jebusites until King David conquered it in around 1003 BC (see II Samuel 5). It became the capital city of the Jewish people, and is often called *Zion* or the *city of David* in the Old Testament. Jerusalem represented the place God's rule over His people, and the prophecies about the Messiah say that He will one day rule from David's throne in Jerusalem (e.g. Isaiah 9:6-7). David had a great vision to replace the Tabernacle with a permanent building in Jerusalem where God could be worshipped. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (II Samuel 6), the first time that the kings and priests were based in the same city, and prepared the foundations for a great Temple, but God would not allow Him to build it (I Chronicles 28:3). That task was given to Solomon (I Kings 5-6; II Chronicles 2-7). Solomon's Temple followed the same pattern as the Tabernacle and took seven years to build (around 956-950BC). It was an immense building decorated with much gold and precious stones. The Temple and its sacrifices were maintained by the members of the tribe of Levi, paid for by an offering of one tenth of their income from the other tribes. When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC he took many of the dishes and cups from the Temple to Babylon (see II Kings 25:1-26). The system of sacrifices stopped and the Temple fell into disrepair.

The Temple and the city of Jerusalem were central to Jewish identity, and **the Temple represented the place where God lived with His people**. In the Temple we see several amazing truths about God:

1. **He is holy** – the presence of God was in the inner room of the Temple, separated from the sinful people
2. **He is loving** – God wanted to live with His people even though they were sinful – He wanted them to know Him
3. **He can forgive sin only on the basis of sacrifice** – the Temple taught the people that the holy God could not ignore their sin, but that through sacrifice He could forgive their sins.

An unsolved problem

At the height of Solomon's reign the nation of Israel was at its most powerful and wealthy. They lived at peace in the land God had given them, worshipping Him in the Temple where His presence and glory were and enjoying His blessings. Other nations (e.g. the Queen of Sheba – I Kings 10:1-13) glorified God because of Israel's prosperity and Solomon's wisdom. The promises to Abraham were fulfilled (see I Kings 4:20-21). At the dedication of the Temple Solomon prayed:

Praise the LORD who has given rest to His people Israel, just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the wonderful promises He gave through His servant Moses (I Kings 8:56)

Solomon's reign started well, but he had a great weakness – he loved and married many foreign women. God therefore decided to judge him, but because of David He promised to wait until after Solomon's death, when He would divide the nation leaving only a minority under Solomon's son (I Kings 11:9-13). Although the promises of God had been fulfilled, the problem of sin remained! The animal sacrifices at the Temple could not really remove sin – a perfect sacrifice was needed to finally pay for sins. **God's Kingdom could not be restored until sin was dealt with.**

Key Lesson: God gave the Land of Canaan to the people of Israel

Although God's people (Israel) were now in God's place (Canaan) under God's rule (the Law), God's Kingdom could not be restored perfectly because of the problem of sin. A perfect sacrifice for sin was needed.