**LESSON THIRTEEN - THE UNITED KINGDOM**

1. **The Reign of Saul:** Throughout the historical books information about each king is given – how old he was and how long he reigned. Saul began to reign at age 30, and reigned for 42 years.

**Summary**: Saul was a transitional ruler between Samuel, last of the old confederacy lead by judges, and David, new national order, unity under a monarch. Saul belonged more to the old order than the new:

* He had to call out tribes to fight whenever there was a battle
* He had no standing army (1 Sam 11)
* He had divided support (1 Sam 10:26,27)
* He was still out plowing fields even after he was anointed king (1 Sam 11:5)

Early in his reign he disobeyed God so God rejected Saul as his ruler from that point on, anointing David as his new king. David's popularity was a constant threat; he and Saul are in constant conflict.

**1. Saul's contributions:**

1. Military success against Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zebah and the Philistines
2. He destroyed the Philistines iron smelting monopoly (which had given them iron weapons, making them a formidable foe), paving the way for economic development.
3. He began to unify the tribes of Israel

**2. Saul's downfall:**

1. Samuel had instructed Saul to wait at Gilgal to seek the Lord's favour, but he grew impatient waiting for him. Driven by fear (his army was deserting) he went ahead with the sacrifice required before going to battle, incurring the Lord's wrath (1 Sam 13:11-14). Saul was not a priest, so was not permitted to offer sacrifices. The greater sin however, was not obeying God’s instructions.
2. Saul made a rash oath, saying that anyone who ate before he had avenged himself on his enemies would die – unnecessary as the victory was God’s to give. The men had pursued the Philistines all day, and so were weakened and needed food to go on fighting. It nearly cost his son Jonathon his life, but for the wise intervention of his men (1 Sam 14:24, 41-45). It resulted in another sin, his men, in their desperation for nourishment, ate meat with blood in it.
3. Saul, in trying to atone for their sin, builds an altar in order to sacrifice to the Lord. The implication is that he offered the sacrifices, which should have been done by a priest, therefore without following the proper procedure (I Sam 14:31-35).
4. In holy war the spoil is Yahweh's. No one was to take anything for any reason, not even a seemingly noble reason like Saul's, to sacrifice it to God. He used his own judgement in deciding how far to go in obeying God (1 Sam 15:12-26).

Saul proved to be an impatient, impulsive man, inclined to take things into his own hands, and lacked spiritual sensitivity. He failed to realize that obedience is essential to being used of God. As a leader, his failure also led others into sin.

1. **The Reign of David:** began when he was 30, and lasted 40 years. In all the years of waiting for God to fulfill his promise to give the throne to him, David never resorted to using human means to bring fulfillment to that promise. He waited for the Lord to do it. Now that Saul is dead, he continues to wait for the Lord.
2. **Consolidating the kingdom**

David began his reign as king over Judah. It took 7 years to finally establish his reign over a united Israel. He used peaceful means, diplomacy rather than military strength. The purity of his heart is revealed repeatedly:

* He publicly mourns for Saul and Jonathon. He killed the Amalekite who claimed credit for finishing off Saul (2 Sam 1:6-16). What the man thought would win a reward resulted in his death – characteristic of David honouring Saul as God’s anointed throughout 1 Samuel, unwilling to take the throne for himself.
* He commends the men of Jabesh Gilead, who had risked their lives to retrieve the bodies of Saul and his sons for a decent burial (2 Sam 2: 4-7).
* He welcomed Abner, commander of Saul' army and former enemy, when he came with the purpose of turning over the Northern tribes, uniting the kingdom (2 Sam 3).
* He mourns Abner's death publically when killed by Joab (his own commander), and rebukes Joab publically (2 Sam 3).
* When men from the tribe of Benjamin bring Ishbosheth's head (son of Saul and king of the Northern tribes) to David, he has them killed (2 Sam 4:9-12), once again affirming he will not take the throne of Israel by human means.

His diplomacy effectively dissolved northern opposition to his reign. They became quite willing to have David as their king (2 Sam 5:1-5). The people recognized the "charisma" (spiritual, not worldly) and character of David, that he was a man on whom God's spirit rested.

Dynastic succession was not yet recognized. God’s king was still the one of his choosing.

1. **Subdues the Philistines:** (2 Sam 5:17-25) Remember David had appeared to be in league with the Philistines for a time when he hid in Gath from Saul.

* A united Israel posed a real threat to the Philistines and they mobilised immediately. But David took the offensive, driving them out of Israelite territory, taking possession of the whole "Promised Land" at last. Note 2 Sam 5:19-23: David sought the Lord’s guidance before he acted. It had become his modus operandi.
* With their defeat, the Philistines recognized Israel's supremacy and were at peace.

1. **Jerusalem established as the capital:** Freed from external danger David turned to internal consolidation of power.

* Jerusalem was centrally located
* It was a military stronghold. David captured it himself with his own troops, thereafter known as "The city of David"
* Having a capital city aided in consolidation of power. The administration of law came under the king's authority: David had a court recorder, a king's secretary, the influence of Egyptian government. Israel increasingly was becoming like other nations. The king truly supervised the kingdom.

1. **Jerusalem became the religious center**: (2 Sam 6) whatever changes David introduced in establishing a kingdom like other kingdoms, he understood the spiritual power of Israel's Mosaic institutions and traditions.

* He was a theocratic (God-centred) king: He wanted to acknowledge the Lord's kingship over himself and the people by making the ark central. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David was making Jerusalem not only the political center, but also the religious center. The Ark represented the presence of God, and its presence in Jerusalem effectively installed God’s throne in Jerusalem. Zion had now become the "City of God." This single act must have done more to bind the hearts of the tribes to Jerusalem than we can imagine.
* Proper worship was restored on a national scale.
* The Uzzah incident (2 Samuel 6:1-8) reminded them that the Lord was to be taken seriously. David's error had been in making a cart to carry the ark when God had instructed that it was to be carried on the shoulders of the priests. David’s reaction was not "awe" of the Lord, but genuine "fear." He delays moving the Ark as a result.
* David set a godly example for the people in spite of his sin. He was truly repentant, desiring to please God, sacrificing and dancing before the Lord. As a result, God prospered David in all that he did.
* Under David, Israel was probably as strong as any other contemporary power.

1. **God reveals David as the line through which the Messiah will come**.

In response to David's request to build God a house, God promises to "build a house for David" (2 Sam 7:5-16).

* Divine assurance that David’s son would succeed him on the throne (2 Sam 7:12)
* “Your offspring” (the "seed of David") included more than Solomon. God is promising that he is going to establish his throne forever (2 Sam 7:16). In spite of sin among David's descendants, this is another link in the series of Messianic promises given in the Old Testament. God is gradually unfolding the fulfillment of the initial commitment that victory over sin, death and Satan would come through the “seed of the woman” (Gen 3:15).
* Revelation of the Messiah as an individual, and his eternal kingdom begins to take shape, continuing to unfold throughout Israel's history. Prophecies begin to come concerning the Messiah's relationship to the line of David: Isa 9:6-7; Ps. 89:19-37; Isa 11:1 (“a root from the stump of Jesse” - Jesse is David's father). The fulfillment of the promise in an individual began to unfold already in Gen. 49:10 "The sceptre will not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs." David was from the tribe of Judah.

1. **David’s reign was Israel’s Golden Era**

* David was the ideal king. More than any other king he typified the ideal combination of power and goodness. God had made a covenant with David, and although God's judgement would fall on individual kings for their sins, his steadfast love, covenant loyalty (“hesed”) would not be withdrawn from David’s house – an unconditional promise (2 Sam 23:5)
* Military victories on every front: Conquering enemies led to a time of peace and prosperity. Conquered enemies had to pay tribute of gold, silver, bronze. Israel controlled the fertile crescent, trade routes, and rich natural resources (iron, copper)
* David's reign was a period the Israelites looked back to as the "Golden Era," particularly when the nation began to fall apart, and later came under the rule of oppressing foreign powers. They longed for the promised "Messiah, the Anointed One" to come from David's lineage, one who would:
* Reunite Israel
* Restore Jerusalem to a place of prestige among the nations
* Restore peace and prosperity

In times of trouble people prayed ardently to God to remember His covenant with David, to restore the kingdom to Israel. The theological importance of the kingdom, the city of David, Davidic dynasty, and covenant with David increased.

Knowing this history, we perhaps better understand the disciples' question of Jesus in Acts 1:6, *"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* The constant temptation of Jesus was to restore the political kingdom of David. When Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offered them to him to reign over, when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Peter's persuasion to not go the route of the cross all imply taking the route of political power. The Jews always saw that restoration of David's kingdom as the ultimate goal.

1. **The sin of David:** led to the disunity that resulted in the decline and fall of the kingdom of Israel. It is prophesied by Nathan in 2 Sam 12:10-12: *"The sword will not depart from your household..."*

* Absalom avenges Amnon’s (his half-brother) sin against Tamar, his sister, killing his brother (2 Sam 13:20- 29)
* Absalom leads a coup trying to overthrow David, openly lies with David's concubines *("I will take your wives..."* 2 Sam 16:21-22), but dies in the attempt
* Adonijah is killed by Solomon, his younger brother when he tries to seize the throne (1Kings 2:23-25)

**Question: How does God’s forgiveness of David line up with these consequences? What are the implications for us?**

Although David is forgiven (Solomon, his second son by Bathsheba, God instructed to be named “loved of the Lord,” a foreshadowing of his future reign) the consequences of his sin remain.

**C. The Reign of Solomon** He reigned 40 years

1. He was the last king to rule over Israel as a United Kingdom. It had lasted only 120 years.
2. Solomon became a symbol of wealth, the glory of the empire. Not even David had ascended to such heights of worldly splendour. He initiated a vast building program: temple, palace, cities, etc. (1 Kings 5-7; 9:10-26), gathered a large harem (I Kings 11:1-3); accumulated vast wealth, complete with commercial enterprises and military programs, and was renowned for his wisdom. His success is summarized in 1Kings 10:23-24. He was admired by everyone.

**Question: What led to his downfall? What effects did it have on the nation?**

**David and Solomon: A Study in Contrasts**

David: came to the throne the hard way, up from the bottom. A shepherd, a warrior, he never rose so high that he was cut off from his common roots and his people. He was not perfect, but when he sinned, his repentance was deep and genuine. Ps 51 was written by him when Nathan confronted him with his adultery. Even with his sin, God said of him: “I have found David...a man after my own heart” (1 Sam 13:13-14; Acts 13:22).

Solomon: born in a king's household, sheltered, and grew up with extravagance. He ruled with absolute power, fulfilling all that Samuel had warned of in 1 Sam 8:10-18: heavy taxation, conscription, forced labour.

* He began with a concern for the things of God (1 Kings 3:3-10), but ended giving his sanction to the foreign gods of his wives, even building them temples to be worshipped, introducing false gods into Israel.
* He began with great wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34) wrote more than 3000 proverbs, and 1000 songs, but ended up with a materialistic philosophy that led to rebellion among the Israelites. He conscripted Israelites for service, introduced forced labour for building projects, and traded Israelites' property to foreign kings to raise money for his projects.

**Conclusion:** Kings were intended to be God's spokesmen, to lead people spiritually. When they did not obey it resulted in disunity, loss of power, and affected the whole nation. A nation cannot rise above the godliness of its leaders. The destiny of nations and individuals is dependent on their obedience to God.

Throughout this period, indeed from her inception, Israel had yet to become the blessing God intended. There were bright moments (God’s reputation among the nations as he established the kingdom of Israel; Solomon’s wisdom attracting the nations). Nevertheless, she became more and more focused on God's promise to bless her, rather than her destiny. In fact, Israel never did fully become that blessing, except that the Messiah came through her.

The Golden Era was the time when she could have become a blessing, a real spiritual leader and light to the Gentiles more than any other. She had no military or economic concerns, but she did not reach out, and so the nation began its decline.

**Question: What lessons can we learn from these three kings as individuals, and as a nation?**