

David #1 • Introduction

During our journey through The Book of Ruth we saw how the Bible stories regularly contain multiple layers of meanings and truths. In particular, they point to other Bible stories, making comparisons and contrasts with the way the characters behave.

Today we're going to begin a series of studies that centre on Ruth's great-grandson and one of the best known characters in the Bible.

David.

David was born around 1000 BC in Bethlehem. Yes, that Bethlehem.

His father, Jesse, was a shepherd, and David learned his father's trade.

David was born two generations after Ruth lived, a time when the last, and greatest judge Samuel was (unsuccessfully) attempting to keep Israel following the one true God.

The era that David lived in was the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. Iron was more difficult to work with than bronze, but iron tools and weapons were more durable and effective.

The nation of Israel was surrounded by hostile nations, including the Egyptians, Edomites, Arameans and the Neo-Hittites.

And cutting them off from the Mediterranean was a people that you have probably heard of, the Philistines.

They were a sea-faring, warrior nation, think 'Middle-eastern Vikings'. They were skilled in using iron to make tools and weapons, including a new invention, the horse-drawn chariot, which acted as a mobile platform for archers to terrify and decimate foot soldiers.

Chariots gave the Philistines a massive military advantage, in a similar way to which the invention of tanks did in the First World War.

At the time David was born, the Philistines were a constant threat to Israel's security, regularly making raids on farms and villages.

Unlike most of their neighbours, the Israelites were not ruled by a king. Israel was comprised of a number of tribal families, linked by their shared history, and their worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses.

Each of the tribes selected a council of elders who made decisions about local laws and how best to ensure the prosperity of their people.

For inter-tribal decisions, the position of 'judge' evolved. Usually a respected, religious person, they worked to unify the tribes under God's command to strengthen the nation both morally and militarily.

However, as the Book of Judges shows, the tribes rarely listened to what the judges said, and frequently the judges didn't listen to what God said, resulting in Israel becoming a weak and fragmented nation.

And so, when David was still a child, a group of Israel's leaders approached the last and greatest judge, Samuel and told him that they wanted Israel to become a monarchy.

Samuel tries to persuade them to change their minds, but they are insistent, and when Samuel prays about it, God tells him to go along with their request.

Samuel reluctantly does as he is told, and is led by God to anoint a tall, good looking Benjamite called Saul as king.

Saul starts out well, uniting Israel to, with God's help, wage a successful battle against an invading Ammonite army, and another against the Philistines.

However, Saul becomes increasingly arrogant, and Samuel tells him that his kingship will be transferred to someone more suitable.

Saul continues to win battles for a time, but as he drifts away from obedience to God, he loses both his authority and his sanity.

Meanwhile, Samuel begins his search for a new king, eventually finding him in a family of shepherds in Bethlehem.

And that man was David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth.

God sends Samuel to anoint David with oil. Samuel does so and leaves. It is not clear from the story whether David or anyone else understood what had happened, and David goes back to his shepherding.

Meanwhile Saul is becoming more and more paranoid. It would appear that long before it became 'a thing' in our culture, music therapy was recognised in ancient Israel, because Saul asks his courtiers to find him a minstrel to play and sing to him to sooth his mental distress.

One of Saul's attendants has heard of a skilled musician who lives a few miles away in Bethlehem.

OK, you're there ahead of me. It's David!

His lyre playing proves to be successful in lifting Saul's moods, and soon David has become one of Saul's favourite people.

During this time, the Philistines launch another offensive against Israel, and this time they bring a heavily armed giant called Goliath.

David, with God's help, kills Goliath.

A delighted Saul makes David a commander in his army, and David becomes the hero of the Israelite nation, with crowds of dancing women greeting the returning army with a song that went...

*Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.*

At this point Saul's love of David evaporates, to be replaced by deep envy and paranoid suspicion.

Saul makes several attempts on David's life, and David eventually flees to the surrounding hill country.

There he gathers a band of followers, and gets involved in a number of, sometimes questionable, adventures.

Saul unsuccessfully tries to track down and kill David.

Saul's end comes when he and his army once again battle the Philistines. Saul and his three sons are all killed, and the Israelite army is defeated.

With Saul dead, David is told by God to return to Hebron, south of Bethlehem, where he is crowned king of Judah. However, the northern Israelite tribes have their own idea as to who they want as king, Ishbosheth, (OK, no one can pronounce Ishbosheth, so I'm going to use his alternative name, Ishbaal) Saul's youngest son.

And so, for the next 7 years Israel is plunged into a civil war, with Israel being split between the northern tribes loyal to Ishbaal and the southern tribes loyal to David.

With God's guidance, David's military prowess and leadership skills prove to be superior to Ishbaal's, and eventually he is crowned king. Israel and Judah are once again united!

David chooses Jerusalem as the royal capital, which given its elevated and central location was a natural choice.

Just one problem, it was occupied by a Canaanite people called the Jebusites.

David once again exhibits his excellent military skills and using commando tactics he defeats the Jebusites and captures Jerusalem, which he modestly names 'the City of David.'

David then works on making Jerusalem the administrative and religious hub of Israel. This is accomplished, although not without some hitches.

Israel's Philistine neighbours had been watching the civil war with delight, nothing is better than seeing your enemies killing one another.

They respond to David's enthronement by launching two large military operations against Israel, but are unsuccessful in both, and Philistia becomes a vassal (servant) nation to Israel.

David continues his expansion project, and at the height of his reign had tripled Israel's area of influence.

This is where the story should end with 'and they all lived happily ever after'.

But this is where we come to the darkest time in the story of David.

One spring day when his armies are away on a campaign, David is standing on his palace balcony when he sees a beautiful woman bathing in one of the residences below the palace.

He sends a servant to find out who she is, and is told that her name is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's elite warriors.

By this time David is a rich and powerful man, with a large number of wives and concubines (mistresses).

But, as history regularly shows us, enough is rarely enough, and the man who God called 'a man after his own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14), has Bathsheba brought to the palace so he can have sex with her.

Some time later, Bathsheba discovers that she is pregnant. David knows that it is definitely his child, because Uriah has been away on military service for months.

Worried at the scandal this might cause, David gets Uriah leave from the battle, assuming that Uriah will have sex with his wife and that the child will be assumed to be Uriah's.

However, Uriah doesn't sleep with his wife, and David sinks to a new moral low, organising for Uriah to be sent to an area of the battlefield where he is certain to be killed.

Uriah is killed, and Bathsheba is added to David's harem.

Job done.

Except that Nathan, one of God's prophets, confronts David with his sin. And David, rather than having Nathan killed, takes responsibility for his actions, and confesses his sins against God, Bathsheba and Uriah.

Sadly the child dies at birth, but soon after David and Bathsheba conceive another child, who would be named 'Solomon'.

One of David's many daughters was Tamar, who grew up to be a beautiful young woman.

David's eldest son, Amnon, becomes sexually obsessed with Tamar, and rapes her.

As is so often the case with powerful leaders, David was not good at disciplining his own children. When he finds out what Amnon has done, he is furious, but does nothing to punish Amnon for what he has done.

Tamar's brother, Absalom, a handsome, arrogant man, takes the law into his own hands and murders Amnon.

Knowing he could be stoned to death, Absalom flees Israel. David enters a deep depression that lasts for 3 years but does not try to contact Absalom. David is eventually persuaded to pardon Absalom, and he allows him to return to the royal palace.

However, although David forgave Absalom for murdering Amnon, Absalom did not forgive David for his mishandling of Tamar's rape.

Absalom leads a rebellion against David, and David flees the capital with his family. Much trickery and intrigue follows, but Absalom is eventually killed, and David is restored to his palace in Jerusalem.

By now David is an old man, and has ruled Israel for over 30 years.

As his health begins to fail, a succession struggle begins.

David's eldest son, Adonijah, assumes that he is going to be the new king. However, many believe that Solomon would make a better ruler.

David dithers over naming a successor, and Adonijah employs a priest to anoint him as the ruler of Israel.

When Nathan the prophet hears about this, he gets Bathsheba to inform David of Adonijah's treachery. David finally makes a decision, and has Solomon anointed and crowned as king of Israel.

This is a popular decision, and Adonijah's plot is foiled.

Not long after this, David gives his deathbed blessing to Solomon, along with a lengthy to do list of people he wants Solomon to kill.

And so David dies and is buried in the city that bore his name.

The end.

But of course, it wasn't the end. In fact, in many ways, it wasn't even the beginning. Because the story of David is much more than a history of an ancient king.

In fact, up until the 1990s, many historians thought he was a legendary, fictional character, until archaeologists discovered the Tel Dan Stele in 1993. It dates to the ninth century BC, and commemorates the victory of an Aramean king, Hazael, over the 'king of Israel' and the 'House of David'.

Not for the first time, the Bible was proved to be historically reliable.

So David is a historical figure. But he is also a key figure in God's plan of redemption, which becomes especially obvious in the way he is interpreted by the authors of the New Testament.

Firstly, Jesus is viewed as the 'son of David', the one who fulfils the Jewish messianic hope prophesied by the prophets in the Old Testament, the one who will restore the Davidic family line.

This is laid out in the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament, with Matthew emphasising Jesus' place in David's genealogical line,

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David.

Matthew 1:1a

along with Jesus being born in the same town as David, Bethlehem.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea...

Matthew 2:1a

Similar stuff is seen in Romans 1:2-3

...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David.

The link with Jesus Christ and David is something we are used to singing about in hymns and choruses, which makes it easy for us to take it for granted, without questioning or understanding why it is there.

When, as Christians, we read about David in the Old Testament, it will help us to understand him better when we realise that he is what is known as a ‘type’, a foreshadowing, of Jesus, Israel’s true messiah.

Over the coming months, I am going to take a look at a number of ways in which the story of David helps us to understand themes that occur throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments.

My aim is to provide us with a framework that helps us to better understand the imagery that runs through the pages of the Bible.

Just as when we studied The Book of Ruth, I hope that there will be ‘a ha’ moments that enrich our appreciation of just how special the message contained in the Scriptures is.

As we do this, we will see how so many aspects of David anticipated Jesus, and were fulfilled in his life. And as we do so, I want us to reflect on how these truths should be reflected in the way we live our lives.

As Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy...

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14–17

The ‘Holy Scriptures’ Paul is referring to is what we call the Old Testament... being quoted in what would eventually become the Holy Scriptures of the *New Testament*!

Christians are to embrace the teaching of both Testaments, because they ‘*are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*’.

2 Timothy 3:15b

Why? Because...

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

I’m going to conclude today’s talk with one of my favourite Bible stories. Not just because it is one of my favourites, but because it demonstrates how tightly linked the Old and New Testaments are.

Found in the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke, it is the third day after Jesus was crucified, and two of his despondent followers, assuming that their Rabbi is dead, are trudging their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus...

Starting from chapter 24, verse 13 we read...

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with

each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.

He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

You have got to love Jesus... can you imagine the barely concealed smirk on his face as he waits for their reply...

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they

recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

Luke 24:13-27

Can you even begin to conceive what that would have been like? Having Jesus, the man you thought was dead, explain to you personally what the Old Testament taught about him, including why he had to die?

In their joy and excitement, they forget about their trip to Emmaus, and rush back to Jerusalem to tell the rest of Jesus' followers what has just happened. The disciples meet together, and as they do this Jesus 'appears' among them.

We aren't told exactly how Jesus does this, but his resurrection body doesn't seem to be limited in the same way his physical body was.

They are, not surprisingly, 'startled and frightened'.

Jesus calms them down, then tells them...

'This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

Luke 24:40-49

Wow...

the Old Testament helps us to understand the New Testament.

The Old Testament is the promise of God's plan to save the world from sin, a plan that the New Testament records gets fulfilled in Jesus.

And over the coming months, we are going to look at some specific examples of how the New Testament writers use the Old Testament, and specifically David to explain the Gospel to its readers and hearers.

Let the journey begin!