

The Power of the Prophets

Worksheet for Week 2

The Birth of the Kingdom of Israel

This course is titled *The Power of the Prophets: from Moses to Jesus*. We'll be taking a look at some of God's great prophets and look at the story of God and his people through the words and actions of these prophets. Each Weekly Worksheet will give you an overview for the segment of Israel's story that we'll be talking about that week. The Daily Bible Readings will be drawn from (1) significant stories about the prophet(s) for that week or (2) passages from their oracles (messages) that are particularly important to Christians.

Israel's Birth

Let's first get straight what we mean by "Israel."¹ "Israel" was the collective name of the twelve tribes descended from Jacob, Abraham's grandson. After spending a night wrestling with a stranger who turns out to be God, Jacob was given the name "Israel," which in Hebrew means something like "one who strives with God." From that time on, the name "Israel" would not only designate the ancestor Jacob, but also God's people, as in the twelve tribes "of Israel." Later, it would take on national or political meaning as well. Thus, David would be King of Israel. Your reading of the Bible will be helped by keeping in mind that "Israel" sometimes refers to the people of God and at other times refers to a political entity.

Because "Israel" can refer to God's people, the story of Israel's birth properly begins with God's choosing of Abraham and the stories of his sons and grandsons (all in Genesis). Jacob had twelve sons whose families were stranded in Egypt at the end of Genesis. Exodus tells the story of how the Israelites (meaning the twelve tribes!) had become enslaved in Egypt and were freed from their bondage by God, through the work of Moses, who then led the Israelites to the borders of Canaan, the land that God had long before promised to Abraham (Genesis 12).

Because he had disobeyed God, Moses did not lead the Israelites into Canaan. That was left to Joshua. Some of the land was conquered during Joshua's time, but not all. The book of Judges continues the story of the Israelites conquest and settlement of Canaan, but it is not a story with a happy ending. The Israelites were God's people and they were to be different from all the peoples around them. Indeed, they were to have no king ~ for YHWH² was to be their king. Thus, in these early years, Israel was ruled by judges such as Gideon and Deborah. But the people continually drifted away from God until, finally, all God's people did what was right in their own eyes, not in the eyes of God (see the last verse in Judges!). The people clamored and begged for a king like everyone else had . . . so, in the end, God gave them one.

The Birth of the Kingdom of Israel

The book of Samuel³ tells the story of Samuel, the last of Israel's judges and one of Israel's great prophets. Samuel would anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. After Saul's disobedience to God and his descent into madness, Samuel would anoint young David as the second king of Israel in roughly 1000BC. Though Israel would achieve its greatest wealth and political power under David's son, Solomon, it was with David that God made a covenant and it was David who would become revered as Israel's greatest king. As we'll see next week, after Solomon's death the united kingdom of Israel fell apart, splitting into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Samuel himself was a transitional figure in the story of Israel. In 1 Samuel 7 he is the ideal prophetic leader in whom all sorts of authority were invested. With the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, Samuel would set the stage for the prophets who would follow him. Samuel and the later prophets would anoint kings, they would speak to God on behalf of Israel, and they would be the conscience of God's people.⁴

¹In case you are curious . . . "Hebrew" is an ancient alternate designation for the people who would later be known as Israelites and then Jews (for those from Judah or Judea) - the descendents of Abraham (ethnically) and those bound by God's covenant (religious). The derivation of "Hebrew" is uncertain.

²YHWH, יהוה, is the name of God that was given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). The Hebrews wrote without vowels, so the closest we can come is something like "Yahweh." This name of God was so holy that it was only spoken by Israel's high priest in the temple on the Day of Atonement. When the ancient scrolls, such as Genesis, were read, every time the reader came upon YHWH, he would say *Adonai*, the Hebrew word for "Lord." This tradition lives on today in our English translations. Every time YHWH appears in the Hebrew, your Bible will have LORD in small caps. Check out Exodus 3 for example. In verse 2, the Hebrew actually reads "There the angel of YHWH appeared to him . . ."

³We divide it into Samuel 1 and 2, but it is actually a single book that was too large to go on one scroll.

⁴ From the entry on Samuel in the *Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary*. This dictionary is available in the St. Andrew bookstore.

Bible Readings for Week 2

All the readings come from the story of Samuel. Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Day 1 1 Samuel 1 The birth of Samuel	Day 2 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a God calls Samuel
Day 3 1 Samuel 7:2-17 Samuel as the Judge of Israel	Day 4 1 Samuel 8 The people demand a king and Samuel delivers a warning
Day 5 1 Samuel 12 Samuel addresses Israel	Weekly Prayer Concerns