

### **Saul**

Saul didn't start well - He was anointed King because the people rejected God's rule. He then proceeds to annoy Samuel and God at every opportunity - he offers sacrifices and enters battle before he should, he makes rash vows about punishing his men before realising that his own son is the guilty party, he takes plunder from the Amalekites when he was told not to, and even after Samuel has died, Saul practises divination, through the witch of Endor, to talk with Samuel again - much to Samuel's displeasure. Saul tries to kill David and his reign comes to an end he falls on his own sword rather than be defeated. Not a good start for the Kings of Israel!

### **David and Jonathan**

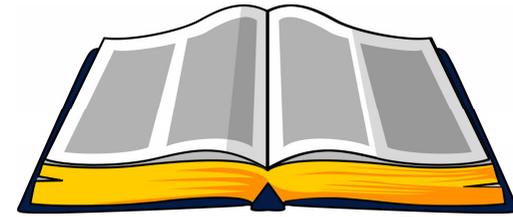
Saul's son Jonathan and David strike up an amazing friendship - to the point where Jonathan is willing to stand up to his Father to protect David. Their friendship has been the cause of much debate. Some would cite their relationship as being a clear example of a same-sex relationship in the Bible, yet this risks falling into the trap of claiming any close relationship between men has to be sexual at its core. The biblical account of their relationship uses none of the euphemisms which the Bible often uses - feet, thighs, and others (see Song of Songs for more!!!). David and Jonathan represent the height of a man's love for one who is closer than a brother. To celebrate this relationship, whilst affirming the fact that David marries and has a family, is surely why the relationship is so clearly recorded. Close relationships with others are possible and celebrated in scripture, not just those which include a sexual element. To portray David and Jonathan otherwise is to stretch the Bible too far!

### **David and Bathsheba**

Truth be told David's lust gets him into a lot of trouble. He spies Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite and "invites her over". In time David discovers that Bathsheba is pregnant and, wanting to avoid a scandal, calls Uriah back from battle to "enjoy" a break with his wife. Uriah refuses to enjoy what his men cannot and David is thwarted. So David plans a spot of murder and has Uriah abandoned in the battle and killed. He then takes Bathsheba as his wife and scandal is averted. What she thought of this turn of events we are not told. David thinks he has got away with it, but God has other ideas and Nathan the prophet is tasked with confronting the king. The difference between Saul and David appears to be that David is willing to repent rather than make excuses. David repents publically in the words we now have as Psalm 51.

### **Solomon**

Where Saul is bad from the start and David falls and is restored, Solomon starts at the high point. Told he can have any gift from God he asks for Wisdom and is granted it. He is the richest King in the region and others come to marvel at his wealth. However, he has inherited his father's problem with the ladies - foreign wives lead Solomon into adultery. His kingship falters and in the end dissolves. After his death the nation splits and the stage is set for a succession of bad kings and much grief.



A YEAR WITH THE BIBLE

Part

4

## JUDGES AND KINGS

So the people of Israel are established in the Promised Land - roll the credits, big orchestral ending, audience leaves... well not quite, because the command to Joshua to take the land is not fully carried out. There remain many people who worship gods other than Yahweh (the special name God gave Moses which is written as "the LORD" in the NIV translation).

After Joshua's death we begin to see a recurring theme in the Bible, "Once again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD". God then raises up individuals - the Judges - to lead the people and bring them back to God. The last judge is Samuel, who is born at a time when "the word of the LORD was rare". God calls him to be a prophet, one who speaks God's word into the life of the nation. Samuel establishes the nation under God but then when he gets old the people say to him "Give us a King to lead us". Samuel objects but God says to him it is not Samuel that the people have rejected but God himself. Samuel relents and under God's guidance anoints Saul as King (the King was proclaimed by having oil poured onto his head - he is "anointed" - one of the names given to Jesus - "Christ" - means "anointed one").

Saul however proves untrustworthy. Instead of trusting God he chooses to force his own agenda. He does what Samuel should have been left to do. God speaks through Samuel that the line of Kings will not follow Saul but another. In secret Samuel is led to the house of Jesse where Jesse's youngest son David is anointed King. He goes on to defeat Goliath, to win great battles for Saul but then to be outlawed, before finally Saul's son Jonathan dies, Saul kills himself and David takes the throne.

David proves to be far from perfect, a little lust, adultery and murder along the way but, unlike Saul, David listens to the words of Nathan the prophet and repents. Trouble follows David's house when his son tries to depose him, but eventually David regains the throne and establishes the King's palace in Jerusalem. His son Solomon (famed for his wealth and wisdom) takes the throne and builds the first temple to house the ark of the covenant - the chest which contains the tablets Moses brought down from the mountain. Solomon descends into idolatry and with a few exceptions his descendants follow suit. The Kingdom splits into Judah and Israel and it all starts to go downhill!

## Judges

**Othniel - (3: 7-11)** - Caleb's nephew who slew the first King to enslave Israel

**Ehud - (3:12-30)** - Assassinates Eglon, the fat Moabite King. He attacks the king in his private apartments leaving his sword in the body of the dead man because the fat closes over the hilt and he can't get it out again. Ehud manages to hide his sword from the guards because he is left handed and they checked the wrong side - which just goes to prove that prejudice is fatal!!

**Deborah - (4:1-5:31)** - Deborah is the only female judge and she persuades Barak to defeat the Canaanites. The enemy general Sisera hides in a woman's tent (against the rules) but Jael, the woman in question, decides to side with Israel and drives a tent peg through Sisera's head straight into the ground!

**Gideon - (6:1-8:35)** - An unlikely hero, Gideon is finally persuaded by God to attack the Philistines but is not impressed when God reduces his fighting force from 32,000 to just 500. Gideon wins but the victory is clearly God's doing. Sadly Gideon is like the book of Judges in one man. He is blessed by God, he is hugely successful and then he turns to foreign gods. He embodies the moral confusion and decay of the times.

**Abimelech - (9:1-57)** - He was not called by God but he led Israel for 3 years by virtue of murdering almost all of his brothers!!!

**Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon - (10:1 - 12:15)** - All ruled Israel with varying degrees of success. The fact that Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter having made a very rash promise to God tells you that they weren't necessarily following the LORD!

**Samson - (13:1-16:31)** - Everyone knows the story of Samson with the long hair. Samson is a strange judge. He is motivated by an intense hatred for the Philistines but at the same time chases one of their women to be his wife. He is clever, witty and amazingly strong, a man of God who sleeps with prostitutes and falls for totally unsuitable women.

Samson is in some ways, a picture of Israel - a set-apart and special hero, who constantly compromises and blurs the rules. However, Samson is always careful to give the glory to God and God provides for him.

In the end brought low by the schemes of Delilah "He did not realise that the LORD had stopped helping him" (16:20) and he is caught, blinded and chained to the temple of Dagon. Samson repents, calls on God and God gives him the strength to bring the house down - right on top of the Philistines!!

## The Kings of Israel and Judah

