

Lecture 10: David's Covenant, Solomon's Temple, and the Long Way Down

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 30 minutes

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Before you watch

A shepherd fells the serpent-voiced giant, a prince gives away his throne, and God swears a dynasty that will never end. Dr. Schreiner reads the covenant with David through the psalms, watches Solomon carry Israel to Eden's doorstep and then down again, and follows Kings through lions, whispers, and exile to a released prisoner who reigns over nothing. Listen for why fifteen hundred years run backwards, and for the King the whole story will not let you forget.

The lecture, section by section

1. Goliath and Jonathan

David fells Goliath, who taunts Israel with the serpent's own voice, and then the book gives us Jonathan, one of its most remarkable figures. Everything in Jonathan's character says he would have made a fantastic king, and he is the one man in Israel with a claim to the throne. Instead he sides with David against his own father and his own future: you will be king, he tells him, and I will be second to you. He is the Old Testament's John the Baptist: he must increase, and I must decrease. Meanwhile Saul hunts David daily, and God does not give David into his hand: those who belong to God finally triumph.

2. The king in waiting: mercy and humility

David shows what kind of king he will be before he wears a crown. Twice he spares Saul when Saul's life is in his hand. And riding with four hundred men to slaughter Nabal's house, he stops, listens humbly to a woman, and blesses God for Abigail, who kept him from evil, and who tells him the LORD will make him a sure house. Hannah's song is unfolding in real time: Saul brought low, David lifted up.

3. Jerusalem and the ark

As king, David chooses Jerusalem, a capital bridging north and south and bound to no tribe, and his love for the LORD shows in bringing up the ark and in his longing to build the LORD a house.

4. The covenant with David

Second Samuel 7 is the mountain: David's offspring will endure forever, the promise Psalm 89 sings at length. And Schreiner, following Hamilton's careful reading, hears Genesis 3:15 underneath: David and his sons crush their enemies to dust beneath their feet; in Psalm 72 the king's foes lick the dust, which is what serpents do; Psalm 8 puts all things under the feet of man, and Hebrews 2 reads it of Jesus; Psalm 110 seats David's son and Lord at God's right hand until every enemy is a footstool. In a sense, always in a sense, for he is a sinner, David is a new Adam and a new Abraham.

5. The land becomes the world

Through the king, the covenant with Abraham comes to fulfillment. Psalm 2: ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession. Psalm 72: rule from sea to sea, kings of Tarshish and Sheba bringing tribute, and the Magi will one day do exactly that, all kings bowing, all nations serving him. Notice what has happened to the land: in the messianic psalms the promised land has stretched to the whole world. The kingdom under the king is creation-wide.

6. An eternal dynasty, no presuming kings

The heart of the covenant is dynasty. Saul kept his throne for life, but no son of his succeeded him; to David God swears that his house, kingdom, and throne will stand forever, and that oath is now kept in Jesus Christ, reigning at the Father's right hand, with more still to come. Yet the covenant disciplines as it endures: when your son does wrong, I will discipline him with the rod of men, but my hesed, my covenant love, will not depart from him as it departed from Saul. Ultimately unconditional, conditional for every individual king: no king may sin and presume on grace, and the discipline ran so deep that for centuries no Davidic king reigned at all, while the prophets, Hosea to Zechariah, kept promising a new David, even from exile.

7. David is not the one

For all his greatness, David murders Uriah and takes Bathsheba: he is not the promised one. Why then is the kingdom not torn from him as from Saul? Because when Nathan says you are the man, David answers with three words and no excuses: I have sinned. God forgives; the consequences still tear through his family for the rest of the book; and the book's closing altar points beyond itself, to the temple's future site and, canonically, to a better sacrifice. Who then is the new Adam the story keeps auditioning? Not Abraham, not Saul, not David, not Israel: every candidate is flawed. It is Jesus, the last Adam. And why does God tell the story through so many failures? So that we see it is our story: apart from grace, human beings cannot bring in the kingdom; over and over, our weakness and his strength.

8. A question of sovereignty

Asked about the census, where Samuel says the LORD incited David and Chronicles names Satan, Schreiner answers: both. God is sovereign over all that Satan does, and Scripture's naming of intermediary causes helps with the problem of evil, distancing God from the doing of the evil he sovereignly governs, exactly as in Job. He commends Paul Helm on providence and D. A. Carson on suffering for those who want to go deeper.

9. Kings: history from above

First and Second Kings weave theology and history, and their method is the opposite of modern history-from-below: we learn almost nothing of common life, because the story is told entirely through the kings. That is the theology: as the kings go, so go the people, and no merely human king can lead God's people. Two refrains govern the whole: the LORD alone is God, and the word of the LORD is always fulfilled.

10. Solomon: Eden at the door

Solomon's early reign reads like the promises arriving. Judah and Israel as many as the sand by the sea, eating, drinking, and rejoicing; dominion from the Euphrates to Egypt's border, Abraham's own map; every man under his vine and fig tree; the Queen of Sheba coming to hear wisdom. Then the temple: seven years to build, as creation took seven days, and at its heart an inner sanctuary that is a perfect cube overlaid with gold, God dwelling among a happy people. A thousand years from Abraham, and paradise seems at the door.

11. The unraveling

Then down again. Solomon loves many foreign women, and they turn his heart to foreign gods, the very thing Deuteronomy 17 warned a king against and the first commandment forbids. The kingdom is torn, one tribe left to David's house for the covenant's sake, and Jeroboam plants golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Everything on the cusp of blessing, and then the fall, again.

12. The man of God and the lion

First Kings 13 tells the strangest and most instructive of stories. A man of God cries against Jeroboam's altar, naming Josiah centuries in advance, and is commanded to eat nothing and return another way. An old prophet lies him into dinner, and on the road home a lion kills him, then stands beside the donkey and the body, eating neither. The lion was not hungry; the lion was obedient. The point of the story is the point of the whole book: the word of the LORD always comes true, and the word of God, not the word of any man, however venerable, is the authority. Even a godly prophet who sets aside the word he received bears the consequence.

13. Baal versus the LORD

From Elijah onward the great contest runs: Baal, the storm and fertility god, against the LORD who actually rules the rain. Carmel settles the question in fire, and then Elijah, fresh from victory, collapses under Jezebel's threat, despairing that nothing has changed. At Sinai the LORD answers him in a whisper: not by earthquake and not today, but surely and quietly, Baal worship will be rooted out of Israel, and Elijah is commissioned toward that end. And so it happens: the word is fulfilled.

14. Exile, a glimmer, and the laboratory

As the kings go, so goes the nation: every northern king does evil, and the north falls in 722 BC; Judah follows in 586. Yet Kings ends with Jehoiachin, David's heir, released from prison, fed at the king of Babylon's table: out of prison, reigning over nothing, a glimmer that the promise is not revoked. Step back and count: nearly fifteen hundred years from Abraham, and the offspring are not even in the land; the story is running backwards under the covenant curses. Why is it told this way? Because Israel is God's laboratory. Choose any people you like and the story ends the same, for the evil in us is radical and we are gullible about our own goodness. The kingdom cannot come from below. Redemption is coming through Israel, but not at all in the way anyone thought.

Scripture in this lecture

1 Samuel 17, 23, 25; 2 Samuel 7, 12, 22, 24; 1 Kings 4, 6, 11, 13, 18, 19; 2 Kings 25; Psalm 2, 8, 72, 89, 110; Deuteronomy 17; Matthew 2; Hebrews 2

Key terms

The sure house

The covenant of 2 Samuel 7: an eternal dynasty for David, disciplined king by king yet never revoked, kept now in the reigning Christ.

Hesed

God's covenant love, sworn never to depart from David's line as it departed from Saul.

Enemies under his feet

The psalms' picture of the Davidic king crushing the serpent's line of Genesis 3:15: foes licking the dust, all things beneath his feet.

Land become world

In the messianic psalms the promised land stretches to the ends of the earth: the kingdom under the king is creation-wide.

History from above

The method of Kings: the nation's story told entirely through its kings, because as the kings go, so go the people.

God's laboratory

Israel's fifteen-hundred-year story proving that no people could have done better: sin is radical, and the kingdom cannot come from below.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. What is remarkable about Jonathan?
 - A. He never met David
 - B. He fought Goliath first
 - C. Though heir to the throne, he humbly supported David as the coming king
 - D. He became a priest at Shiloh
2. What restrained David from slaughtering Nabal's household?
 - A. A warning dream
 - B. Abigail's appeal, which David humbly received as the LORD keeping him from evil
 - C. Saul's sudden arrival
 - D. Nabal's apology
3. What is the heart of the covenant with David?
 - A. An eternal dynasty: his house, kingdom, and throne established forever
 - B. A promise of unmatched wealth
 - C. The conquest of Egypt
 - D. A new code of law

4. How do the messianic psalms echo Genesis 3:15?
 - A. They quote it word for word
 - B. They mention Eden by name
 - C. They retell the flood
 - D. The king's foes are crushed beneath his feet and lick the dust, as serpents do
5. In Psalm 72, what has happened to the promised land?
 - A. It has shrunk to Jerusalem
 - B. It has stretched to the whole earth: rule from sea to sea
 - C. It has moved to Babylon
 - D. It is divided among twelve tribes forever
6. How is the Davidic covenant both unconditional and conditional?
 - A. It is neither, only a poem
 - B. It depends entirely on each king's goodness
 - C. The dynasty is certain forever, yet each king who sins is disciplined and cannot presume
 - D. It was annulled at the exile
7. What distinguished David from Saul after his great sin?
 - A. He confessed without excuses when Nathan rebuked him: I have sinned
 - B. His sin was less serious
 - C. He offered greater sacrifices
 - D. He abdicated the throne
8. Who, finally, is the new Adam the story keeps seeking?
 - A. David
 - B. Solomon
 - C. Josiah
 - D. Jesus Christ, the last Adam, where every other candidate failed
9. What does it mean that Kings is history from above?
 - A. It was dictated from heaven
 - B. The story is told through the kings, because as the kings go, so go the people
 - C. It ignores all politics
 - D. It records only miracles
10. What did Solomon's early reign resemble?
 - A. The wilderness years
 - B. Egypt's bondage
 - C. A near return of Eden: Abraham's promises visibly arriving and God dwelling in the temple
 - D. The days of the judges

11. What is the point of the man of God and the lion in 1 Kings 13?
- A. The word of the LORD always comes true, and God's word, not any man's, is the authority
 - B. Lions are unpredictable
 - C. Older prophets outrank younger ones
 - D. Hospitality is dangerous
12. Why is Israel's fifteen-hundred-year story told as a decline?
- A. Israel was uniquely wicked among nations
 - B. The records were lost in exile
 - C. The narrators were pessimists
 - D. Israel is God's laboratory: any people would have fared the same, for sin is radical and the kingdom cannot come from below

Talk it over

1. Jonathan gave away a throne with both hands and called it right. Where is God asking you to decrease so that his purposes increase, and what makes Jonathan's kind of gladness possible?
2. David's plain I have sinned stands against Saul's catalogue of excuses. Which do the people in your house hear from you when you are confronted, and what would change if confession came first?
3. Solomon had wisdom, wealth, and the temple, and his heart still turned. What guards a heart that circumstances cannot, and how is that different from what you are currently relying on?

One verse to carry

2 Samuel 7:16, the promise beneath a thousand years: your house and your kingdom will stand forever before me; your throne will be established for all time.

Go further

For the sovereignty questions raised in the Q&A, the lecture recommends Paul Helm's *The Providence of God* and D. A. Carson's *How Long, O Lord*. Psalms 72 and 89 are the covenant's own commentary, and Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty* frames the whole.

Lecture 10 Comprehension Check

1. C. Though heir to the throne, he humbly supported David as the coming king (*outline section 1*)
2. B. Abigail's appeal, which David humbly received as the LORD keeping him from evil (*outline section 2*)
3. A. An eternal dynasty: his house, kingdom, and throne established forever (*outline section 4*)
4. D. The king's foes are crushed beneath his feet and lick the dust, as serpents do (*outline section 4*)
5. B. It has stretched to the whole earth: rule from sea to sea (*outline section 5*)
6. C. The dynasty is certain forever, yet each king who sins is disciplined and cannot presume (*outline section 6*)
7. A. He confessed without excuses when Nathan rebuked him: I have sinned (*outline section 7*)
8. D. Jesus Christ, the last Adam, where every other candidate failed (*outline section 7*)
9. B. The story is told through the kings, because as the kings go, so go the people (*outline section 9*)
10. C. A near return of Eden: Abraham's promises visibly arriving and God dwelling in the temple (*outline section 10*)
11. A. The word of the LORD always comes true, and God's word, not any man's, is the authority (*outline section 12*)
12. D. Israel is God's laboratory: any people would have fared the same, for sin is radical and the kingdom cannot come from below (*outline section 14*)