**St. Margaret’s Church – RCIA**

**Books of 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings**

**The Books of Samuel: [***NAB* pp 283-341]

In their original Hebrew form, the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings were written as a single unit (and in some earlier renditions in English they are all called KINGS [1st to 4th Kings]. They are united in tracing the history of Israel from creation (in Genesis) all the way through to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile (587 BC). Somehow, by the time of the 3rd C AD 1st and 2nd Samuel are considered a single book called *Samouel* = *the called of God.* The early Greek translators of the *Septuagint* [LXX or 70 books], they divided the Book of Samuel into two parts probably because of its length and the impossibility of putting so lengthy a text into one scroll (and this is also what happens with 1st and 2nd Kings). Also in the *Septuagint* these four books were called simply “the four books of Kingdoms.”

Although 1st and 2nd Samuel bare the name of the prophet Samuel, whose birth introduces the work, the main figure in both of these books is DAVID. He is the central figure around whom all the other stories and characters flow. Samuel is the prophet who anoints DAVID as king; Saul is the royal predecessor and father-in-law of DAVID; Jonathan, Saul’s son and heir, is the beloved friend of DAVID; Joab is the loyal general to DAVID, etc… And we first are introduced to DAVID in the *Book of Ruth* 4:22 – literally the last line of *Ruth*, and yet in 1 Samuel 16 David is introduced and becomes the principle focus of the rest of that book and 2nd Samuel. In a sense DAVID takes over as the dominant figure in the Old Testament after MOSES – note Moses is mentioned 767 times in the OT while David is mentioned 1075 times. The second half of 1 Samuel (chapters 16-30) as well as all of 2nd Samuel are dedicated to detailing the life of David. It is interesting to note that the Old Testament pays more biographical attention to David than to any other character mentioned, including Moses. Taken together with the New Testament, the only other figure to out-do David in terms of biographical attention will be Jesus the Christ through the four Gospels.

The main reason for David’s significance in the O.T. is his reception of an *everlasting covenant* from God (see 2 Sam. 7: 8-16; 2 Sam. 23:5 and Psalm 89: 20-37). This is a covenant that bestows on David and his heirs the status of “*son of God*” and universal high king (see again Ps. 89: 27). The sonship was offered to Israel at Sinai (the original covenant) but rejected over and over through idolatry and turning from YHWH. It is now granted to the dynasty of David. Indirectly through the Davidic line of kings, Israel will now share in this new covenant and through this they assimilate the blessings and promises of the previous covenants (Abraham and Moses) – a status that will be the focus of the eschatological hopes of Israel through the prophets.

The great Biblical scholar, Father Raymond Brown, describes this Davidic covenant this way: “*The story of David brings out all the strengths and weaknesses of the beginnings of the religious institution of the kingdom of the people of God… The kingdom established by David… is the closest Old Testament parallel to the New Testament church… To help modern Christians make up their mind on how the Bible speaks to CHURCH issues, it would help if they knew about David and his kingdom, which was also God’s kingdom and whose kings, with all their imperfections, God promised to treat as “sons”* (see 2 Sam. 7:14).” The importance of the books of Samuel are the story of David and his kingdom which reaches its zenith here – followed by a long demise, and it revolves around the kingdom established by David and the covenant sonship that God bestowed on him.

*Structure of 1st and 2nd Samuel*

What helps us understand that these two books were originally a single literary unit comes from what is termed the *incluso* of two length and important poems: the *Song of Hannah* (1 Sam. 2:1-10), and the *Song of David* (2 Sam. 22) coming at the beginning and then nearly at the end of these two books. These two “songs” share a lot of similar references. They see God as a rock [1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:2]; they tell of the providential reversal of fortune [1 Sam. 2:4-8; 2 Sam. 22:28]; the crushing of the enemies of the Lord [1 Sam. 2:10a; 2 Sam. 22:43]; the manifestation of the Lord through the phenomena of storms [1 Sam. 2: 10b;2 Sam. 22:8-15]; and of God’s fidelity to his anointed (in Hebrew, *mashiah* or “messiah”) [1 Sam. 2:10c-e; 2 Sam. 22: 51].

As we can see, in the beginning of 1st Samuel and in the story of Hannah, she expresses faith in the Lord and his “anointed” (*masiah*), but the anointed one is not yet identified. However, by the end of 2 Samuel, the “anointed one” is clearly identified as David, the one through whom God manifests his great ministry of humbling the proud and exalting the humble. In other words, the hopes and prayers of Israel found in Hannah’s song are fulfilled in David and his heirs.

The easiest way of seeing these two books of Samuel would be this outline:

1st Samuel

1. From Eli to Samuel: Eli’s demise, Samuel’s rise (1 Sam. 1-7)
   1. From Samuel’s Birth to Eli’s death (1-4)
   2. The Sojourn of the Ark of the Covenant in Philistia (5-6)
   3. The judgeship of Samuel (7)
2. From Samuel to Saul: Samuel fades, Saul fails (1 Sam. 8-15)
   1. Samuel gives the People Saul as King (8-12)
   2. Saul’s Kingship unravels (13-15)
3. From Saul to David: Saul’s Demise, David’s Rise (1 Sam. 16-31)
   1. David’s Anointing and Early Successes (16:1-18:9)
   2. David on the run from Saul (18:10-30:31)
   3. The death of Saul (31:1-13)

2nd Samuel

1. The House of David vs the House of Saul (2 Sam. 1-4)
   1. Eulogy for Saul and Jonathan (1)
   2. Rivalry between the House of David and the House of Saul (2-3)
   3. The death of Ish-bosheth, Saul’s heir (4)
2. The Triumphs of David (2 Sam. 5-10)
   1. David established as King of Israel in Jerusalem (5-6)
   2. David receives a Covenant (7)
   3. David reaches the Height of his power (8-10)
3. The tragedies of David (2 Sam. 11-20)
   1. The Sin of David: the Bathsheba Affair (11-12)
   2. The Sins of David’s sons: The Usurpation of Absalom (13-20)
4. Epilogue: A Retrospect on David’s reign (2 Sam. 21-24
   1. Plague Ended by Atonement: The Gibeonites (21:1-14)
   2. The Exploits of David’s Men: Giant Killing (21:15-22)
   3. Poem 1: David’s Song of Praise (22)
      1. Poem 2: David’s Last words (23:1-7)
   4. The Exploits of David’s Men (2): The Mighty Men (23:8-39)
   5. Plague Ended by Atonement: The Census and Threshing Floor (24)

While we see in the two books of Samuel the rise and fall of David, there is a balanced assessment of David’s reign that recalls David’s virtue and his vices, but highlights most of all God’s *hesed* (mercy, or covenant fidelity) toward him.

The author of these books uses some very interesting literary techniques, such as allowing two protagonists or major actors to carry out a story line together for long sections (Eli and Samuel, Samuel and Saul, Saul and David, David and Absalom). While there are some similarities there are also quite a few variations. Sometimes we see a sinful ruler replaced by a righteous one, but in the case of Samuel and Saul as well as with David and his son Absalom, both rulers are flawed but the younger challenger is more flawed than the older, so that the transition is aborted and the older ruler retains the power and eventually transfers it to a worthier recipient.

Another thing we notice here is that the characters are more drawn out and complex. The “heroes” are often flawed, and the “villains” have some good virtues. For instance, Eli cannot restrain his sons but is merciful to Hannah. Samuel is enormously successful as a prophet and judge, but a poor father to his sons who all turn out as wicked men. Saul degenerates into attempted murder, massacre, and witchcraft but his heroism and prophetic inspiration are not forgotten and in death he is magnificently eulogized. David is of course the great King of Israel, the central character in these books, but his sins – sloth, adultery, drunkenness, lying and murder of the innocent – are reported in great detail. Finally, Absalom, David’s son, is a wicked usurper and attempts patricide; yet we might sympathize with his indignation over his sister’s rape and the subsequent lack of justice for her, and his final epitaph is filled with tragic pathos (2 Sam. 18:16-18).

OVERVIEW OF 1ST SAMUEL

The opening chapters of 1st Samuel serve as a transition from the time of the Judges and the rise of the monarchy, by focusing on the last of all judges of Israel – SAMUEL. There are three important aspects to the story of Samuel:

First, Samuel has his origin in a miraculous birth. His mother, Hannah (=*grace* or *gracious one*), was barren. An Ephraimite, she was the second wife of Elkanah whose first wife Peninnah, mercilessly taunts her. The tragic story takes a turn at the sanctuary of *Shiloh* at the place of the Tabernacle where she prays and meets the priest (Levite) Eli, who promises that she will conceive a bear a son. She names her son *Shemu’el* = God hears, or name of God), and more remarkably offers her son to the Lord bringing him back to the Tabernacle to be dedicated by means of a livelong vow – that of a *Nazirite* mentioned in the last class. This is more striking as Samuel is given to service in the Tabernacle although NOT from the tribe of Levi. The *Song of Hannah* has direct parallels to Mary’s *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55. The *Song of Hannah* foreshadows the importance of Samuel – that he will be a pivotal figure in transitioning Israel from the rule of the judges to the rule of kings.

The second important aspect here is the contrast between the piety and sacrifice of Hannah and the evil and selfishness of Eli’s sons, who are the official ministers of the Tabernacle in *Shiloh*. Two particular sins of the priestly class (Levites) are seen here: his sons commit liturgical sins by eating the meat from the offered sacrifices and they commit sexual sins having relations with the women serving in the forecourts of the meeting tent (Tabernacle). I should point out that for the Israelites, the relationship between God and his people was viewed as a nuptial covenant and acts of cultic infidelity were considered spiritual adultery. Throughout salvation history, cultic offenses against the Lord’s covenant often coincided with offenses against the matrimonial covenant in the form of sexual immorality. Because of the immorality of his sons, God declares that the priesthood will be taken away from his sons and given to “a faithful priest” who will replace Eli (Samuel).

Third, as a result of the corruption of Israel’s leaders, the great sign of the covenant with God – the ARK OF THE COVENANT – is captured by Philistines – the enemies of Israel who we see throughout these two books of Samuel. Thought their origins are not clear, they are mentioned in ancient Near Eastern texts and they stand out as perfect examples of evil enemies. It is during this invasion of Philistines that God removes Eli from leadership over Israel, the Ark is captured, the Philistines suffer alarming plagues (hemorrhoids, mice, tumors) forcing them to surrender back the Ark and leadership now passes to Samuel, the last of the judges.

*The Rise and Fall of King Saul (1 Sam. 8-15*)

Probably one of the most pivotal events in Samuel is when the Israelites make the decision to request a “king.” Up until this point, YHWH was their only king. He ruled the people through the mediation of prophets and judges. Their demand for a king shows their faulty reasoning: “*The people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, ‘No! but we will have a king over us, that we may also be like all the nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles*” (1 Sam. 8:19-20). So – they want a king to be “like the other nations” which leads them also to idolatry. And they want a military man to “fight their battles” so that they can feel protected – but this means they do no feel or recognize God’s protection – it’s not enough for them. They have given in to fear of their enemies in general and in particular their fear of the Philistines.

The Lord accepts their demand through, but warns them through Samuel about the usual forms of abuse of kings “*like the nations*” – military draft, slavery and taxes – even up to 10%. (1 Sam. 8: 10-18). Because of the people’s insistence, the Lord appoints through Samuel Saul of the Benjamites – a strange choice as the leaders should have come from Judah, not the House of Benjamin. But as we saw in Judges, the tribe of Judah was decimated after adopting the practices of Sodom.

Like so many figures in the two books of Samuel and the following two books of kings, we find people begin with good motives, such as Saul, and then slide into bad – sinful – behaviour. Saul assumed the role of the Levites (priestly tribe), and because of this he loses his dynasty. For disobeying Samuel, he loses his claim to the kingdom, which is torn away from him and given to a more worthy person, David.

When Samuel follows the Lord’s command to choose a new king, this time he returns to the Biblical choice of someone from the tribe of Judah, the son of one Jesse from Bethlehem, who becomes the anointed one (messiah). With the choice or selection of David as king, it becomes clearer in Scripture what it means to be the anointed one of YHWH, becoming the *meshiah-YHWH* filled with the spirit (*ruah*-YHWH) of the Lord. The visible sign of anointing bestows the spirit of the Lord. Interestingly, the first time David displays this “*ruah-YHWH*” is when he plays the lyre to soothe Saul, and David’s playing drives away evil spirits – the display of an exorcistic power. (1 Sam. 16: 14-23).

Through this, David becomes Saul’s armour-bearer (or bodyguard) and this sets up the famous battle between David and the Philistine Goliath. (1 Sam. 17). But David’s success in this battle create a rift with Saul who is filled with jealousy – as Saul’s praise and power wane, the rise in David. While his relationship with Saul grows distant and is filled with suspicion, his friendship with Jonathan and with Michal (Saul’s heir and his daughter) grows. Jumping ahead as these narratives are quite long and complex – Jonathan discovers the treachery of his father Saul against David; in the meantime, Saul marries his daughter Michal (already David’s wife) off to someone else while David is in hiding. By 2nd Samuel, Jonathan has died, Michal reappears at the scene where David dances before the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem, and for her own treachery, she dies barren.

In 2nd Samuel (chapters 5-10) we see the establishment of the Davidic Kingdom and the new Davidic Covenant after the death of Ish-bosheth (the last son of Saul). This begins David’s golden era when all the 12 tribes of Israel gather in Hebron (2 Samuel 5:1-5) to pledge their allegiance to David’s rule over both Israel and Judah. It is at Hebron that we see the distinction between the time David ruled over the southern kingdom (Judah) and when he reigned over Jerusalem and all 12 tribes (including Israel, the northern kingdom).The distinction between the Northern and Southern kingdoms play out throughout the next two books, 1st and 2nd Kings. We also see here that David’s Kingdom is the only one in the Old Testament that is established with a Covenant. In capturing Jerusalem, he makes it the capital and begins the reconstruction of the city and embarks on the arduous task of moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. But aside from its strategic location separating the northern and southern kingdoms, it had no place in the history of Israel until David. But since then, it has been bound up with Israel and the Covenant ever since.

Much of the rest of 2nd Samuel is filled with stories of the transgression and sins of David. The first major sin deals with sloth leading to his temptation to take the wife of one of his most loyal officers. He sees Bathsheba performing a ritual purification, cleansing herself from her monthly cycle as was required in the Mosaic tradition. David rapes her and because of the time of the month, she immediately becomes pregnant. David adds to the sin by arranging the murder of her husband, Uriah, a Gentile who had converted to Judaism. Following Uriah’s murder, David takes Bathsheba as his wife and they have a son, and this act “displeases the Lord,” (2 Sam. 11:27). It is at this point that the prophet Nathan enters and confronts the king with an intriguing parable about a rich man and a poor man and his prized lamb (2 Sam. 12:1-6) which enrages David against the rich man, until the prophet confronts him to tell him, “You are the man.” From this, through Nathan, God puts a curse on the House of David. And through this the last part of the 2nd Book of Samuel tells the tragedies that befall David through his sons, first through his immediate heir, Amnon, who rapes his own half-sister, Tamar (an offense punishable by death), and then with treachery of his son, Absalom, Tamar’s brother, who exacts revenge against Amnon and eventually David. The attempted coup of Absalom is overcome with Absalom himself dying an ignominious death hung and strangulated when his long hair gets caught in a thorn tree as he tries escaping. He is killed by David’s loyal general, Joab, and David’s reign is secure yet again.

The last four chapters of 2 Samuel (21-24) offer a retrospect and epilogue to David’s reign telling of plagues, exploits against giants, and two poems of David in the style of the psalms. The great lesson of these two books and the story of David centers not on David’s character but on God’s fidelity (*hesed*). God exalted David when he was humble and humbled him when he became arrogant. It is God’s covenant promises to David – not David’s strength or character – that give reason for hope. It is therefore significant that the last act of the 2nd Book of Samuel is the preparation and purchase of the site for the future TEMPLE of Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices of atonement will be offered. David’s life required atonement through sacrifice. The hope for Israel is to be found in MERCY and FAITHFULNESS to God who graciously provides a place of worship and a means of atonement for his weak and wayward people.

**The Books of 1st and 2nd Kings [NAB pp 341-404] – 960 BC – 587 BC**

As with 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings were originally one single book, a sequel to Samuel, detailing the approximately 400 years of the history of Israel from the time of David’s successors (about 960 BC) until the collapse of his kingdom at the hand of the Babylonian empire (about 587 BC). The books titles come from the opening words, “When King David was old” – so the story of kings. The central focus if the two books is the rise and fall of the Davidic kingdom. There are hundreds of stories here, but they begin with King Solomon, a long and glorious reign.

The basic structure of 1st and 2nd Kings can be seen in two ways. The first is around 3 parts:

1. One Kingdom under the Son of David, Solomon [1 Kings 1-11]
2. Two Kingdoms (Israel and Judah) [1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17]
3. One Kingdom under the Son of David: Judah alone [2 Kings 18-25]

Although the two books are the stories of many kings of both kingdoms, more importantly the central section of the two books (1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17) tell the story of the divided monarchy arranged around the two great prophets of the period, ELIJAH and ELISHA.

Even before the death of King Solomon, whose rule was 40 years, the tremendous building projects he started – including the Temple of Jerusalem – had required heavy taxes and forced the conscription of skilled laborers and engineers to build them. He also needed to maintain a large army to keep control over the surrounding areas that had been conquered by David. But more telling was how the people had turned against him as he began distancing himself from the religious sensibilities of the Israelites, mostly under the influence of his many foreign wives, who brought into Jerusalem their pagan gods and beliefs.

Solomon’s son Rehoboam was forced to go north to Shechem to discuss the uprisings with the tribal leaders, but when he refused to promote changes to his father’s policies, the ten northern tribes (Israel) broke away from the King and his tribe of Judah. Rehoboam was forced to flew south to Judah and Jerusalem to save his life while the northern leaders chose a new king, Jeroboam. So by 1 Kings 12 we have the establishment of the Northern and Southern kingdom, with the border running east to west from the corner of the Jordan river flowing into the Dead Sea across north of Jerusalem and south of Bethel to the Mediterranean Sea.

Thus begins a long period of rivalry between the divided parts of the Israelites, and the tribal areas of the border (just north of Jerusalem among the tribe of Benjamin) were a constantly-contested area. Judah had a smaller population over against Israel, and its land was more rugged, but the people coming from the tribe of Judah and from Simeon to the south was more unified.

The Northern Kingdom contained far richer and more fertile land, including the Jezreel Valley and the hills north of the Sea od Galilee. Jeroboam named the shrine cities of Dan and Bethel as a way of attracting pilgrims from the south. He had two golden calves built one for each shrine to rival the Temple and the Ark. He also set about fortifying the city of Shechem, Bethel and Penuel, cities where Jacob had lived, so that the people could see and recognize ties to their older historical roots, and place less importance to the ties of David. No prophet who actually lived and worked in the Northern Kingdom such as Elijah, Elisha, Hosea or Amos ever condemned these shrines, although later in history people would consider hem part of the reason the Northern Kingdom was suppressed and sent into exile.

The 200 years from Jeroboam (922-722 BC) when the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians were marked by constant border disputes with Judah as well as battles against the much stronger Assyria. There was also a revolt against Moab (southeast), or struggles against a new Kingdom of the Aramaeans (Damascus). But above all else, this was the period of the rise of Assyria, the great power in Mesopotamia and its ambition to conquer all the western lands it bordered, especially Israel that blocked its expansion west to the Mediterranean.

The first eleven chapters of 1st Kings is taken up with the death of David and the reign of Solomon. The remainder of First Kings deals with the beginnings of the divided monarchy, as mentioned above. It is noted that each reign in both Northern and Southern kingdoms is carefully dated and recorded: “*In the third year of Asa, king of Judah, Baasha, the son of Ahijah, began to reign over Israel in Tizrah, and he reigned for 24 years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam*.” (see 1 Kings 15: 33-34). And each reign had a closing formula like this: “*And Baasha slept with his fathers, and they buried him at Tirzah, and Elah his son reigned in his place*.” (1 Kings 16:6)

Between the opening and closing remarks of each king, the editors would include one or more significant events that the king had done. Aside from the date ascending the throne, the year of the current king of Judah, and the length of his reign, all the kings were judged on whether they were faithful to the YHWH. But it appears none of the kings of the north are found pleasing to the Lord. This reflects the judgment of the authors of 1st and 2nd Kings, who wrote much later from the perspective obviously of Judah, and who interpreted the separation of the northern tribes after Solomon’s death as the beginning of idolatry, the rejection of YHWH and his Temple, and the cause of their eventual fall to Assyria and exile. To see tis clearly, look at 2 Kings 17 (The End of Israel).

The southern kings have a similar way of being listed, but each story also includes information about the king’s mother (see 1 Kings 15: 1-3, 7-8). IN all there were twenty southern kings, including one queen mother, Athaliah, who seized the throne illegally (842-837 BC). All are also judged by their conduct in light of David’s faithfulness to YHWH. Most were found wanting, except for three: ASA, HEZEKIAH and JOSIAH.

First and Second Kings shows that Judah and a more stable history and sense of nationhood. The listing of the queen mother in each case shows the importance of naming the important families or clans that intermarried with the royal household, and the place of honour and authority given to women at the government’s highest level. On the other hand. Northern Israel had nineteen kings in about half the time as Judah, and the northern prophets and tribal leaders were much harsher against their kings.

Many of the kings were assassinated, and often the prophets themselves incited military leaders to regicide and to wrest control. Such was the case with Jehu in the time of the prophet Elisha, and it even accounts for the original choice of Jeroboam himself, who as picked out by a prophet, Ahijah, according to 1 Kings 11. Northern Israel rose and fell in just about two hundred years and most of its life was spent fighting one enemy after another. Judah survived as a kingdom under one dynasty for over four hundred years.