



The Rise of the Monarchy in Israel

Introduction

The rise of the monarchy in Israel marks a turning point in biblical history. Up until the time of **Samuel**, Israel had been a tribal confederation, loosely united under judges whom God raised up during times of crisis. But the people longed for stability, strength against their enemies, and a visible ruler like the nations around them. This desire led to the anointing of Israel's first kings: Saul, David, and Solomon.

The establishment of the monarchy was both a fulfillment of **God's promises** and a reflection of Israel's spiritual struggles. While God permitted kingship, He made clear that Israel's king was to rule under His authority, guided by His law. The rise of the **monarchy** reveals themes of leadership, obedience, failure, and God's enduring covenant promises.

The Demand for a King

During Samuel's leadership, Israel demanded a king. They said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). This request displeased Samuel, but God told him, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:7).

Israel's request showed their lack of trust in God's kingship. Still, God instructed Samuel to warn them about the burdens of monarchy, including taxation and military service (1 Samuel 8:11-18). Despite the warning, the people insisted, "Nay; but we will have a king over us" (1 Samuel 8:19).

The Anointing of Saul

Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, was chosen as Israel's first king. He stood out physically: "From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2). Samuel anointed him with oil, declaring God's choice (1 Samuel 10:1).

Saul began his reign with military victories, such as defeating the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11:11). Yet his character soon revealed flaws. In disobedience, he offered a sacrifice without waiting for Samuel (1 Samuel 13:9). Later, he spared King Agag and the best of the Amalekite spoils against God's command (1 Samuel 15:9). Because of these failures,



Samuel declared, “The LORD hath rejected thee from being king” (1 Samuel 15:26).

Saul’s reign demonstrates that outward stature and initial success cannot substitute for obedience to God.

The Anointing of David

God chose David, the youngest son of Jesse, to succeed Saul. Samuel anointed him privately, and “the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13).

David first rose to prominence by defeating Goliath, the Philistine giant (1 Samuel 17:49). His courage and faith contrasted with Saul’s fear. David’s growing popularity sparked Saul’s jealousy, resulting in years of pursuit and conflict. Yet David repeatedly refused to harm Saul, showing respect for God’s anointed king (1 Samuel 24:6).

David’s heart for God distinguished him as “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

David as King of Israel

After Saul’s death, David was anointed king of Judah and later king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:3). He established Jerusalem as the capital and brought the ark of the covenant into the city (2 Samuel 6:17).

One of the most significant moments of David’s reign was the establishment of God’s covenant with him. The Lord promised: “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:16). This covenant guaranteed that the Messiah would come from David’s line.

David was a warrior king who expanded Israel’s territory and defeated the surrounding enemies. Yet his reign also included personal failures, most notably his sin with Bathsheba and the arranged death of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11:15). Nathan confronted him, and David repented, writing Psalm 51 as a prayer of confession. His repentance stands in contrast to Saul’s hardness of heart.

David’s Legacy

David is remembered as Israel’s greatest **king**, not because he was sinless, but because his heart sought God. The psalms attributed to him reveal his deep trust, worship, and



repentance. His reign pointed forward to the Messiah, often referred to as the “**Son of David**.” Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem fulfilled the people’s cry, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:9).

David’s legacy demonstrates that God’s purposes are fulfilled not by perfect human leaders but through His grace and covenant promises.

The Reign of Solomon

David’s son **Solomon** succeeded him as king. When God appeared to him in a dream, Solomon asked for wisdom to govern, and God granted him wisdom beyond that of any other (1 Kings 3:12). His wisdom became legendary, attracting rulers such as the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-9).

Solomon’s greatest achievement was the construction of the **Temple in Jerusalem**. At its dedication, he prayed, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27). The temple symbolized God’s presence among His people and became central to Israel’s worship.

However, Solomon’s reign also revealed the dangers of compromise. He married foreign wives, which turned his heart toward idolatry (1 Kings 11:4). His heavy taxation and forced labor sowed the seeds of division. Though his reign was marked by wealth and glory, his disobedience led to God’s judgment: “I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant” (1 Kings 11:11).

Theological Themes

The rise of the monarchy reveals enduring truths:

- God is Israel’s true King. Human kings were meant to rule under His authority.
- Obedience is more important than outward success. Saul’s failure shows that disobedience leads to rejection.
- **God’s covenant promises** endure. Despite human failures, the Davidic covenant assures a lasting throne.
- Leadership carries responsibility. Kings were called to reflect God’s justice and holiness.



The Relevance for Believers

For believers today, the rise of the monarchy illustrates the tension between human leadership and divine authority. We are reminded to place our trust not in human rulers but in Christ, the true King. Just as David's throne points to Jesus, so our hope rests in the One who reigns forever.

The psalmist affirms: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). This finds fulfillment in Christ, who reigns at God's right hand and will return to establish His kingdom in fullness.

Conclusion

The monarchy in Israel began with the people's misguided demand but was used by God to accomplish His purposes. Saul's failure, David's heart for God, and Solomon's wisdom and weakness all point to the need for a greater King. That King is Christ, the Son of David, who fulfills the covenant and reigns eternally. The rise of the monarchy thus serves as both a historical account and a theological lesson: human kings come and go, but the Lord reigns forever.