

## 2 SAMUEL 3-9

### EARTHLY KINGS AND HEAVENLY REALMS

These passages offer timeless, daily challenges, as we read how individual choices affect whole families, their legacies, and their relationships: choices which lead to murder, betrayal, love, envy – it is all here. With cautionary hindsight, we witness mighty men rise and fall, we see human strength emboldened by God or totally quashed by him. We witness human self-seeking in preference to seeking God's heart and how those with great potential can rise and fall.

As disciples, we understand the complexity of daily choices, but that is compounded here by promises of power and untold wealth. We are challenged to keep focused on the eternal, to avoid turning our eyes to the immediate glitter. Every story has two sides and these are no exception – Saul, who reigned for so long, fades disappointingly in comparison to David, the shepherd boy. Through David, God saw fit to establish an earthly throne of enormous influence and power and to go beyond David's comprehension by declaring that this was the never-ending kingdom.

The messianic throne of David would become clearer as the ages passed, revealed through a king who would leave everlasting glory to be born in a lowly place, to be crowned with thorns and to die. While other kings came and went, God was establishing a new kingdom built on decades of faithful servants, many of whom struggled and seemed insignificant. When they handed that insignificance to God and walked with him, when they obeyed God before their own desires, God revealed himself. We will read of changing kings and kingdoms, of divided houses being reunited, but what never has, or will, change is the overriding narrative throughout this story (and all stories): the King of Kings is the one who has been, who will be, and who always is to come.

### FOR FURTHER READING

David Tsumura, *NICOT The Second Book of Samuel*, Eerdmans, 2019

K Chafin, *The Preacher's Commentary*, 1 & 2 Samuel, Thomas Nelson, 1989

R Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, WW Norton, 2000

## LUKE 3-9

### PREPARATION AND MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Luke's gospel is the longest book in the New Testament, a masterfully written narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar, but each has a unique contribution and a distinctive emphasis. We will encounter Luke's characteristic themes in the coming chapters, including: (1) the universal inclusion of all people and the recognition of the central part gentiles play in God's plan; (2) an emphasis on the importance of regular prayer and, particularly, Jesus' habit of praying before important occasions; (3) a focus on the significant role of women in the Jesus movement; (4) a special interest in the poor and the marginalized, including the social ostracism they suffer; (5) a concern for 'sinners', who are often juxtaposed favorably against religious leaders; (6) a stress on the family circle and the use of familial settings and imagery.

Our readings start with a focus on Jesus' preparation for ministry (3:1 – 4:13). The next chapters are Luke's stories of Jesus' ministry in his home regions in Galilee (4:14 – 9:50). This section is filled with memorable miracles and preaching, with a few parables sprinkled here and there. Luke's main theme throughout is the nature of Jesus' Messiahship and mission.

As you study this central portion of Luke's gospel, watch for the themes mentioned above and allow them to shape your own devotional life and outlook. Because this material is narrative, pay close attention to the plot, the various characters and settings, the overall structure, and the repeated themes. Luke has written these vivid episodes to make a profound impact on the reader; his goal is to inspire and to provoke. This is transformative, though not always comfortable. May our hearts be open to being formed and renovated by these stories as we read and ponder them.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

Two of the best commentaries on Luke's gospel are *Bock's Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* and *Nolland's Word Biblical Commentary*; these will inform the background of the following notes.

## NUMBERS 20 – 36

### HISTORY THAT RHYMES

‘In the wilderness’ is the Hebrew title of Numbers, the narrative of the wilderness wanderings of the people of God as they journey toward the Promised Land. We learn some geography – probably meaningless to most of us! We learn far more about their spiritual journey, which has timeless relevance for all of us.

God’s people had made it as far as Kadesh, the southern frontier of Canaan, just 11 days away from their destination, but, despite touching and tasting of the goodness of the land, fears and doubts had hardened into rebellious unbelief that kept them in a physical and spiritual wilderness for 40 years. Numbers 20–36, the last leg in this wilderness marathon, describes the resumption of their journey (chs 20,21), reaffirmation of covenant promises, albeit through an unlikely spokesperson (chs 22–24), a rebellion that probably wiped out the last of the Exodus generation (ch 25) and regulations that were to govern life in the Promised Land (chs 26–36).

To those who’ve recently read Exodus or earlier chapters of Numbers, this series may evoke a sense of déjà vu. The stories seem familiar, sometimes painfully so: murmuring against Moses, grumbling against God, water from a rock, battles and blessings, victory songs, census lists, laws about offerings, impatience and idolatry, plagues, a frustrated Moses, a wrathful God.

Yet, details differ, fresh faces are spotlighted, and there are twists in the tales – the command to speak to rather than strike the rock, the reversal of defeat at Hormah, the change of heart of two tribes in contrast to ten unfaithful spies. ‘History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.’<sup>11</sup> As history unfolds, the rhyming continues. These echoes of the past have been recorded for our edification today: ‘These are all warning markers – DANGER! – in our history books, written down so that we don’t repeat their mistakes.’<sup>12</sup>

### FOR FURTHER READING

Gordon J Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1981  
Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers*, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP, 2002

1 Attributed to Mark Twain, 1835–1910 2 1 Cor 10:11, The Message

# 1 TIMOTHY

## FIGHTING FOR THE FAITH

Over the next couple of weeks, we will dive into this letter from Paul to his younger protégé Timothy. What will become clear as we do so is that while many of the thoughts expressed to Timothy are personal in nature, they are expressed in a way to be read by the church as a whole. This letter is personal, but not private. My prayer is that God will speak to you through this preserved ancient letter. What a wonder it is that words written into the first-century culture of Ephesus, where Timothy ministered, can still shine a spotlight on our diverse contexts today.

This letter forms part of what have been labeled the ‘Pastoral Letters’. Unlike his other letters, which are addressed to whole churches, Paul addressed two letters individually to Timothy, as well as one to Titus and one to Philemon. In this letter, Paul is acting not only as a pastor to Timothy, but also offering pastoral wisdom to the various congregations of which Timothy had oversight. Since first meeting Timothy at his home in Lystra,<sup>1</sup> Paul’s relationship with him was clearly very special. While mentoring as a term is not biblically referenced, what we see exemplified in Paul and Timothy’s relationship is an exemplar for contemporary Christian relationships of mutual encouragement and intentional discipleship.

There are some difficult sections in this letter. The notes that follow will not give all the answers to the host of questions you may have. As we journey through the letter, please keep in mind that Paul urges Timothy to rely and lean on the grace of God. The letter both begins (1:2) and ends (6:21) with such a plea. May that grace extended from Paul to Timothy and those within his reach be ours too. Amidst the teaching on gender roles within public worship, eligibility for leadership, relations between church and state, may we, with Paul, be preoccupied with faithfully guarding the glorious gospel and handing it on.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:1

## 2 SAMUEL 10-22

### DAVID: A HERO WITH FLAWS

The book of 2 Samuel records Israel's history during David's reign. This section records a series of incidents in the latter section of that reign, concentrating largely but not exclusively on David's leadership. However, they are not just accurate accounts of past events. Like all Scripture, these stories are 'God-breathed and ... useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness'.<sup>1</sup> We should read the chapters not just observing what happened, but also asking what we are meant to be learning and why, given the inevitable limitations on space, the author has chosen to include these particular stories. Each day we can only concentrate on a few verses, though the account is not just a collection of individual stories but a carefully composed book. We should therefore be looking out for ongoing concerns and interests that arise, asking what this very gifted author is intending us to learn, how he expects us to feel and what difference it might make to the way we live our lives for God.

The chapters convey a real sense of affection and appreciation of David, but there seems to be a special concern for pointing out his weaknesses and failures. It is possible that the writer is reflecting on 1 Samuel 13:14 and asking whether David really was the one God sought, who was 'after his own heart'. David as psalmist fits this picture well, but the stories we shall read do raise doubts about David as king! Look out, too, for the way David interacts with others, his attitude to keeping promises, his treatment of his family, his close but strained relationship with Joab – and maybe for other ongoing themes not mentioned here.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim 3:16