

5 The Rise and Fall of Israel

This is the fifth talk outline in The God Story Sermon Series. The related chapter in The God Story book is Chapter 5, *The Rise and Fall of Israel*. The books in the Bible this chapter corresponds with are Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

Teaching Outline

Key aims

To explore Israel's dramatic entrance into the Promised Land, her growing sense of compromise with the other nations, Israel's transition to a recognised monarchy which rose to prominence under the leadership of David, and her subsequent tragic demise through idolatry, indulgence and pride.

The God Story storytelling method

The God Story Storyteller understands that to teach The God Story effectively a dual teaching method is required. This is the art of teaching in a way that both **unfolds the eternal purposes of God through history and also releases them into personal encounter**. Practically this will mean prayerfully considering in each talk outline what parts you want to 'go deeper' in and what parts you want to mention at a headline level. We trust the Spirit will inspire and guide you to find the right cadence as you aim to give a passionate sweep of the unfolding narrative while also narrowing the focus in certain places to emphasise personal application and encounter.

Key Bible passages

You may want to read a short passage of scripture before you begin your talk. The passages below are the ones we believe are most relevant to this particular talk.

We recommend you choose one of these:

Joshua 1

Joshua 3

1 Samuel 16:1-13

2 Samuel 5-7

1 Kings 8-9

Teaching notes

The notes provided will equip you to understand more of the context and more of the story as you prepare your talk. Generally speaking the talk outline follows the structure of the corresponding chapter in The God Story book. We feel the key sections in the Talk Outline below relate to the main flow of the unfolding scriptural narrative and so we have included key Biblical passages and quotes from The God Story to assist you in this. We recommend using these sections to shape your talk but please choose the parts which you feel are most helpful for your context.

Continue to the sermon ✓

Introduction

Recap of previous session(s)

God brought about a great deliverance, rescuing his people from Egypt and dismantling the Egyptian Empire. God's desire was to form the Hebrew slaves into a holy nation, God's own special people, to dwell among them and journey with them into the Promised Land. But the task of taking 'Egypt' out of them proved more difficult than taking them out of Egypt and the generation who witnessed God's mighty deliverance in the end forfeited their inheritance. Despite the people's rebellion, the leadership of Moses shone through the Israelites' wilderness sojourn, revealing to us the essence of The God Story plot - *'if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.'*

Talk overview

'Moses is dead!!!' God will grant the Israelites time to grieve the father of their nation, but equally God will not allow their sorrow to be prolonged. Joshua the leader of the next generation is about to face his defining moment. The crossing of the River Jordan will be this generation's Red Sea experience. 400 years after it was promised to Abraham, God's people will eventually set foot on the Promised Land. The Children of Israel will enjoy the fruits of this new land for a season, witnessing remarkable victories, but in the end they will be seduced by the gods of other nations, doing evil in the sight of the Lord. In the generations which follow, they will go so far as to ask for a king like the other nations. Though brokenhearted and rejected, God in his kindness will give them a king like David - an imperfect man but one who has a heart after God's. Under David's leadership the fragmented tribes of Israel will be united and Israel will live through some of their most prosperous and blessed years. David's greatest legacy is connected to his establishment of a culture of worship and 'presence' at the centre of Israel's national life, and stemming from this a desire to build a permanent dwelling place for God. David's holy ambition pleases God so much that God chooses to bind his covenant promises to David's legacy forever. Yet it is his son Solomon who will oversee the construction of the temple. As Solomon dedicates the finished building to the Lord, God's glory fills the temple in a powerful display of holiness and God reinstates his covenant with Israel. These are the glory days of Israel. It will not last forever though as Solomon's heart turns from the Lord and a downward spiral begins, starting with the division of the 12 tribes into two rival kingdoms. Bar a few bright spots along the way, the 500 years of Israel's story after Solomon will tell a sorry tale of idolatry and indulgence, ego and evil.

1 Joshua – stepping up with courage (Josh 1-6)

Before getting into the story, remind people where the key qualifying characteristic for Joshua's leadership is found (Exod 33:7-11.) The hopes of a generation rest squarely on Joshua's shoulders yet he knew if he had the presence of God, anything was possible.

- + **Joshua Commissioned** (Josh 1): Highlight God's promise to Joshua. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." (v.5) Three times God says, "be strong and courageous." This is the moment to walk in the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Joshua is being called to step up and lead.

» Application opportunity

Every generation needs women and men to step up to lead with Godly courage. Is God calling you to lead? What will you do?

- + **Crossing the Jordan** (Josh 3): Explain how 40 years after the Red Sea God will grant this generation their own miracle story. This time the cloud does not lead them but the Ark of the Covenant, raised high and carried by the priests.
 - **Important Note:** the method may be different but the principle the same - prioritise the presence of God, submit to the presence (i.e. picture the priests carrying it aloft)
 - Highlight the need for ruthless trust to unlock their inheritance - i.e. only when the priests stepped into water did they begin to recede.

» Application opportunity

In what ways is God calling you to risk - to get your feet wet by stepping into the water?

- The Children of Israel crossed over the Jordan and set their foot on the Promised Land - 400 years after the original promise!

+ **Important reminder:** God's destination for his people had always been the Promised Land - the wilderness was never the final destination.

- Egypt had been 'the land of not enough'
- Wilderness was the 'the land of just enough'
- Canaan (the Promised Land) represented 'the land of more than enough' – overflowing abundance!

» Application opportunity

what kind of land do you find yourself living in at present? Are you aware of the incredible 'inheritance' God has destined for you?

+ **Gilgal** (Josh 5:1-12): To truly access their inheritance, this new generation needed to be reminded of their identity and vocation. Focus on how Gilgal is an important first step for this generation. Here, the identity-affirming practices of Circumcision and Passover take place.

- Key verse (Josh 5:9) - God wants to roll away reproach.

+ **Jericho and the conquest** (Josh 5:13 - 12:24): Describe Joshua's encounter with 'the Commander of the army of the Lord' as he approaches Jericho. Joshua's question 'are you for us or against us?' is met with a striking response, 'Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have come'

≡ Key quote

*"This heavenly Soldier had appeared to remind Joshua that God is beyond the tribal gods and any of our own personal political purposes. God is not 'for us' any more than he is for 'our enemies'. Joshua must remember that to be elected and known as God's people comes with great responsibility: to serve God's sovereign purposes and not our own."*¹

- Describe the story of the fall of Jericho and how many other subsequent strongholds in Canaan will also be defeated.

» Application opportunity

God's battle plan for Jericho is worth noting. The Ark of the Covenant was carried and the people quietly trusted God until it was time to shout! Only a mixture of worship, humility and obedience - the opposite spirit to the opposing kingdoms of this world - will be fruitful for the purposes of God.

- + **Possessing the land** (Josh 13 - 24): Explain how Joshua divided up the land among the twelve tribes, encouraging them to populate it with the culture of God's loving rule and reign. Before Joshua died he renewed Israel's covenant with God echoing the words of Moses at Mount Sinai, calling them to hold fast to the Lord; to be uncompromising in their love for God and to 'throw away the foreign gods.'

2 The book of Judges - a dark and repeating cycle

Explain how the hopeful note the book of Joshua ends with is quickly dashed at the start of Judges.

- + Read Judges 2:10-16: and describe how the next generation aroused the anger of the Lord.
- + Describe how the period of Judges lasting 300 years is marked by a dark repeating cycle: Idolatry → Judgement and oppression → Repentance → Deliverance through a 'judge' → Repeat cycle.
- + Note the depressing low point at the end of Judges.
 - **Key verse:** "In those days there was no King in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." (Judg 21:25)

≡ Key quote

*"As the book of Judges ends, the increasing levels of corruption have escalated to an unthinkable dark place. Israel is in a bad, bad way. A civil war has broken out which results in increasing division among the 12 tribes of Israel...The dark cycle we see in the period of the Judges points to the even bigger circle of a rebellious humanity spiraling out of control since the Fall."*²

3 Hannah and Samuel: A new era (1 Sam 1-25)

Highlight the depressing tone we read at the end of Judges - The God Story is crying out for a hero! Step forward Hannah, a barren woman we initially find pouring out her grief to the Lord.

- + Explain Hannah's story: she asks the Lord to give her a son and promises to dedicate him to the service of the Lord. Focus on how her genuine surrender becomes a receptacle for the dreams of God.
- + Describe how God grants Hannah her request and gives her a son - Samuel, who is born at a moment of religious apathy. Samuel's innocence and hunger for the presence of God are presented in stark contrast to the compromise of the existing priesthood represented by Eli and his sons.
- + Describe Samuel's first encounter with the voice of God (1 Sam 3). Highlight another 'Here I am' moment in scripture when Samuel responds, "speak Lord for your servant is listening." Describe how God speaks about a new thing about to happen in the nation of Israel.

4 Plan B (1 Sam 8)

Describe how Samuel's authentic spiritual leadership fills the vacuum of Godly leadership in Israel. But explain how his ministry stands at the threshold of a new chapter in The God Story plotline. Samuel is the last of the Judges and the first of the prophets but even more than this he lives at a defining moment in Israel's history. Under Samuel's leadership the people request a king like the other nations (1 Sam 8:4-6).

- + Emphasise God's broken-heartedness and sense of rejection.
 - **Key verse:** "it is not you [Samuel] they have rejected, but they have rejected me." (1 Sam 8:7)
- + Further emphasise the devastating nature of this, how this was never God's Plan A for his chosen people. Rather, they had expressed their preference for a system of rule just like their pagan neighbours. Israel is transitioning into a recognised monarchy.

5 Saul – what could have been? (1 Sam 9–15)

Explain how God graciously orchestrated things so the new monarchy could get off to the best possible start. Saul is impressive, gifted and anointed by God. Explain how things start well for Saul but in the end his role in The God Story becomes one of the greatest ‘what might have been’ tales ever told.

≡ Key quote

“For all his qualities Saul has a ‘divided heart’. He obeys halfway. He is insecure. He seeks the acclaim of the people too much....Saul hasn’t allowed himself to be truly ‘formed’ in the presence of God and the fault lines deep in the structure of his identity come to the surface in the form of jealousy, pride and competitiveness.”³

- + God rejects Saul’s leadership and a new king will be anointed while the existing one is still in place (1 Sam 16:1)

6 David: A heart after God

- + Describe Samuel’s visit to Jesse’s house (1 Sam 16:1–13), his examination of the seven sons culminating in David, the youngest and least considered, being anointed as king.
 - **Key verse:** 1 Sam 16:7
- + While Saul still remains king, note how The God Story narrative shifts its focuses to David - an anointed musician, faithful shepherd boy and courageous young warrior (1 Sam 16:14 - 17:58)
- + Explain how as David’s prominence rises so does Saul’s jealousy. David has to escape - a fugitive on the run in the wilderness.
 - **Note:** once again we see the principle of the painful gift of the wilderness season.
 - Yet even in the wilderness, leadership follows David and he empowers an army of men who will serve alongside him.
- + Explain how it will take 15 years from being anointed by Samuel to being appointed King of Judah at 30 years of age. Another seven years will pass before David becomes King of Israel, uniting the 12 tribes.

- + Emphasise, for all David's amazing accomplishments, we read of some shocking moments of failure. (i.e. his affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12), his dysfunctional family (2 Sam 13-15), and his disobedience with the census (2 Sam 24).
- Yet in all of this what shines through is David's security in God's love and his pursuit of God's presence.

7 The Psalms

Take some time to highlight how we know about David's 'heart after God's' primarily through David's Psalms - the prayers of a soul laid bare before the Lord.

≡ Key quote

*"In the Psalms, we can hear the cadence of Edenic rhyme, love-songs rising up from a beloved son who is reveling in divine desire and the longing love of God."*⁴

- + Focus on Psalm 27:4 and link to 2 Samuel describing David's rise to great prominence -
- *"Placing David's Psalms alongside Samuel's narrative of his life helps us discover the secret of David's rise to become Israel's greatest ever leader. His passionate pursuit of God's presence had unlocked the blessings of God on his life and those he led."*⁵

8 A home for God (2 Sam 6-7)

- + Emphasise David's greatest accomplishment: establishing a culture of worship and 'presence' at the centre of Israel's national life
- + Describe David's plan to bring the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. (2 Sam 6)
 - Initially David learns the hard way: *"Placing the Ark on a cart rather than carrying it on poles revealed a heart-posture which lacked the humility and awe stewarding the presence of God on behalf of others required."*⁶
 - Eventually the Ark comes back and 24-7 prayer is established at the centre of the nation.

- + **Key moment:** Emphasise this is not enough for David. He resolves to build a house of God. (2 Sam. 7) and submits this request to the prophet Nathan. Focus on the breathtaking nature of God's reply through Nathan,.
 - *"God's response to David's desire is breathtaking. Initially God reminds David he doesn't need a palace. He's never really been that into buildings as he has always moved freely with his people. At the same time God loves the holy ambition in David's heart and, like with Abraham and Moses, God hears the echo of his own heartbeat in David's request. David's heart has become one with God. He had wanted to build a home for God. But now God responds essentially saying, 'David, I am going to build you a home! Forever!'"*⁷
- + Emphasise how God has bound his plans and purposes for humanity to David's life and legacy forever.

9 Israel's decline

- + **David's big mistake** (2 Sam 11): Highlight how even after these incredible moments of encounter with God, David sins horrendously through an affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent orchestration of the murder of her husband. David repents (Ps 51) and God is attracted to David's genuine and humble contrition. But despite the 'hero status' attached to David's kingship, in the final chapters of 2 Samuel a tragic end to his reign is revealed. David's first son with Bathsheba dies after 7 days.
- + Focus on God's wild act of mercy - giving David another son, Solomon, who will not just be the next king but be assigned by God to fulfil the dream that originated in his dad's heart to build a dwelling place for God.
- + **Solomon** (1 Kings 1-11): Describe how Solomon's reign could not have got off to a better start. He asks the Lord for wisdom to rule the people of God and God lavishly bestows it on him. He proves himself a skilled decision maker and is anointed to write Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Further Solomon's divine assignment is to build the temple, his father's dream.
 - **Dedication of the temple:** Read sections of 1 Kings 8-9:
 - Encourage people to picture the scene as God fills the temple with the cloud of his presence so tangibly that the priests could not enter the building.

- + Note the startling shift in Solomon's reign after this. In the end it is clear, Solomon may have loved God but he loved himself more.
 - *"Solomon's life swings in the opposite direction, away from the presence of God, and as it does he leads the nation of Israel down a depressing and tragic spiral."*⁸
- + Explain how this spiralling culminates so that by the end of Solomon's reign Israel resembles the empire of Egypt more than Eden.
 - *"We read of harems facilitating political marriages, oppressive state control in the forms of heavy taxes and slave labour and an army to protect the royal elite. Unthinkably, God's people, a nation defined by their liberation from oppression, have now become the oppressors."*⁹

10 A kingdom divided

- + Explain how God's hand of blessing upon Solomon's reign was removed and Israel's kingdom began to crumble. The only obvious successors, Jeroboam (a former commander in Solomon's court) and Rehoboam (one of Solomon's sons), were both immature and reckless and their foolish rivalry led to the ultimate division of Israel's 12-tribe monarchy.
 - 10 tribes, under Jeroboam's leadership, took the territory to the north of Palestine and became known as 'The Northern Kingdom' (or 'The Kingdom of Israel')
 - 2 tribes, Judah and Benjamin, became known as 'The Southern Kingdom' (or 'The Kingdom of Judah').
- + Describe at an overview headline level how the rest of 1 and 2 Kings tells the story of Israel's divided monarchy and the lives of the kings of each.
 - All 19 kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were bad and 'did evil in the sight of the Lord'.
 - Of the 20 kings of the Southern Kingdom, 12 were bad, 6 were ok and 2 stood out i.e. Hezekiah and Josiah led revolutionary reforms in difficult circumstances.
 - Broadly speaking however, the 500 years of Israel's story after Solomon is a sorry tale of idolatry and indulgence, ego and evil.

11 Helpful summary of rise and fall of Israel

+ “God had planted Israel like a new tree, in a land of promise to flourish for his glory. Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David, even Solomon (before he blew it!) had called the people to covenant faithfulness....The mighty oak Israel had become under David had been so damaged by sin it would need to be cut down to a stump. Only a holy seed would remain.”¹⁰

Questions for Reflection or Further Application

Despite David's weaknesses he asked God for an undivided heart. What are the sins or distractions that could divide your heart? Israel put their hope in human kings over and above God. Why do we often put our hope in other leaders rather than God? Discuss the consequences of such.

Three Sacred Themes

The closing page of each chapter in The God Story book includes a summary shaped around three sacred themes which we believe helps knit the overarching storyline together. Feel free to use this as an extra resource to The God Story Sermon Series if you feel this would be helpful to summarise each talk. You will find this for *The Rise and Fall of Israel* on p.92.

End of sermon

¹ Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, The God Story; Encountering unfailing love in the unfolding narrative of scripture; (London, Form SPCK Group 2024), p.78

² Ibid, p.81

³ Ibid, p.83

⁴ Ibid, p.86

⁵ Ibid, p.86

⁶ Ibid, p.87

⁷ Ibid, p.88

⁸ Ibid, p.89

⁹ Ibid, p.90

¹⁰ Ibid, p.91

*All Bible passages quoted are taken from NIV unless stated.