



APPIAN MEDIA

SEARCHING FOR A KING

— ISRAEL'S UNITED KINGDOM —

STUDY GUIDE



WRITTEN BY

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INTRODUCTION: WHY SEARCH FOR A KING?

Foolish King Saul. Godly King David! Wise King Solomon. Many have grown up hearing the Biblical account of Israel's United Kingdom since they were small children. However, nearly half a century ago, some minimalist archaeologists (some call them "radical") began challenging the historical reliability of the Biblical text and questioned the work of anyone who used the Bible as a primary source of information. For example, consider the following excerpts from one of the most vocal of these men:

"The bible gives the impression of speaking of the past...we do not think this is a characteristic of biblical stories at all."

"'Ancient Israel' is a scholarly construct hardly to be sought any more, existing only in the minds of scholars."

"There is no more 'ancient Israel.' History no longer has room for it."

These are confident-sounding and startling claims! But are they accurate? Some minimalists (archaeologists who believe the Bible has little historical value) have now come to the point where they refute the historicity of the Exodus, the United Monarchy, and the very existence of Saul, David, Solomon or his temple.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, when asked if he had "ever encountered an archaeological finding that blatantly contravened a New Testament reference," archaeologist Dr. John McRay "shook his head. 'Archaeology has not produced anything that is unequivocally a contradiction to the Bible...On the contrary, as we've seen, there have been many opinions of skeptical scholars that have become codified "fact" over the years but that archaeology has shown to be wrong.'"

What is an honest seeker to do with such wildly divergent claims? Investigate. Research. Seek! We set out on a quest to examine the evidence for ourselves. We flew to Israel and took a film crew with us. We did our best to meet with specialists who could give us exclusive and first-hand testimony. Do archaeology, geography, and other ancient literature harmonize and substantiate the Biblical descriptions of an ancient Israel? Is the development of a united Israelite kingdom real? We want sincere seekers of truth to find this study to be a beneficial introduction to the topic of Biblical historicity.

There are a couple of components of the study guide that deserve notice. In every lesson, we have included a timeline to help you find your bearings as you study the Biblical text. All dates were compared to several resources. Some dates are approximate. A complete list of dates is available on the last page of the study guide. Each lesson also has a sidebar to provide you with additional historical and geographic details pertinent to the Biblical text. Finally, we believe a study of God's word is meant to be more than academic; it is meant to move every person to greater faith and faithfulness, so we have written an application section to facilitate that.

Our conviction is that as we follow where the evidence leads, all of us will build stronger confidence in the reliability of God's word. Thank you for joining us in *Searching for a King!*

LESSON 1: THE TIME BEFORE KINGS



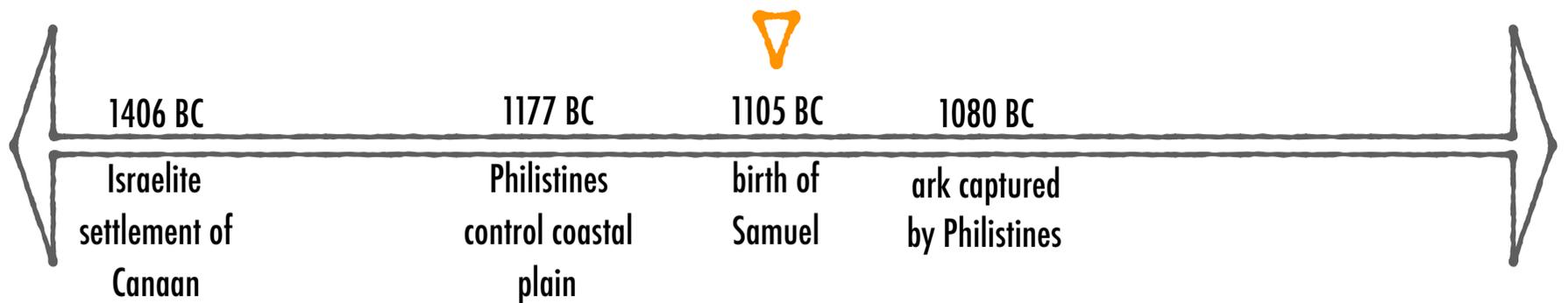
Watch *Searching for a King: Episode 1* [00:00 min. - 08:10 min.] by scanning the QR code with the camera on your mobile device.



SCAN TO PLAY

Before watching the episode, discuss for a few minutes what you recall about the closing days of the period of the judges. What was life like for people during this time?

As you watch the episode, make note of any questions you have or points you find significant.



DISCUSSION

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Jdg. 21:25).

It’s hard to imagine what life must have been like during the period of the judges. On four separate occasions, the book of Judges reminds us that there wasn’t a king in Israel (Jdg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) and two times informs us that people did whatever was right in their own eyes (17:6; 21:25). Westerners might imagine such a civilization to be similar to the days of America’s “Wild West” when there were very few lawmen and “might made right.” To gain a better perspective of the United Kingdom, it is helpful to review the last several chapters of Judges. The book closes with the account of the civil war between the tribes of Israel. The incident began when a Levite and his concubine were traveling home after reconciling at her father’s home in Bethlehem. They’d stopped in the Israelite city of Gibeah, assuming they would be safer among God’s people than among foreigners still living in the land. When worthless Israelite men accosted them, the cowardly Levite gave his concubine into their hands. She was abused all night until she passed away on the threshold of the house (Jdg. 19). After the Levite sent a morbid message throughout the country asking for help, the other Israelites were so incensed at what had happened that they went to battle against Benjamin and almost destroyed the entire tribe (Jdg. 20-21).



birthplace of Samuel, about 12 miles west of Shiloh

The picture is so bleak! How could anyone morally devolve to such a point, especially God’s people? The prophet Jeremiah made a powerful observation: “I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). When left alone without the instruction of a holy and good God, we all give in to selfishness and sin. That is where the nation of Israel was morally and spiritually during the period of the Judges. By the time we begin reading Samuel—our books of 1 & 2 Samuel were one volume in the Hebrew Bible—we are primed for a spiritual revival, desperately looking for godly leadership in the historical narrative. Some have summarized these books in the following way:

- Judges - No King
- 1 Samuel - Man’s King (Saul)
- 2 Samuel - God’s King (David)

1 & 2 Samuel record the pivotal time in Israel’s history when the nation transitioned from tribal organization and regional judges to a united monarchy with a centralized government and military. They progressed from using the tabernacle structure in Shiloh to the divinely selected city of Jerusalem and Solomon’s famous temple complex. These changes would not happen overnight nor even with the most expected or popular people. Like so many other instances in the Bible, God used the unexpected and lowly for His purposes. At the beginning of 1 Samuel, he used the son of humble parents who had

THE CITY OF SHILOH



Shortly after the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, the city of Shiloh was conquered and used as the center of religious worship for a number of years. During this time it was common for many people to make trips to Shiloh for major feasts and sacrifices. This practice continued until the ark of the covenant was taken into battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:3-5). The Philistines won this battle, and the ark was taken back to the Philistine city of Ashdod. With the ark of the covenant no longer at Shiloh, people stopped coming to the city. At some point later in time, the city of Shiloh was destroyed, possibly by the Philistines, although this is disputed.

been unable to conceive. In the first two chapters, and especially in Hannah's prayer of gratitude, we are introduced to several key themes from this period of Israel's history.

We are introduced to the theme of reversals...

1 Samuel 1 introducing us to Hannah and Peninnah, the rival wives of Elkanah. Peninnah had been blessed to conceive several children, but Hannah, the beloved wife, was barren (1 Sam. 1:4-5). Hannah's circumstances closely mirrored many of the ancient mothers of Israel's patriarchs (Sarah in Gen. 11:30; Rebekah in 25:21; Rachel in 29:31).¹

During Elkanah's annual family visit to Shiloh, the rivalry between the women intensified to the point that Hannah could not eat and tearfully poured out her heart to God in prayer. Eli, the current judge and high priest witnessed her silent but dramatic petition and eventually blessed her. God heard her plea, and the once barren and belittled wife was given a son. Hannah recognized God's role in reversing her situation: the lowly had been exalted! This kind of reversal would happen multiple times in the coming decades as the nation of Israel became a monarchy.

"The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble bind on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap

to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor" (1 Sam. 2:4-8).

As you study the United Kingdom, take note of instances of reversal similar to that of Peninnah and Hannah's.

We are introduced to the theme of God's sovereignty...

One of the main things that should stand out to every careful reader of the Old Testament is how active God was in caring for His people! He had made provision to deliver them from drought during the life of Joseph. He rescued them from centuries of oppression during the life of Moses. He remembered his covenant and brought them into the promised land of rest during the life of Joshua. But during the period of the Judges, the people had abandoned their Deliverer and stopped seeking him! They didn't recognize God's hand in their lives, though he was still at work. The opening chapters of 1 Samuel remind us that God was still active. It was the Lord who closed the womb of Hannah, and it was the Lord who granted her petition to have a child (1 Sam. 1:5, 17, 20, 27). Just as God was at work in Hannah's life, he was graciously working on his nation. As you read the account of Israel's first kings, look for displays of God's sovereignty.

We are introduced to the theme of a king...

While the book of 1 Samuel opens during the life of Eli and tells us about the birth of the last judge, the people are not aware that their first king will soon be anointed and enthroned. The fact that they are unaware makes the closing lines of Hannah's prayer prophetic as she described the protection of God:

"The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.

¹ Bergen, R. D. (1996). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 7, p. 51). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam. 2:10)

Hannah had made a vow to the Lord: if he would bless her with a son, then she would “give him to the Lord all the days of his life” (1 Sam. 1:11). Hannah kept her vow, and so a young Samuel was given to the work of the Lord. The life and work of Samuel would soon usher in a new era of revelation from God and spiritual renewal within the people. Eventually, he would play a vital role in identifying and anointing Israel’s first two kings.

QUESTIONS

1. What connections did you make between the Biblical text and this episode of *Searching for a King*?
2. After reading 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11, what verses stand out the most to you?
3. What do you think about each of the primary characters (Elkanah, Hannah, Peninnah, and Eli)?
4. What stood out to you about the archeological process as it was described by Dr. Scott Stripling?
5. What did you learn about the site of ancient Shiloh?

APPLICATION

When I read the various books of the Bible, it is almost a default for me to frame the narratives as I learned them as a child: stand-alone stories, disconnected from other events and histories. But when I piece them back together into their historical settings and see how they relate to other Biblical books and characters, I then see them as part of a larger story with deeper meaning and greater application.

For instance, when we read about Elkanah and Hannah and remember that they were living during the spiritually corrupt time of the judges, Hannah's willingness to beseech God and the couples' joint-conviction for her to keep her vow becomes an astounding testament to their faith! Would you be willing to serve God when surrounded by an entire culture of people who had become their own moral authorities, each person "doing what seemed right in his own eyes" (Jdg. 21:25)? If Elkanah were like the average husband of the day, he would not have encouraged Hannah to keep such a sacrificial vow (1 Sam. 1:23). If Hannah were like the women of the day, she would not have sought God's intervention or followed through with her promise (1:15-16). If she were like the people of the day, she would have taken matters into her own hands, sought some vengeance against her rival wife, and likely would have developed a bitter heart toward Jehovah for her inability to have children. But they were not like the people of the day! Praise God for such bright examples in such a dark time!

In every generation of God's people, we have been called to be salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16), brightly shining and holding out the truths of God's revelation (Php. 2:15). To stand out in such a way will mean being perceived as different; frankly, we will be considered odd and found offensive. It will take strength and grace from God as we seek to reflect Him into a world overcome and twisted by sin. Praise God that we have the examples of so many who have blazed the trail ahead of us, examples like Elkanah and Hannah.

Take a moment to write a prayer of thanksgiving for examples like Elkanah and Hannah, and ask for opportunities in your life to stand out for God in the middle of a corrupt culture.