



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany, Sunday, February 6th, 2011

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

It only takes a few chapters of the Book of Judges to grasp that the differences between today's America and the Canaan of 3,000 years ago are actually quite superficial. Modern America boasts the internal combustion engine, nuclear power and main drainage. But such superficialities aside -- and I do mean superficialities -- the forces that animate society turn out to be much the same.

Indeed, if the books of Judges, Ruth and First Samuel teach anything it is that spiritually and psychologically human beings haven't changed very much over the last four millennia.

This is rather useful in as much as it enables us to forecast the outcome of modern scenarios by analyzing the outcome of similar events that occurred long ago and are recorded in the Bible. It is called the Case Study Method, a method of analysis much favored by the Harvard Business School.

In any event, the situation in Canaan after Joshua's conquest was pretty much the same as that in which America finds itself today. For many, the worship of God had become a hedonistic mélange that might best be described as a sort of "New Age B.C." It combined the less demanding elements of Judaism with the more pleasurable aspects of local paganism.

Personal morality had fallen to an all time low -- a phenomenon accompanied by a precipitous decline in public morality. A consequence of the social decay was that society was unable to unite sufficiently to suppress both internal lawlessness

and external aggression.

The bright spot in the picture is even though the children of Israel turned their backs on God, he did not turn his back on them. God did not abandon his Chosen People. At the depth of the Children of Israel's apostasy, God raised up David, the nation's greatest king and ushered in a Golden Age. Worship of God was restored to relatively pure state, and the people's grip on the land was consolidated.

According to the Bible, the radical change in the Israelites' fortunes came about because David was particularly beloved of God -- so beloved, in fact, God made a special covenant with him. It promised David one of his direct descendants would "build a house in my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." It was a prophecy, of course, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

This being so, it is worth trying to discover why God loved David so much. After all, David must have had some special quality that appealed particularly to God. What worked for David might well work for us. God, after all, is not capricious

If a case study of David's life demonstrates one thing about him, it is that he most certainly was not perfect. Far from it. David was a sinner. And not simply a small time sinner, at that. Some of David's sins were really quite horrific.

Take, for example, his adulterous affair with Bathsheba: To cover up his adultery, he

deliberately sent Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband, to his death in battle. He cold-bloodedly sacrificed the life of one his most loyal companions to spare himself a bit of embarrassment.

If we compare David with Saul, his predecessor, one thing is clear it is that while David was brave, he was no more fearless than Saul. But Saul was ruthless and cruel, while David, by contrast, was merciful. Saul never forgave an enemy, real or imagined.

He relentlessly hunted David down, wrongly imagining he planned to kill him. But when, on two occasions, David spared his life, Saul did not abandon his efforts to kill him. David readily spared Saul's life – knowing Saul would never have accorded him the same mercy. David spared Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, even though, as Saul's heir, he posed a serious threat to David's claim to the throne.

When David's own son Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, David forgave him just as he freely forgave the odious Shimei, who cursed him and hurled stones at him when he was forced to flee Jerusalem following Absalom's rebellion. David's physical courage and natural sense of mercy, though entirely commendable, were not, however, the qualities that especially commended him to God. One can find many men just as brave and just as kindhearted.

The quality for which God particularly esteemed David is a virtue that sounds quite the opposite of bravery: It is the virtue of humility. David – for all his courage, for all his strength, for all his popularity with the people, for all his worldly success – was humble in his dealings with God. He knew whatever he had achieved in this world was solely due to God's grace.

This humility gave him a down-to-earth understanding of the vastness of the gulf between himself, a mere human being, and God. This expressed itself in a heartfelt sense of contrition for his sins, and an iron faith in God's goodness and mercy.

One can see it in the Psalms he composed: (*Psalms 6 & 7*) "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine indignation, neither chasten me in thy displeasure." "O Lord my God, in thee have I put

my trust: save me from them that persecute me, and deliver me."

But beyond David's unshakable faith, his contrition, and his humility, his very special relationship with God was founded on one further aspect of his character. It was the fact that David, freely and unreservedly, acknowledged God to be his Sovereign Lord and King. (*Psalms 8*) "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!"

Many people hail God as their Lord and King, but few of them mean it in anything more than an abstract sense. David, by contrast, hailed God as Lord and King in every respect. God commanded not just David's spiritual life, but his earthly actions as well. David held himself completely accountable to God and was bitterly aware of how greatly he fell short.

The fundamental principle of God's Covenant with the children of Israel was the establishment of God as their Lord and King. Indeed, that was the whole point of the exercise. Thus, the Israelites committed a grievous sin when they ordered Samuel to give them a king. God was their King. Demanding a human king was nothing less than rebellion against God.

It is no accident that David was Israel's greatest king – because his unreserved acknowledgment of God as his own king served to fulfill Israel's covenant with God. This is what God demands of us as his people. God doesn't expect us to be perfect – any more than he expected David to be perfect. He is our creator. He knows our faults and flaws too well for that. But what he demands of us is that we acknowledge him as our Lord and King – accept the obvious, in fact.

If we accept him as our Lord and King, we will, quite naturally, try to keep his commandments and obey his will. We'll fall short, of course, just as David fell short. But, like David, we'll acknowledge our failure and try to do better. If we manage to do that, then we, too, can look forward to a golden age of our own. That, at least, is what the case study method seems to indicate. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.