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Text: Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (1999).

Session I
The Prophet Samuel and the First King

Discussion Questions:

- How does the story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel recall the matriarchs of Genesis?
- What are the grounds for the replacement of Eli the priest and his sons by Samuel?
- What are the claims Samuel makes in reacting to the people's demand to have a king, like the other nations?
- Are there good grounds for this demand by the people? How does God respond to Samuel?
- Do Samuel's claims about kingship fully capture his own motives for rejecting the people's demand?
- What do we learn about Saul's character from the way he is first introduced in the narrative? Why must Samuel's anointment of Saul as king take place on three occasions and how do they differ (1 Sam. 9:1, 9:17, 11:14-15)?
- In what ways does Samuel strive to hold Saul under his control?

Session II

The Struggles of Saul

Discussion Questions:

- What do we learn about David's character, first from the way he is initially introduced in the narrative, then from his behavior with the giant Goliath?
- How do Saul's daughter Michal and his son Jonathan display a love for David that goes beyond a sense of obligation to their father?
- What are Saul's motivations for his antagonism to David?
- What are David's motivations in refraining from killing Saul when he has the opportunity to do so (ch. 24 and 26)?
- What strengths does Abigail portray, which perhaps lead David to choose her as a wife (ch. 25)?
- How does the poignant scene of Saul conjuring the ghost of Samuel, on the night of the king's last battle, reflect their whole relationship?
- How and why does David respond as he does to the Amalekite who brings news about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1)?

Session III

The Kingship of David

Discussion Questions:

- How does David establish his authority as King of Israel and Judah?
- How should Joab's relationship to David be characterized and does it change over time?
- Are there cases where we are led to admire Joab's realistic sense of political necessities?
- What leads David to distance himself from "the hard sons of Zeruiah" (consider 2 Samuel 3:39, 16:10, 19:23, along with David's final speech, 1 Kings 2:5)?
- What does the whole episode with Bathsheba reveal about David's character and his position as king?
- When we hear at the end of the story that "the thing David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:27), is that a reference to a particular event or the whole sequence?
- How does the prophet Nathan confront David and why is it so effective?
- Should David's experience with Bathsheba, which leads to the death of their first child, be seen as a turning point in his life?

Session IV Crisis in the Royal Family

Discussion Questions:

- How does David respond to the terrible family crisis when his son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar?
- How is the character of Absalom indicated in the course of the narrative? What are the motives behind his revolt against his father's reign?
- In what ways does Nathan's exchange with David resonate in the way the widow of Tekoa persuades David to bring back Absalom (2 Sam. 14)?
- Does David's response to the death of his beloved son exhibit an inevitable conflict between his private life in the family and his public life as king?
- Is there a faint echo of Absalom's revolt in the actions of Adonijah, at the end of David's life and what is the role of Bathsheba in dealing with him (1 Kings 1)?
- How do Bathsheba and Nathan orchestrate the succession of Solomon to the throne?
- What should we make of the charge David issues on his deathbed to his son Solomon?