

i. Intro. *(walking)*

A. When Janette & I lived in Egypt for 3 years, one of the most common Arabic phrases we quickly learned was "in sha'allah" (if God wills)

1. In James 4:13-15 we Christians are told not to simply declare our future plans, but to say "If God wishes, we will do so & so".
 - a) In a similar way, many Muslims would add "in sha'allah" after naming their future plans.
 - b) As a Christian coming from a largely secular country, I appreciated people acknowledging our dependence on God in daily life. I think James 4:15 should appear in our conversations here more often than it does.
2. But over time I became a little more cynical about "if God wills"
 - a) We Westerners in Egypt would sometimes joke how "in sha'allah" was used to cover over all kinds of incompetence
 - b) Someone might agree to do something for you (like come fix your plumbing), and quickly add "in sha'allah" when you knew they really had no intention to do it
 - c) But they couldn't be accused of lying because if they didn't show up, it must not have been God's will! *(back to pulpit)*

B. We in Western churches also sometimes refer to God's will

1. When we pray the Lord's prayer, we say, "Thy will be done ..." But what do we think that means?
 - a) Are wars ever in God's will? Because some Muslims claim Allah instructs them to destroy all infidels who oppose their vision of an Islamic state, does that make it God's will?
 - b) Is abuse of women, children and the vulnerable God's will? Abortion? Destruction of the environment through human activities?
2. Clearly in the course of Christian history, all manner of abuses & sins have been excused under the justification, "It's God's will".

II. So what do we make of so much violence in the Old Testament that is so repulsive to us today?

A. A few weeks ago with the story of the Exodus I introduced us to a model of biblical holy war, to help us understand God originally fighting FOR God's people.

1. This morphed into the people fighting FOR God & ultimately led back to the restoration of God's original model for Holy War
2. God's Holy War was restored through Jesus, who defeated evil by the power of self-sacrificing love, rather than by human violence.

B. The Holy War model is closely connected to this important concept of God's will.

1. We have to get an understanding of this, or else we end up with the God seen in Jesus being very different from the God of the O.T.
2. I hope to help make that connection this morning as we review God's salvation history that we're picking up in the books of Samuel

III. (Heilsgeschichte review)

A. Samuel was basically the last of the judges over people of Israel, as Cindy introduced us to the judges last week

1. Already the people had turned away from God's Holy War plan for God to fight FOR them without them shedding blood ...
2. So God raised up a series of judges, mostly military leaders, to guide the people and keep them from worshiping other gods ... leaders like Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephtha & Samson
 - a) Sometimes, as with Gideon, they let God do the real fighting & they just mopped up, while many more times the judge led bloody military campaigns.
 - b) None of the judges was an ideal leader. Even the ones like Gideon & Samson that we tell positive stories about ... they all had serious flaws.
 - c) Yet thru this time, Yahweh remained Israel's king. To his credit, Gideon refused kingship when the Israelites wanted him to rule over them

B. The closest to an ideal judge was Samuel, who sort of combined roles of priest, prophet & judge together

1. But despite Samuel's virtues, his sons were so corrupt that the people came to old man Samuel demanding that he appoint a king for them, so they could be like other nations.
 - a) So Samuel prayed to the LORD re. this & the LORD told him to do what the people asked, because by this action the people were not rejecting Samuel, but rejecting Yahweh as their king.
 - b) Yahweh also instructed Samuel to tell them of the greedy & power-hungry ways that a king would treat them

Samuel warned the people that a king would take heavy taxes from them & eventually enslave them in forced labor.

And when that happened, Samuel told them, & they cried out to Yahweh, this time their God would not respond as he did in Egypt.
2. But the people ignored Samuel's warning, demanding a king anyway ... so at God's instruction, Samuel gave in & anointed Saul as their 1st king, chosen by lot

C. The kings who followed after the judges, by earthly standards, were some great kings

1. But in God's eyes they were only surrogate rulers, failed substitutes for the true king, Yahweh himself
2. David & Solomon especially sowed the seeds of apostasy & oppression, which led within a hundred years to the breakdown of this united kingdom, something we'll hear about next week

IV. (Competing visions of community)

A. Looking back to 1 Sam. 8, it wasn't only Samuel the prophet who gave in to the people ... in a significant way God did too.

1. This story in 1 Sam. 8 is a very important one in O.T. Heilsgeschichte because it captures one of the turning points in the bigger salvation story.
 - a) On the timeline, this is one of those crises marked by an asterisk
 - b) Last week Cindy described the 2nd crisis of God's chosen people: syncretism. Today we see the 3rd crisis: their struggle w/ nationalism.
2. The books of Samuel & Kings don't present us w/ just one narrative of God & God's people after the judges ... they give us 2 competing views of kingship
3. As Christians, we believe that one of these views is what God really wanted, & the other is what God allowed to happen for a while, due to the people's stubbornness
 - a) You see, God got tired of his chosen covenant shalom people breaking that covenant & following other gods & violent ways, so God decided to make the best of a bad situation
 - b) We will call the former God's ultimate will & the latter God's remedial will ... more about that shortly.
4. Let's compare these 2 competing visions of God's community in Samuel, as Marion Bontrager has described it for many Hesston College students.
 - a) On the one hand, here's a vision of theocracy: which means God is the direct ruler with no earthly king ... basically began @ the Exodus event.
 - b) Contrasting with that is a nation-state in the form of a monarchy, which the people demanded about 260 years after the Exodus

B. I'll describe these vision differences in 3 dimensions of community, going thru them rather quickly *(you can access this chart later thru church website if you wish)* [PPT chart chosen]

Visions for community *As seen in 1 & 2 Samuel*

Theocracy	Monarchy Nation-State
Chosen: for the mission to reveal God to all peoples.	
Defined only by faith boundaries	Defined by geographical & political boundaries.
Enlarged by communicating Yahweh to everyone	Enlarged by military or political conquest.

1. How do these 2 visions of community compare if we talk about a "chosen people", where chosen means chosen for a mission?
 - a) In theocracy, community has faith boundaries for who's in and who's out ... while the monarchy's boundaries are drawn with lines of loyalty to a king & physical lines on the ground.
 - b) In a theocracy, the community is enlarged by showing & telling about Yahweh to more people ... The nation-state is enlarged by military and political conquest.
2. [PPT chart covenant]

Visions for community *As seen in 1 & 2 Samuel*

Theocracy	Monarchy Nation-State
Covenant: creates a relationship of responsibility and opportunity.	
Yahweh as king, who serves the people	The monarch as king, whom the people serve
Trust in Yahweh's Holy War	Trust in a standing army and foreign alliances

We also talk about God's calling a covenant people, because a covenant creates a relationship. Look @ the contrast of responsibilities & opportunities between these 2 visions:

- a) In a theocracy, Yahweh is the king, but this is a king who serves the people & looks out for their best interest ... In the monarchy nation-state, there is a human king, but the people serve him & make him powerful & wealthy.
- b) In a theocracy, evil & outside dangers are addressed by trusting in Yahweh's Holy War, where God fights for them ... But of course people in the monarchy trust in a standing army & the alliances their king makes with foreign powers.

3. [PPT chart shalom]

Visions for community *As seen in 1 & 2 Samuel*

Theocracy	Monarchy Nation-State
Shalom: where all people and things are in right relationship.	
Humble leadership from among the people, like Moses and Gideon	Elite, privileged wealthy leadership
Trust in Yahweh raising up leaders as needed.	Trust in the monarchy & inherited succession

A 3rd dimension of who God's people were to be is around the word "shalom" = all people & things being in right relationships. If God was calling out a shalom people, what would that look like in leadership?

- a) A theocracy had humble leadership that came from among ordinary people, examples being Moses & Gideon ... but in the nation-state of Israel, leadership only came from elite, privileged people of wealth.
- b) And how did you get new leadership? In a theocracy, the people trusted God to raise up new leaders, like the judges, as needed ... In contrast, the nation-state of Israel, like other countries, trusted in the monarchy itself for new leaders, from father to son.

4. In summary, all these contrasts of vision in 1 & 2 Samuel really come back to the question of what God wants [PPT chart God's will]

Visions for community *As seen in 1 & 2 Samuel*

Theocracy	Monarchy Nation-State
What was God's will?	
A voluntary community of faith	A community enforced by a king
God's ultimate will	God's remedial will

Adapted from Marion G Bontrager, Hesston College *BibLit* course

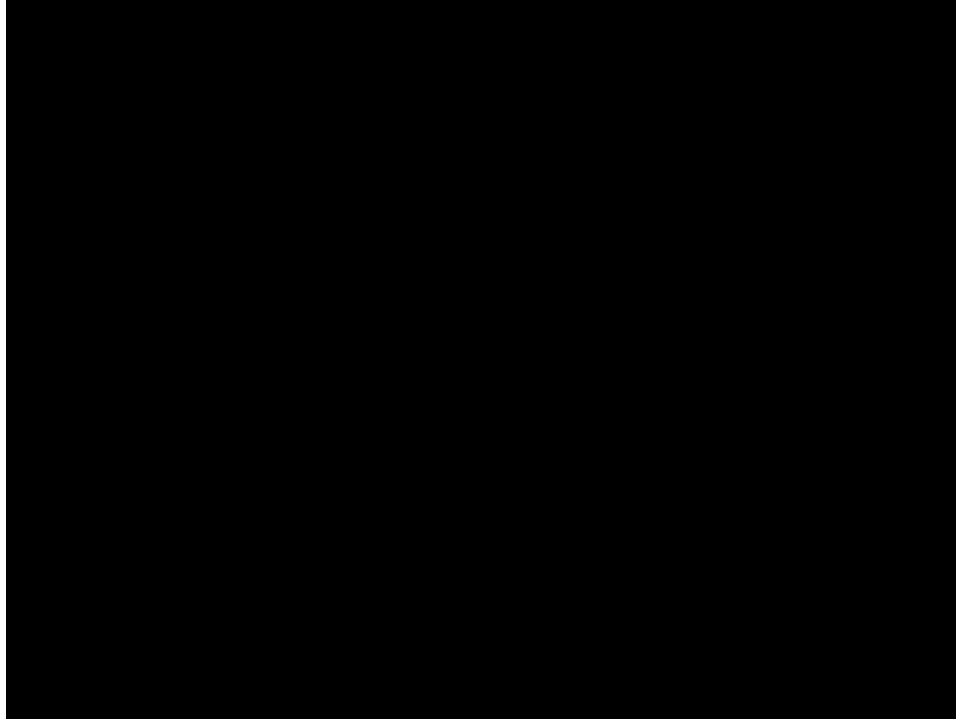
What was God's will for the chosen covenant shalom people?

- a) Theocracy was God's ultimate will ... God wanted a voluntary community of faith where people chose to commit to Yahweh as king
- b) But monarchy ended up being God's remedial will ... Monarchy was a way that God could still work with a stubborn people, but this was a community where their loyalty to God was filtered thru a human king, who invariably distorted God's shalom message.

All thru the OT there was always a certain level of faithfulness of God's people, but among the kings who had the most positive biblical descriptions, even the great heroes were still operating below the level of God's ultimate will

God's ultimate shalom vision didn't really have a chance to be lived out as long as the people expected a human king to lead them

- c. (Visualizing ultimate & remedial on timeline) [blank PPT]



1. So for a period of more than 1000 years on the Heils. Timeline we have this new line of activity running parallel to the original line of salvation history that went from creation to the time of the judges.
2. In fact, as we'll see next week, that parallel line actually becomes two parallel lines with Solomon's kingdom breaking into a northern kingdom & a southern one
3. Let's remember that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of our OT is describing events within the monarchy, or a belief system based on the monarchy which was God's remedial will.
4. But even during those long 1000 years of God's people not operating according to God's ultimate will, that vision was not totally lost or forgotten.

V. This is where the prophets come in

A. The prophets (& not the kings) were the carriers of the vision of God's ultimate will

1. We could spend many Sundays describing the work of OT prophets & types of prophets
2. Today have only enough time to barely introduce biblical prophecy by saying 2 simple things:

B. What prophets are NOT, and what prophets ARE [PPT prophets 1]

PROPHETS:

O.T. carriers of God’s
ultimate vision

➤ *Prophets are NOT ...*

Crystal ball gazers/
Foretellers of the distant future

1. What prophets are NOT: foretellers of the distant future, like some crystal ball gazers
 - a) Earlier Pastor Cindy said that “chosen” and “nation-state” are some of the most critically misunderstood words in the Bible
 - b) Today I want to add “prophet” and “prophecy” to that list ... Biblical prophecy is not primarily about future predictions
2. If prophets are not foretellers, then think of them as forthtellers
[PPT prophets 2]

PROPHETS:

O.T. carriers of God’s
ultimate vision

➤ *Prophets ARE ...*

Forthtellers of God’s word to God’s
people in a specific historical
situation

- a) A better name for them might be spokespersons for God
 - b) The prophet preaches forth Yahweh's word to a specific historical situation in the life of Yahweh's people
 - c) It is wrong to apply ancient prophecies to our world today without 1st closely examining the historical context of the prophet & the prophet's audience.
3. Having described God's ultimate will for God's people, & God's remedial will thru the kings & how the vision of that ultimate will was carried by the OT prophets ... [PPT Boxing 1]

BOXING GOD IN

How God's people got it wrong
by limiting Yahweh

VI. I want to conclude by naming 2 simple "boxes" that God got put into, thanks largely to King David & King Solomon

A. Along the timeline where the united monarchy is, you can see 2 square boxes to represent what I'm talking about ...

1. Though well-intentioned, these "boxes" constrained how well the people could cooperate with God's vision
2. And we struggle with these same boxes today.

B. The 1st box is nationalism [PPT boxing 2]

BOXING GOD IN

How God’s people got it wrong by limiting Yahweh

- **The nationalistic box:**
Nation-state = God’s people

(God is on our side, and blesses
our country more than all others.)

1. Here the interests of God’s people & the interests of the nation-state became identified together
 - a) David & Solomon drafted men into their standing army, & used taxes to support the rich lifestyles of the noble elites rather than to help the poor.
 - b) Defending Israel the nation-state became = defending Yahweh
2. You & I know this box very well in the 21st Century
 - a) In our own nation-state, people who question the marriage of “God and country” are accused of being unpatriotic.
 - b) I invite you to get your wallets/purses out & pull out any bill you find (& don’t worry, this is an object lesson, not another offering)

What does it say on the back of the bill, just below “United States of America”? *It says, “In God we trust”* ... See any irony there?

To me, the fact that “In God we trust” appears on the money of the country with a military budget larger than the next eleven countries combined, strikes me as more than a little idolatrous!

<http://www.iiss.org/en/about%20us/press%20room/press%20releases/press%20releases/archive/2014-dd03/february-0abc/military-balance-2014-press-statement-52d7>

- c) When national flags fly in churches where Jesus is claimed as Lord ... when politicians lace every speech with generous doses of “God bless America” ... there are great big nationalistic boxes around God!

c. The 2nd box usually goes right along w/ the 1st one:
geography [PPT boxing 3]

BOXING GOD IN

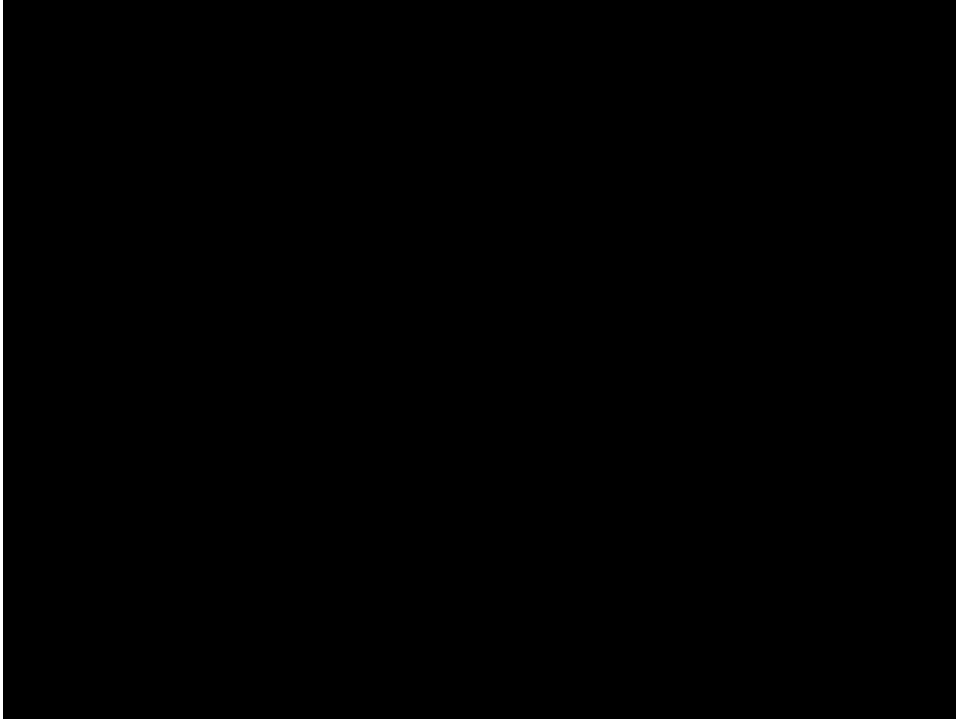
How God's people got it wrong by limiting Yahweh

- **The geographical box:**
God's home is in Jerusalem.

(True worship only happens
in the Temple.)

1. The thinking goes, *"If God supports our nation-state, then God must also live in our territory, favor our land, & prefer to be worshiped in a particular building."*
2. The elaborate Temple taxes & rituals we see in Jesus' day, built up to support proper worship @ the Jerusalem Temple, were set in motion by King Solomon.
 - a) He's the one who built a spectacular permanent house for Yahweh, even though Yahweh had been worshiped just fine in a traveling tabernacle & local shrines for over 300 years!
3. Today we may not say God dwells only in Jerusalem or Washington or Indianapolis, but this box still shows up. The geographical box is revealed when ...
 - a) A family is traveling on vacation over a Sunday & they consider attending worship @ some local church, but then they just stay in the hotel room because "it just wouldn't be like our own church."
 - b) A growing congregation with a beautiful building decides to channel its growth into a church plant in a rented gymnasium space 20 minutes away. It asks for members willing to help start this little congregation for at least the first 2 years, and only 5 people offer to do so.

D. [blank PPT]



So in 2014 in the great state of Indiana in the heart of the most powerful country on earth, it's time to ask, "How have we allowed our power, comfort and privilege to constrain God in such boxes?"

VII. (Conclusion ... pause)

A. God had a vision long, long ago

1. It was a vision of a world where right relationships in all directions was a way of life: This ... was God's ultimate will

B. At one point, about 1000 years before Christ appeared, **the dissonance between this vision and the sinful patterns of God's chosen people became so great **that God backed off insisting on fully implementing this vision of theocracy****

1. God let the people have the kind of community they demanded, even though God knew it would fall short of that vision
2. This was God's remedial will ... a way of shepherding his people along through the voice of the prophets who carried that original vision, until a later time when it could shine once again

C. When you pray for God's will, what do YOU mean? ... Is your gaze going high enough?

1. When you search in the Scriptures for God's will, be aware that not everything that appears in the Bible is God's ultimate will ...
2. Ask yourself whether the examples & guidance you're seeking in

the Bible align with God’s ultimate will, or if you’re settling for biblical answers that aren’t God’s highest & best

3. Jesus restored God’s ultimate will and showed us most closely what it looks like ...

D. Even as we continue studying the OT parts of this salvation history, let us never lose sight of Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith!