

EGD 099: Lesson 22 Script

David

Leader; not Israel's first king, but perhaps it's most kingly leader. Even Solomon's wisdom and wealth do not quite rise to the same level of David in the Jewish national consciousness.

A Renaissance man of sorts; he was a king, a man of war and brilliant tactician, a charismatic leader, a skilled political operative. He was also an artist, a musician and a poet. Tradition credits him with thousands of psalms and other writings. A non-canonical psalm discovered among the DSS credits his prolific literary output with a spirit of prophecy, so we might be justified in adding "prophet" to his resume.

What is kind of unfortunate is that the records we have of David in the OT were shaped by the political needs of the times. We hear more about David the warrior, and David the politician than we do about David the musician, for instance, except in his early years as Saul's protégé. David's prowess as a military leader also tends to overlook one of his most remarkable achievements, which was the unification of all twelve tribes into a single kingdom.

David and Saul's rivalry eventually devolved into open civil war, with David's southern faction wearing down Saul's forces in the north. When Saul's forces finally succumbed and after Saul's death, David managed to unite the Israelites by persuasion, by which I don't mean that he made them a proverbial offer they couldn't refuse. No force, no threat of force. His use of diplomacy was extraordinary; even his son Solomon, for all his vaunted wisdom, had real problems in that department when it came to domestic policy.

David is also a very remarkable character as an example of obedience. This is going to sound strange when talking about someone who messed up big time in the matter of Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba. Why do I refer to his obedience? Yes, David broke the rules. Actually, he broke quite a large number of rules. For example, he massacred a large number of Moabite prisoners of war in spite of the fact that when he was himself on the run, he entrusted his parents into the care and keeping of the king of the Moabites. Many interpreters have had trouble with that incident. If nothing else, it points out that David, like anyone else, had his complexities and weaknesses.

This weakness was clearly a problem for many people who gave us the Old Testament. Two major accounts of David's reign appear in the Old Testament. The first and probably the most accurate is that found in Kings. The other is located in I and II Chronicles. The version in Kings is quite unsparing. We get everything; the good with the bad. David is brilliant, heroic, and noble, but also conniving, deceitful, and ruthless. At the end of his life, he and Bathsheba make sure that Solomon will take the throne, and David leaves instructions about all the people that Solomon needs to have executed when he assumes power to ensure that his reign is not plagued by the same infighting and civil war as David's.

But I was talking about obedience. The point being made in the OT is that when God called David on the carpet, so to speak, David listened to the criticism and the correction, and acted accordingly. This was a consistent pattern throughout his career. When God made some special demand of David, David always obeyed. For this reason, of all the kings mentioned in the books of I and II Kings, David is one of a very few who makes the cut as a righteous king. In fact, for the kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, David is the gold standard of what a king should be like.

This isn't very much like our idea of obedience; we like to think that someone who is obedient isn't going to make those kinds of mistakes to begin with. It does give us cause to rethink what we mean by living a good life or what obedience really means. It's also important to keep one's criteria in mind. The Books of Kings are fixated on one thing, and one thing only, and that is to what degree the kings whose histories they relate, and that was whether they followed God's way. Since only about three of them make the cut, that bar is set pretty high, and yet this murderer and adulterer not only passes, he sets the top of the grading curve.

What do we make of that?

One obvious conclusion is that, nobody's perfect, and that's okay. There are plenty of examples of God working with very human servants, even some who are less than willing, and yet together they manage to accomplish great things.

This isn't to make excuses for the weaknesses and mistakes of either David or ourselves; we all make them. If you insist on perfection, you're going to end up very frustrated. Worse, you may start trying to escape that imperfection that is the essence of being human. Another post-apostolic Christian thinker could not explain our human penchant for sin but instead of accepting what David and others in the OT clearly understood, namely that God is used to working

with the likes of us, he evolved a new model in which human depravity the very nature of humanity. And Christians have been suffering for the sins of St. Augustine ever since.

If you are interested in learning more about King David, btw, you can listen to my podcast, Discovering the Old Testament, episode 23, which covers the reign and legacy of King David.

Now, let's move on to our panel discussion.

David

Historicity

Inscriptions

citadels

The kingship controversy

Good or bad?

Rationale was for military purposes, but you might say that the office experienced a great deal of mission creep to include diplomatic, commercial, domestic policy ventures that would not have happened in the absence of a monarchy.

Perhaps it was the military crisis of the philistine threat which caused the rush to kingship in the first place that created the template by which the narrative of both David and Saul; as war leaders and political operatives first.

David starts out making all the right moves. He has this natural charisma and gift for both leadership and smart tactical thinking. He does not put himself above his men, and he understands politics as few rulers have before or since. At the same time, he also exploited the deaths of Saul and his friend Jonathan to usurp the kingship from its rightful heir

One of his smartest moves was to seize the Jebusite city of Jerusalem shortly after he gained the allegiance of all twelve tribes. This city is in the northern part of Judah, but close enough to the northern kingdom that it made the perfect capital for the new Kingdom of Israel.

But as his rule drew on, discontent grew. There were forced labor gangs, a personal army, even a draft that was enacted after a census; not a way to get

on people's good side. In fact, the popular support of those who attempted to overthrow David argues that not everything he did was popular, and that there were a lot of people harboring resentment about his monarchical ways.

Davidic covenant; the most controversial of the covenants; was it unconditional or not? Since the dynasty went down along with the sacred city in 587, I'd say that's a no. But David's dynasty did manage to survive until it was finally taken down by the Babylonians. Along the way, this continuity was a serious political advantage for Judah compared with the much more chaotic institutions of monarchy in the north.

The Davidic Dynasty and the alleged covenant they laid claim to was, in their view, a divine institution. I say "alleged" by the way, because not everyone in the OT believed that theirs was a truly legitimate covenant. Some argue that it was about the dynasty but others say that it was only divine permission to build God's Temple. In any case, we have trappings of outside Near Eastern Kingship, including a hint of deification when it comes to David's successors.

There are a number of Psalms known today as "enthronement psalms" in which the speaker implies divine adoption of the king by God. It was apparently assumed that once the Davidic king took the throne, he became God's son by means of adoption. Psalm 2:7 is one of these enthronement psalms, and the clearest expression of this; "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" Now if that sounds familiar, and it should, it's because it is also associated with the baptism of Jesus, another of David's scions, or so we are expected to believe.

This leads us to yet another example of fallout from the Davidic Dynasty. So completely is David bound up in the fate of the Jewish and Israelite peoples, that his persona became attached to one of several messianic models that developed during the Intertestamental period. As David had become the prototype of the Israelite king, he also became an archetype of a new king who would appear at a critical moment in Jewish history and not only save his people from disaster, but help to elevate them into a completely new cosmic order.

Interestingly, this "Davidic messiah" as he was often described, was a military and political leader, just as he was touted in the Old Testament—which should surprise no one. Along the way, somewhere, the harp-playing poet, the suffering father, the repentant sinner, in other words, the David that is probably the most pertinent to the rest of us and our lives, was lost.