



PALMA CEIA

Presbyterian Church

What to do with David? (II Samuel)

Gathering Together Around God's Word

*Sunday, March 20th 2022
10:05am in EM 307/308 & Zoom*

Background

Samuel I & II are believed to have been written sometime between 630-540 BC, during the Babylonian Exile. It's important to note, though, that parts of the book were composed prior to these dates. The two books are part of a larger Deuteronomistic History, a series of Old Testament books that tell the theological history of Israel and the law. The entire Deuteronomistic History is composed of the books Joshua, Judges, Samuel I & II, and Kings I & II. The two books of Samuel recount Israel's history from the birth of the prophet and last judge Samuel through the reigns of Saul and David. These books cover the transition of Israel from a tribal people ruled by judges and prophets to a centralized nation-state ruled over by a monarchy. This transformation had a large impact on Israel's political, social, and religious identity.

The Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has pointed out that while Samuel I & II contain history and theology, the books are better thought of in totality as an imaginative narrative: "The shrewd convergence of all these factors of realism, Davidic distinctiveness, and Yahweh's presence can be expressed only in an artistic idiom that means to acknowledge and transcend our conventional historical and theological questions." Brueggemann warns, "Our historical approach tends to end in *Realpolitik* (reducing social relations to the operation of sheer power), and our theological reading tends to end in a monopoly of certitude."

Some themes to pay attention to through I & II Samuel are kingship and covenant loyalty and the ongoing tension between the two. The Philistines, who showed up in Judges, play an important and antagonistic part in these books. Another theme is the manner of worship of God and the role of the ark. In many ways the ark is a central character in I & II Samuel and figures into the story both religiously and politically. Israel continues to shift in how it organizes and governs itself; the transition from tribes ruled by judges to a nation state ruled by a monarchy is an critical change that has wide ranging effects. Lastly, the subject of God's anointed one is another central theme that will continue throughout the remainder of the Old Testament.

Outline

I. The Story of Samuel (I Samuel 1-7)

- I Samuel 1:1 - 4:1 The Birth and Call of Samuel
- I Samuel 4:1 - 7:17 The Loss and Return of the Ark

II. The Story of Samuel & Saul (I Samuel 8-15)

- I Samuel 8:1 - 12:25 Saul Anointed King
- I Samuel 13:1 - 15:35 The Failure of Saul's Kingship

III. The Story of Saul and David (I Samuel 16-31)

- I Samuel 16:1 - 17:58 The Rise of David
- I Samuel 18:1 - 31:13 The Decline & Death of Saul

IV. The Story of David (II Samuel)

- II Samuel 1:1 - 4:12 The Story of David as King of Judah
- II Samuel 5:1 - 9:13 The Story of David as King over all Israel
- II Samuel 10:1 - 20:26 David's Sin and its Consequences
- II Samuel 21:1 – 24:25 Final Reflections on David and His Reign

David

David is a central figure in I & II Samuel in addition to the Bible as a whole. His name is mentioned approximately 1,100 times throughout Scripture, second only to Jesus. David's story begins on the fringes, a shepherd and the youngest son of eight, and transitions until he is at the very center of Israel, a king who brings Judah and Israel together under a united monarchy. Though David is largely portrayed in charismatic terms, his story is by no means perfect. Second Samuel in particular details the highs and lows of David's biography, including stories of murder, adultery, incest, and interfamilial strife. David's story is a tragic one, though, the text is clear it is never considered an outright failure.

In spite of the tragic elements, David's story is integral to the overarching Old Testament narrative as well as the New Testament, where both Matthew and Luke explicitly connect Jesus to David in their genealogies. David is portrayed in varying lights in other parts of Scripture, and their focus can differ. For example, I

& II Samuel provide a comprehensive approach to David's biography whereas I & II Chronicles paints a picture of David as a powerful leader completely devoid of flaws or personal issues. In the Psalms (e.g. Psalms 18, 34, & 51) a more personal tact is taken, and the reader is given insight to David's inner life and the struggles he faced. Some of the prophets focus less on David as a man and more on the Davidic dynasty and what it means to Israel as a whole. This focus is seen in minor prophets as well with attention given to a messianic deliver in the familial line of David. Regardless of the book, the character and idea of David looms large over all of Scripture.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

— Jeremiah 23:5-6

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.

— Ezekiel 37:24

*On that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen,
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of old*

— Amos 9:11

The Complexity of David in II Samuel

- David Mourns for Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1)
 - II Samuel 1:19-27 is one of the earliest poems in the Bible and its attribution to David is believed by many to be authentic. The poem beautifully captures the grief of David over the loss of Saul and Jonathan, lifting up their heroism while leaving out the previous drama that occurred between Saul and David.
- God's Covenant with David, David's Prayer (II Samuel 7)
 - This chapter occupies the narrative and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus. Many commentators have pointed to this chapter as one of the most crucial Old Testament texts, due to the lasting role of the covenant made with David.
 - While there is an ambiguity to David's motives for previous actions (such as bringing the ark to Jerusalem), there is an honesty in David's actions in this chapter that avoids charges of political motivation or self-interest.

- David's Kindness to Mephibosheth (II Samuel 9)
 - David finds the surviving heir of the house of Saul and graciously allows him to live in David's court. The text is clear David's motivation for this act of kindness centers on his loyalty to his friend Jonathan. Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who is "crippled in his feet" (II Sam 9:3) from then on lives in Jerusalem and "always ate at the king's table" (II Sam 9:13).

- David Commits Adultery with Bathsheba (II Samuel 11)
 - David has scored a number of political, religious, and military victories leading up to this point; however, in Chapter 11 and after there is a shift in the story to David's failures and various troubles. This chapter is considered by many to be the pivotal turning point in the narrative plot. The aftereffects of this story will play out in the life of David and, consequently, Israel for years to come.

- Nathan Condemns David (II Samuel 12)
 - Walter Brueggemann has posited the entire David and Bathsheba narrative centers around three terse statements that however simple they read have costly impacts, *"In their utterance we watch David being dismantled before the massive claim of Israel's torah."*
 - Bathsheba saying "I am pregnant" (11:5).
 - Nathan identifying David and his affront "You are the man!" (12:7).
 - David's confession "I have sinned against the Lord" (12:13).

- Amnon and Tamar (II Samuel 13)
 - The horrific account of Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar, serves as a prologue for the Absalom's rebellion (II Sam 15-20). The text paints a picture of an overly lenient David who restrains from addressing the incident, "When Kind David heard of all these things he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn" (II Sam 13:21).

- Absalom Usurps the Throne (II Samuel 15)
 - Absalom, now in open rebellion against his father, holds court and ingratiates himself with the people of Israel, ultimately claiming the throne at Hebron.

- The Defeat and Death of Absalom (II Samuel 18)
 - This chapter's mix of dramatic tension, tragedy, and grief is considered one of the literary high points of all of Scripture. Robert Barron claims, *"This pivotal chapter...concludes with what is arguably the most humanly moving scene in the entire Old Testament, the weeping of the king for his rebellious son: 'Absalom, my son, my son.'"*