

David at Thirty

Today we look at the beginning of the reign of King David. I want to sort of luxuriate on this today and not rush past the lessons we can learn from the contemplation of his life. And the lessons are very interesting.

As Hillel (he was the great first century Rabbi who d. 10 CE, Jesus would have been an early teen when he died) once said referring to they called the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Remembrance, "...turn it and turn it again for everything is in it; and contemplate it and grow grey over it and stir not from it for you can have no better rule (Mishnah *Aboth* 5:22).

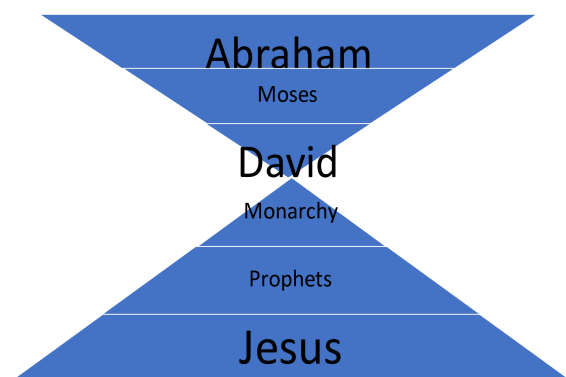
We hurry too much!

It was from Hillel that I get the phrase, the gospel while standing on one foot.

First he went to Shammai, who, insulted by this ridiculous request, threw him out of the house. The man did not give up and went to Hillel. This gentle sage accepted the challenge, and said:

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this—go and study it!" (Talmud Shabbat 31a)

It is hard to overstate the importance of David to Israelite history *and* to the Christian church. If you will think of salvation history like you see it in this graphic you will see how idea works. This isn't just a factual history, but it is a moral/theological perspective on history that helps us interpret the world. It gives us identity.



You have read the very first verse of the New Testament: ***An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*** (Matt 1:1)

David stands at the crux of salvation history. All the promises to Abraham for land and a people culminate in his ascendancy to the throne, and after him all kings in Judea and Israel are judged by the standard of David, the *man after God's own heart*.

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. (2 Sam 5:3-4)

I call this message ***David at Thirty*** because that is the age at which he begins his reign of Judah in Hebron. It doesn't mean necessarily that he is 30 years old. Thirty is biblical shorthand that you are ready for authority. As in Mishnah *Aboth* 5:21:

- Five for reading,
- thirteen for manhood (*bar mitzvah*),
- eighteen for marriage,
- twenty for vocation,
- thirty for authority,
- forty for discernment
- fifty for counsel
- sixty to be an elder
- seventy for grey hair [I'm more of a Prov 20:29 guy... ***The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.*** :) Poor Elisha was bald. He looked just like me and the little boys of Bethel yelled, 'Go away you old baldhead!' (2 Kings 2:23)]
- eighty for special strength!

So also we see that Jesus ***...was about 30 when he began his work...*** (Lk 3:23)

So here are the fast facts of David's life:

- Reigns 40 years. 7 1/5 in Hebron and 33 in Jerusalem.
- 8 wives, many concubines
- 19 sons many daughters
- Moabite, not Israeli (great grandmother is Ruth → Obed → Jesse → David)¹
- He was massively popular with everyone: ***...everything the king did pleased all the people*** (2 Sam 3:36)²
- Throughout his rise, and beyond to Israelite history in the generations to come everyone seemed to understand and accept:
 - ***The lord said to you: it is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you shall be ruler of Israel*** (2 Sam 5:2b)³
- Above all, he is the "anointed of the God of Jacob" (2 Sam 23:1c), that is... the *mashiah* משיח the messiah, the anointed one of God
- Jesus is the *mashiah*, the greek is Christos, echoing his heritage from David

¹ cf Matt 1:4-6; Lk 3:32

² Not only for the slaying of Goliath but his victory over the Philistines. Compare 2 Samuel 21:19, which says Goliath was killed by Elhanan, with the Goliath story in 1 Samuel 17. It may be that Goliath's name was given to David's opponent, whose name was unknown at the time.

³ David's life is the fulfilment of the promise of God to Judah in Genesis 49:8-12

***The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and the obedience of the peoples is his.***

Now we move to the part of II Samuel that tells the story of David's life. To say it had its ups and downs would be putting it mildly.

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker (2 Sam 3:1).

There is plenty of room to debate the deeds and misdeeds of David. He was not a blameless man. Forty years of rule is a lot of time to screw up in. And David doesn't disappoint. For example, we are going to spend two weeks on the David/Uriah/Bathsheba story. It's so bad that it takes **two** sermons to unravel that hot mess and figure out what we are to learn from it. And I don't mean the kind of hot mess where you still look good even though you just got up :).

- His shrewdest move was to move his capitol city from Hebron to Jerusalem, the last remaining city of the Canaanites, which he takes from the Jebusites. ***The king and his men marched to Jerusalem!*** (2 Sam 5). Having just been anointed as king of both Judah and the northern tribes of Israel, Jerusalem is Canaanite city, there fore neutral and it sits on the Jerusalem saddle between both kingdoms.
- Here you have the famous scene where he conquers that impregnable city by sending troops up a water shaft from the Gihon Spring
- He rises quickly. In a summary of his victories in chapter 8 of 2 Samuel (it is 24 chapters long) we find that David has subdued ***Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek...*** and the spoils of war, silver, gold and bronze poured into his new capitol of Jerusalem.
- Expands his kingdom to great reaches (see map)



But then the story darkens:

- Chapters 11 and on are a long recitation of the decline of the royal house beginning with the David/Uriah/Bathsheba debacle, see my upcoming messages on July 25 and Aug 1.⁴ From the perspective of the narrative, this is where David's life begins to go sideways.
- There is the rape of David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (chapter 13)
- Absalom kills Amnon and flees (chapter 13)
- Absalom returns to Jerusalem and "steals the hearts of the people" and usurps David's throne. A messenger tells David, "***The hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom.***" So David flees.⁵
- David eventually regains the throne and finishes his days in his house in Jerusalem.

From the Text

What can we learn from this story today? Nothing I'm going to say here is going to rock your world, I'm telling what you already probably know at some level. But, this is the Book of Remembrance! It is our good for us to remember and allow the wisdom of 3000 years to give us perspective on the modern life. We need this.

First, we learn from the way this story is told that without honesty with ourselves, with God, with each other, we can't get to genuine spirituality. Nothing is more detrimental than self-delusion.

We've been told by the First Nations for decades of the untold tragedies of the residential schools but we didn't want to hear it.

When people say 'Well, I don't need your Jesus, I'm a good person and don't need God' it is just not true. That isn't seeing things as they honestly are. Everybody has pulled their own David moments.

Without honesty with ourselves, with God, with each other we can't get to genuine spirituality. Without honesty we will never be free, we will never know the joy of the grace of God.

Do you know what hagiography is? It is a biography that "treats the person with excessive or undue admiration. It's why I don't read autobiographies. I want at least a somewhat objective view of what actually happened. There is some idealization of David's life in 1&2 Samuel but its most striking feature is how he is a flesh-and-blood man, realistically portrayed.

We are following the narrator's lead here because hagiography doesn't help us, it's not real, life and people aren't perfect. And this is where we come to the gospel in all of this, the good news.⁶

⁴ "...an intimate portrait of the domestic and political troubles of the royal family and the court, with all their sordidness and tragic consequences" (Oxford Study Bible, OT, p.398).

⁵ In fact, the people of Israel repeatedly rebel against David, see the story of Sheba in chapter 20.

⁶ When I'm reading through a biblical book like Samuel I look through the whole book to get the lay of the land and then I'm back and forth, reading and rereading, looking for patterns of thought, recurring themes, the repetition of important words and phrases, stories in the cycle that have the same point and stories that seem to contradict other stories.

All the time I am asking, 'Why was the story preserved in this way by the narrator (and the subsequent communities that, over time, intended to shape our faith through its retelling?)' By this means I hope to get at what the stories intend to teach. That is where our protein is.

Consider this. Each narrator adopts a "voice", i.e. a way of telling the story. The narrator in biblical literature is usually omniscient, they know the score (and, by extension, the reader is omniscient). In the gospels, for example, the narrators know who Jesus really is, but the characters along

How is it that David stayed anointed?! Well, when God enters into covenant with his people, when the anointing is on a life, it is very, very durable. And as much as I hate to admit it, the more OT covenant theology I read and the more I live and the more I begin to grasp the unity of the view of God presented in the Bible, it seems that the Baptists are right, the old saying “once saved always saved” seems true. When God gets in your life you are never ever abandoned by his grace.

Even though David seems to have lost sight of the heart and mind of God at times, there was this durable, impervious grace, this irrevocable anointing that blessed him to the end of his days.

David at seventy is as blessed and anointed as David at thirty, before most of life happened. And so are we blessed anointed for life when the God of the Fathers comes upon us through the Holy Spirit. Amen

the way usually do not. In Samuel, we are always clear on who is in the right and who is in the wrong, what God wants and of what God disapproves.

The voice adopted by the narrator can make the main characters look like heroes, glossing over or ignoring flaws and mistakes. This is sometimes called hagiography. It is why I don't like autobiographies, because the author is always trying to make themselves look good. I don't trust autobiographies to get the objective story because you get the glossed-up version – not the flaws that reveal so much about the real person.

I'm riffing about this because as we are rereading Samuel, and I've mentioned this already, we are amazed at the constant candor of the narrative (frankness, openness, honesty), the truth-telling about the characters: their selfish choices, the pursuit of self-interest rather than obeying God. It is such an important and rich narrative decision... in the Word of God.

Some might counter, 'But Pastor Dave, aren't the gospels just hagiographic depictions of Jesus of Nazareth?' And I would answer, it's not hagiography if the stories about Jesus are true. He was the perfect man, without sin. You do see narrative realism in the portraits of everyone else, disciples, Pharisees, etc.

As the OT stories circulated, were retold and finally redacted to the form in which we possess them, the question looms large, 'what did our forebearers want us to see?' As our First Nations put it so beautifully, 'What shall we learn today from the grandfathers and the grandmothers?'