

The Figure of David in 1& 2

Samuel

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More than with any other character in OT, Israel is fascinated by David, deeply attracted to him, bewildered by him and occasionally embarrassed by him. On the one hand, scholars like John McKenzie characterize David as a “bloodthirsty oversexed bandit.” About the same David, Samuel Terrien says, “the purity of David’s faith assumed a quality of elegance which has often gone unnoticed in modern times.” We may wonder whether McKenzie and Terrien are reading the same story about the same man. The relevant assertion about David, which recurs throughout the books of 1& 2 Samuel, is “Yahweh was with him.” This is the theological leitmotif of the apology of David, and the decisive influence of Yahweh’s special favour for David runs throughout the narrative.

The books of Samuel present a highly complex portrait of David who wears many faces in his story: on the one hand we have a shepherd (1 Sam 16:1-13), skilled in fine-arts (1 Sam 16:14-23) and knows how to protect his sheep from the lion or the bear, since he is vigilant, attentive and caring (1 Sam 17:32-37). He is a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence (1 Sam 16:18). He recognizes his weakness and mistakes (2 Sam 12:13; 24:10, 17).

“Yahweh is always” with him (1 Sam 16:13, 18; 18:12, 14, 28; 2 Sam 5:10; 7:9). He is successful in every deed (1 Sam

18:5, 7, 14-15, 27, 30) and has unshakable faith in the Lord (1 Sam 17:38-47; 2 Sam 7:18). He is a man sought out by the Lord, the one after the Lord’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). He consults the Lord before every undertaking and takes courage from the Lord in moments of distress by seeking His counsel (1 Sam 23:1-6; 30:6-10; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:17-25) and is convinced of his own righteousness (2 Sam 22:21-24a).

He is noble and magnanimous (1 Sam 24 & 26; 2 Sam 1:11-12) and feels remorse and does not rejoice over the death of his archenemy (2 Sam 1:11-12). He is tolerant in the face of family rebellion and flees for his life (2 Sam 15:1-23). He is paternally concerned (2 Sam 18:28-32; 19:1, 5) and breaks down with inconsolable grief over the children (2 Sam 18:33-19:4). Moreover, he forgives those who curse and throw stones at him and his retinue (2 Sam 19:20-24). He listens to a woman (Abigail) and takes her counsel to heart and desists from carrying out his revengeful plan (1 Sam 25).

He is ‘protector’ of Judah (1 Sam 23, 25, 27), the shield of the mighty (2 Sam 1:21b; 22:3, 31, 36), the anointed of the Lord (1 Sam 24:26; 2 Sam 1; 1 Sam 16:13) and the chosen one (1 Sam 16:2). He refuses to raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed (1 Sam 24:2, 11; 26:9, 11, 16, 23). He is a powerful and great king (2 Sam 3:1; 8:1-18; 2 Sam 5:10) and destroyer of the enemies (2 Sam 22:38; 4:7, 8, 12; 16:9; 20:21; 1 Sam 17:46, 54, 57; 1 Sam 31:9). He is courageous (1 Sam 16:18). He is the head of the tribes of Israel (1 Sam 15:17) and the head of nations (2 Sam 22:44). He is kind even to the enemies (1 Sam 24:8-21; 26:7-13; 30:11-16; ch 25; 2 Sam 3:36; 2 Sam 9:7-8) and is loved and liked by all (1 Sam 18:13; 16:21; 18:3, 16, 22; 20:17; 2 Sam 12:24). He is benevolent (2 Sam 9:1) and administers justice and equity to all (2 Sam 8:15). He is the servant of God (2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29) and expresses his own

servitude (2 Sam 8:10-11).

However the books of Samuel do not hide the shadows in David's life. His failure to be a true shepherd is exposed and he is rebuked (2 Sam 11:1). The idle king falls prey to the beauty of a bathing woman and commits adultery and then makes every effort to cover up his sin, even to the point of plotting to kill her husband (2 Sam 11:2-5). As a youngster, his ears perk up at the potential for fame and fortune (1 Sam 17:25-27) and he looks for a warrior's reward (1 Sam 17:26, 30). He seeks a spot within the royal family, first through an apparent feigned humility (1 Sam 18:18-19, 23), then through very aggressive and daring military prowess (1 Sam 18:27).

He becomes a proud warrior who acquires the spoils of war (1 Sam 17:54b), and who will cling to a gruesome trophy - the head of Goliath - even in later life (1 Sam 17:54a). He is arrogant (1 Sam 17:34-37a), boasts and seeks glory (2 Sam 8:13; 9:1, 3) and an impudent young man interested in seeing the fighting (1 Sam 17:28). His ruthlessness is exemplified when he does not win the hand of a woman who loves him, but rather, when he becomes the king's son-in law for purely political gain (1 Sam 18:26b). Likewise, he knowingly places the priest, Ahimelech in grave danger (1 Sam 21:2-10; 22:21). When the consequences of his actions are fulfilled, his 'repentance' is minimal. In contrast, he is more ostentatious in showing sorrow when the news of a death has greater political significance (2 Sam 1:11-27; 2:4b-7; 3:28-39; 4:9-12).

His opportunism is shown when he reverses his former decision and quickly renews his interest in Yahweh's ark, perhaps in his hope for a transferral of the blessing. (2 Sam 6: 12). He is still sensitive to the danger : instead of placing the ark in his own house the one Hiram helped him build

(2 Sam 5:11) he pitches a tent for it and offers sacrifices before it (2 Sam 6:17). He does not kill Saul and Absalom but actually looks forward to profiting from their death. He is distressed over Jonathan's death (2 Sam 26) but refrains from speaking directly of his own love for Jonathan. His tribute to the Lord may be seen as earning him the title of servant of the Lord (2 Sam 8:11-12) but his servitude could operate in a self-serving way as he himself appoints the high priests and makes his own sons as priests (2 sam 8:17-18).

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my house for ever" (1 ***as priests***
Sam 20:15). In spite of his

covenant with Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3-4) he has essentially placed Jonathan's son under house arrest (2 Sam 9). He showed kindness to Saul's house only after he allowed the gibeonites' sword to descend upon most of its occupants (2 Sam 21:1-9). He entices Abner (2 Sam 3:25-26) but does not prevent Joab to kill him. His continued disdain for Me-phibosheth is exemplified in his failure to bother with any form of cross-examination when Ziba brings charges against his master (2 Sam 16:1-4). He alludes to murder in the service of religion to rid himself of political rivals (2 Sam 21:1-7). He executes the majority of Saul's male heirs, after having vowed before Yahweh not to do this (1 Sam 24:22-23a). He becomes a passively failed father of Amnon and Tamar and

fails to correct them (2 Sam 13:1-20).

To summarize, David is a well-rounded character. The character emerging from his story is attractive and repulsive, noble and humane, good and evil, pleasing and sickening. His success is due to the divine patronage and favour. Only when he permits himself to be the recipient of Yahweh's favour, only when he permits his fate to rest in the hands of others, does the story present a fully positive view of him.

Endnotes

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1. J. L. McKENZIE, *The Old Testament Without Illusion* (Chicago 1979), 236.
2. S. TERRIEN, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York 1979), 282.
3. The expression "to consult the Lord" or "to inquire of the Lord" used about 42 times in the two books of Samuel, has the theological purpose of defining an individual's relationship with God, especially in the narratives describing the fall of Saul and the rise of David.
4. R. POLZIN, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, (Bloomington 1993) 62. Edelman notes the irony in that Goliath's head parallels the fate of Dagan's head in 1 Samuel 5. Cf. D.V. EDELMAN, *King Saul in the historiography of Judah* (JSOTS; Sheffield 1991) 133.
5. Lawton argues that the Merab-Michal device evokes the Leah- Rachel motif of Genesis 29. In this way, the author is able to highlight the fact that, unlike younger daughter Rachel, younger daughter Michal is not loved by her husband. cf. R.W. LAWTON, "1 Samuel 18: David, Merab and Michal", *CBQ* 51, (1989) 423-425.
6. R. POLZIN, *David and the Deuteronomist, A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History (Part Three: 2 Samuel)* (Bloomington 1993) 65.
7. J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. III. Throne and City (11 Sam 2-8 and 21-24) (SSN 20; Assen 1990) 274.

Initiating a Dialogue with Nature: Lessons from Laudato Si'

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The very existence of the encyclical letter 'Laudato Si' is the causal effect of Man's unmanliness and ungodliness towards nature. Nature is the existential reality for both living and non-living; natural resources make a living for a being. The earth, by nature with motherly care sustains, governs and provides us required fruit for a living abundantly where man acts as the governor of nature. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Gen; 2:15). The very words 'till it and keep it' has enormously changed over the time to 'use and throw' system in a way nobody is bothered about the mother earth at all. In this context, 'Laudato Si' unveils its vision for integrated ecology. The voice of Pontiff reaches to its highest peak to protect our common home without apathy, without negligence in order to rebuild broken relationship with nature.

It is good to know, etymologically; the term ecology has its origin in the Greek '*Oikos*' which means 'house' or 'home, the total environment in which living organisms exist. While the English term 'environment' is a derivation of the French 'environs' meaning thereby 'in circuit' or 'turning