

The Shepherd-King

King David is certainly one of the best known men to have ever lived. He has cast his shadow over so much of what has gripped the imagination of Christians for centuries. Christian painting, sculpture, poetry and music are full of imaginative depictions of the life of King David. Even when not explicitly biblical, you can't help seeing David's story looming over other ones. Stories like King Arthur, the young king chosen to be king instead of his brothers when still a teenager, and proves it by pulling a sword from a stone, but by flinging a stone into a giant's forehead. In Arthur we have the aged and wise Merlin who selects and protects the king, in David the aged and wise Samuel. Like Arthur, Jerusalem becomes David's Camelot, where he surrounds himself with the thirty mighty men, his knights. Adultery is also the beginning of the end of David's kingdom, this time not by one of his best men, Lancelot, but by himself, against one his best men, Uriah. Before that, David is a Robin Hood, an outlaw being pursued through forests and caves, with a band of fellow outlaws and down and outers, while the king tries to capture him and execute him. During that time, David is like a Hamlet, pretending to be crazy to save his life. Like King Lear, he is overthrown and betrayed by his offspring.

David's poems became the hymnbook of the church for centuries. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, British kings tried to claim some kind of link between David and themselves or model their monarchies somewhat upon David's. When Israel was re-established in 1948, the name of King David appears, and a part of Jerusalem is called the city of David.

And finally, this Hebrew name, probably originally pronounced "Dawith", is now found in at least 90 languages, where people all over the world now name their children after this man. David has cast a shadow over us all.

Why study the life of David? A few important reasons.

First, the sheer amount of Scripture dedicated to David is enormous. Abraham has fourteen chapters dedicated to his life, and so does Joseph. Jacob has eleven. Elijah has ten. How many chapters of Scripture are given to David? Sixty-six, not including 59 references to his life in the New Testament. Half of 1 Samuel, all of 2 Samuel, and all of 1 Chronicles are entirely about David. On top of that, 75 of the 150 psalms are written by David. That's a huge amount of Scripture.

Second, David is a major part of redemptive history. David is a link in the story of God's redeeming the world. The four great movements in that story: creation, fall, redemption, fulfillment. The life of King David is a moment when God shifts into high gear for the coming Messiah. We go from a chaotic, loose time of the judges into a time of a kingdom. God establishes a special covenant with David, known as the Davidic covenant, which promises a throne to David's descendants. Now the wheels are turning, and prophets begin appearing telling us of the Root of Jesse, a Branch of David who will come. If you want to understand the grand story of our people, our culture, our history, you must understand David, the most prominent ancestor of Messiah. In the gospel, Jesus is called the Son of Man most often, the Son of God, second most often, and the Son of David third most often.

Third, David shows us a glimpse of the coming messianic kingdom. David's kingdom was not the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, nor was Solomon's. They failed to reach the promised borders. In fact, all of the biblical prophets lived and prophesied after the lifetimes of David and Solomon, so the coming kingdom is something still future. But we see in David something of what it could be: a place of justice and fairness, a place of peace and prosperity, a place of beauty and majesty, a place of glorious and pure worship. In a time of endless tumult and conflict and confusion, to read of an imperfect Davidic kingdom gives us an appetite for the coming Messianic

kingdom. Our political systems and nations are fracturing under secularism and unbelief. It truly seems like what William B Yeats wrote in his poem, *The Second Coming*:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

We are living through what appears to be the beginning of another Dark Age, another time of the Judges, where every man does that which is right in his own eyes, where everyone is his own authority, and people are lost sheep without a shepherd. In such a time, we should long for the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, and long to have David's Son and David's Lord come and bring order and peace and holiness back to the world. To study even the imperfect and flawed kingdom of David is to see that coming kingdom in more detail.

Fourth, David is a picture of Christ. To study David, is to see Jesus in shadowy form. David is the king by God's choice. David is persecuted without cause. David was both a shepherd and a king. David defeats God's enemies and sets up true worship in Jerusalem. David forgave his enemies and was gracious to them. When we study David, we see pictures and similarities of his coming descendant, the Messiah.

Since most of David's life has to do with his kingship, we also see what happens when you have a good king. Again, our decaying political systems prove that man's sinfulness will destroy the best of our political systems. In a fallen world, the best system is that which understands human evil and creates many checks and balances, many limits and restraints on power. But the best system will be to have a perfect king. A theocracy, where a perfect ruler rules absolutely through faithful servants: this is what will truly bring order to the world. David's kingdom is a shadowy and imperfect picture of a king who is just, ruling in the fear of God.

Fifth, David shows us a real believer's pursuit of God. The Bible gives us a true and unvarnished account of this man's life. He is both an ardent worshipper and a dreadful sinner. He seeks God passionately, but he also sins high-handedly. He loves holiness, and purity and integrity. He is also an adulterer, a murderer, a conniving politician. He is the best friend you could hope for, and also a poor and permissive father. He is courageous enough to face lions and giants, and too cowardly to confront Amnon and Absalom. He brings the Ark to Jerusalem with humble dancing, and he brings a plague to Jerusalem with a proud numbering of the people. In other words he is, as Martin Luther said of all Christians, simultaneously a sinner and a saint. But he is the only one in all of Scripture to be called "a man after God's own heart," and so he remains a model of someone who fought his sin and his passions, who confessed and repented quickly, whose sins were great but who found the grace of God greater. He is flawed, but he is in pursuit of God. He falls, but he rises and keeps on pursuing. David's life is like ours: messy, spotted, inconsistent, but also developing, maturing, growing, becoming like the Saviour. To study David is to study the life of a believer, a life of communing with God, confessing our sins, being cleansed and getting back to communing.

So to introduce David to us, I want us to look at David's tribe, David's traits, and then David's training.

I. David's Tribe & Times

11 Nahshon begot Salma, and Salma begot Boaz; 12 Boaz begot Obed, and Obed begot Jesse; (1 Chr. 2:11-12)

David's family was the family we meet in the book of Ruth. Boaz the landowner who married the foreigner, the Moabitess, Ruth. That wonderful story of grace and redemption produced a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, and perhaps Obed saw his grandson, David, playing at his feet. David's hometown was called the "House of Bread" - Beit-Lechem, or Bethlehem, because of the rich crops of wheat and barley that grew around it.

David was the youngest boy in a large family.

13 Jesse begot Eliab his firstborn, Abinadab the second, Shimea the third, 14 Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, 15 Ozem the sixth, *and* David the seventh. 16 Now their sisters *were* Zeruiah and Abigail. And the sons of Zeruiah *were* Abishai, Joab, and Asahel-- three. 17 Abigail bore Amasa; and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite. (1 Chr. 2:13-17).

David is listed here as the seventh of Jesse's sons, but that refers to Jesse's surviving sons. In 1 Samuel 16, we read that Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and David was not among them. So there were apparently eight brothers, one of whom died or was not mentioned for some reason. David means "beloved one" or "loved".

David also had two sisters, and their children, David's nephews would become important generals in David's kingdom.

Though David's family was probably one of the wealthier families in the area, that did not mean they were among the noble or royal classes. Many years later, when Saul's servants are trying to get David to marry Saul's daughter, Michal, David says, "Is it a light thing in your eyes to become son-in-law to the king, and I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?" In other words, his family had not given him wealth or noble status.

What sort of Israel was David born into? David was born around 1040 BC. Samuel was around 58 when David was born. Saul was already 38, and had been reigning for eight years. His later friend, Jonathan is already 27 when David is born.

Israel had spent a terrible 336 years in the time of the Judges. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. Israel was a dangerous and lawless place. The judges brought some order for certain periods, but even then, there was gross wickedness, civil war, terrible idolatry and enslavement under foreign kings.

The last judge was Samuel. Samuel brought order to Israel and the worship of the true God. But Samuel was aging in the eyes of the elders of Israel (he was only 52, but in the time of the judges, life expectancy wasn't great). Samuel had appointed his sons to help him judge Israel, but they were a tragic contrast to their father.

3 But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. (1 Sam. 8:3)

So Israel's elders called for a meeting with Samuel at Ramah, about five miles north of Jerusalem. There they told Samuel that his age and his sons' corruption meant it was time for a king. Not just any king – a king like the nations around them. All the other nations had strong, handsome, athletic-looking kings. They were tired of telling the other nations that their king was the invisible Yahweh, and all they had were these judges and priests that mediated the rule of King Yahweh. They wanted a flesh-and-blood king to end the line of the judges and begin a new line of Israelite kings.

7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Sam. 8:7)

So the Lord gave them a king. But the first king He gave them was not a king like Himself. He did not give them a king after His own heart. Instead, he gave them a king like the surrounding nations. Saul was a judgement on Israel for their worldliness and desire to live by sight and not by faith.

Handsome and impressive on the outside, but a mess on the inside. Saul was the tallest man in Israel, but ultimately a paranoid, insecure, and unstable man. He was about 30 when he began to rule, and after a short time, he is intruding upon the office of the priest, making foolish vows, and disobeying the commands of God. He ends up a thin-skinned, hot-tempered, unstable man, given to plunging depression and mad fits of rage.

Saul reigned for about 38 years. David was anointed when Saul was 23 years into his reign, and David lived under Saul's rule for another 15 years. So, until David was 30, he lived under the painful, unstable and insecure authority of King Saul.

In all of Saul's reign, he never properly dealt with the enemies of Israel: the Amalekites, the Philistines.

Saul was mostly interested in Saul and in preserving his own line through his son Jonathan. In other words, Saul was exactly like the kings of the pagan nations. This was the world and society that David lived in, grew up in, and came of age in.

But God's judgement on Israel by giving them Saul was followed by His grace on Israel by giving them a king like Himself.

II. David's Traits

13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (1 Sam. 13:13-14)

Here we see that God always had two kings in mind: a worldly king that would chasten Israel for being like the nations, and a humble king after God's own heart who would shepherd Israel rightly.

What does that mean exactly? Likely it means at least these things:

David had true spirituality. During all of Saul's reign, the Ark remained at Kiriath-Jearim. He never displayed the slightest interest in moving the Ark from Kiriath-Jearim to Nob, where the rest of the Tabernacle was. He was never interested in conquering the nearby city of Jerusalem where the Jebusites lived, which would have been the most natural fortress city for the Tabernacle and the Ark. David's heart beat for the things of God. Whereas Saul ends his life in apostasy, consulting the witch at Endor, David spent his whole life thirsting after God, composing psalms of devotion and desire.

Possibly David had come across some of the prophets from Samuel's schools of the prophets. They may well have visited Bethlehem, and there found a very eager student and listener in the young shepherd boy. Perhaps from them he began turning his prayers into poems and songs. From them he

learned to love the Word of God. A person after God's heart loves what God loves.

David had true humility. Saul was proud, defensive, paranoid, and always touchy. Saul blames others and complains. Saul suspects everyone of conspiracies. Saul is insanely jealous if someone is praised more than he. Never do we find David resenting being a shepherd. We don't find him trying to revolt against King Saul. He does not grow angry that God will not let him build the Temple. He does not execute Shimei when Shimei curses him. He does not take revenge on Saul's descendants. David was a man after God's own heart because he always accepted God's providence in his life, and submitted to the position God gave him.

David had true integrity. Saul cared about man-pleasing, even asking Samuel to put on a show so that it didn't look like he had lost Samuel's support. Saul cared about appearances and power, not about the inner man. Saul could pretend to love David one day and be hunting him again the next. He was a divided, double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. In five of his psalms, David writes that he has walked in his integrity. David is a whole man, his spirituality penetrates his whole being. That doesn't mean he is perfect; it means he is trying to be on the inside what he is on the outside, and vice versa. He is the real version of being real.

Spirituality, humility, integrity are what made David a man after God's own heart, even at the age of fifteen. Worldliness, pride and hypocrisy are what made Saul a king like the nations, one that God rejected.

That leads us to ask, how did God shape David to be a man after His own heart? At age fifteen, God could already have David anointed in front of his family as the next king. He would only come to the throne at thirty, but God had shaped David to be a king after his own heart even while a youth.

III. David's Training

In God's providence, David was the youngest. In Israelite society, that didn't make him the cutest and most spoilt; it made him the least in rank. His family was not a royal and noble one. On top of that, David was given one of the lowest roles.

70 He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; 71 From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. 72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. (Ps. 78:70-72)

For most of his youth, and even after becoming part of Saul's household, he was a shepherd. Being a shepherd was not a high-class job. In fact, when Jesse brings his sons before Samuel to inspect for anointing, Jesse almost forgets about David, and says, "Oh, yes, there's the youngest, keeping the sheep." Much later, when David visits the battlefield, his older brother Eliab scolds him and says, "'Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?' (1 Sam. 17:28)

By making sure David was the youngest, the one given the responsibilities no one wanted, God prepared this man after his own heart by giving him four things.

First, solitude. Being on the hillsides, and sometimes the wildernesses of Judah with those sheep would have given David hours upon hours of pure solitude. David was alone with his thoughts. Shepherds in those days didn't have phones to check every 15 seconds, airpods to listen to tunes on, or portable games to play to wile away the hours. Hours of solitude means that David had time to think, time to pray, and time to sing. David tuned his heart to think much on God, and speak much

to God in those hours. By the time he was thrust into the busyness of court life and military life or even a life on the run, or the hectic life on the throne, he had learned to commune with God. The philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Today is the day of multiplied and multiplying distractions. But to make a man after His own heart, God gave David hours and hours of solitude. Just like Jesus spent hours and hours in the carpenter's shop alone, and had learned to love prayer in the wilderness, so David spent many hours in solitude.

The second thing God gave David was obscurity. By being the youngest, and by being a shepherd, David got used to being unknown, forgotten. He was obscure, a nobody, a nothing in the world's estimation. In so doing, David crucified the idols of vanity and pride and man-pleasing. David accepted his role as a servant, and was content to do it well. That meant when the day came when he was thrust into the limelight, and became famous throughout Israel, he did not become drunk with his own celebrity. Likewise, when he became the outlaw in Israel, he did not become bitter or drowned in depression. Today, our connected world has made celebrity the test of value or importance. How well you are known, how many likes or subscribers or followers or fans or views is the test of how important you are. This even affects believers, trying to gain fame or followings. But one of the things you learn in obscurity is not fame or followings, but faithfulness. Like Jesus, who for thirty years was an unknown carpenter living in an almost unknown town called Nazareth, obscurity is one of God's best tools to prepare a man after his own heart.

Third, God gave David monotony. Tending sheep is not exactly a creatively stimulating job. There aren't fascinating problems to solve, or colourful people to meet. It's the same sheep doing the same thing every day. Same paths, same places, same pace. It's repetitive, and quite mundane. But in fact, the man who can do the monotonous is not always an apathetic soul with no ambition. It is often a man who accepts he must do humdrum things every day to end up making a real difference in the long run. The man after God's own heart does not despise doing small things repeatedly, being disciplined in ordinary, uninteresting things. He does them, and does them faithfully. 29 Do you see a man *who* excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown *men*. (Prov. 22:29)

The kind of man who is always thrill-seeking, and scorns monotony may ironically end up with the most monotonous life of all. But the one who shows himself faithful in little will be entrusted with more. Jesus embraced much monotony before the three and a half years of furiously paced ministry. God is not in a hurry to prepare the man He wants, and that means accepting some of the monotony.

Fourth, God gave David difficulty. Years later, David told Saul that he had faced lions and bears when tending his father's sheep. Taking care of your father's financial assets meant being courageous enough to face danger: from thieves, wild animals, and from the difficulty of sheep going missing, thirst, blistering feet, cold, heat. David had to master himself, learn courage and endurance, and do it without complaining, giving up, or blaming someone else. The problems he would face in later years would become much greater than sheep and bears: a mad king, false accusations, marauding enemies, treason in his kingdom, and much more. 10 *If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small.* (Prov. 24:10) We must accept the training programme God has us on now, if we are truly pleading for more usefulness and more faithfulness.

By giving David solitude, obscurity, monotony and difficulty, God prepared David to be a man after his own heart: a man of true spirituality, true humility, and true integrity. This is how David could become the greatest king Israel ever had, a true type of Messiah born as a root out of dry ground – a godly king in an ungodly time.

You may not have the same preparation as David, nor the same destiny. But you may likewise use your freedom of choice to be either a Saul or a David in a such a time as this. As we enter another Dark Age, another time of the judges, you can trust God's preparation of you, and become a man or woman after God's own heart, or you can resist it, rebel, and become a tragic story.

God is not in a hurry to shape you into the image of Christ. And often, what you do in your times of obscurity, solitude, monotony and difficulty are the most formative and shaping times of your life. That's why David could look back later and reflect: "Yahweh is my shepherd, I shall not lack. He has fed me. He leads me. He protects me." Embrace David's Son and David's Lord. Let Him shepherd you and shape you into one after His own heart.