

As we finish the first book of Samuel we find tension between Saul and the young David. Saul has displeased God who rejects Saul and tells Samuel to seek out the replacement God will reveal to him. Samuel is then to anoint the newly chosen King of Israel.

Samuel is led to Jesse in Bethlehem. Jesse is the father of eight sons. As Samuel meets the sons, beginning with the eldest, he is impressed by their size and looks. God tells Samuel not to be led astray by those things. It is Jesse's youngest son, David, who is God's choice to be the next king.

From reading Samuel it should be clear to you that this is a collection of disparate stories about our two main characters, Saul and David. They have been preserved in the oral tradition over time and the Deuteronomist has put them together, not always in any given order. For example, we are introduced to David twice. Once he is a talented harpist who can soothe Saul when he is plagued by evil spirits, perhaps migraine headaches. Then, as if we never heard of David, he is reintroduced as God's choice as king to succeed Saul.

In the ancient world, as on more modern times, kingship was intended to be a hereditary office, passed from father to eldest son. There were several ways to disrupt this order of things. One was to remove the son next in line to inherit the kingship. This could be accomplished by death or exile.

Another was by a coup, an overthrow of the king by an opponent either from among his kinsmen or from an enemy. David used neither of these methods because he believed it was up to God to remove Saul. It was not up to David. In fact, David was part of Saul's military during many battles, working on behalf of Saul.

In the stories of Samuel we have the famous story of David's battle against the giant Goliath. We also meet two of David's wives, Saul's daughters Michal, and Abigail, the widow of Nabal. Michal loved David and it is apparent that David loved Abigail because he courted her. The display of such feelings was unusual in the ancient world where marriages were business deals—contracts between his daddy and her daddy. Marriages were designed to create or strengthen family or clan alliances. Romantic love, by our modern Western definition, was not an issue in marriage. The bride and groom usually never met until their wedding day. Needless to say, neither the groom or bride normally did anything to initiate the marriage contract. So what we see of David's marriage is out of character for his time.

The other oddity on these stories is the friendship between David and Saul's son Jonathan, who David loved as himself. Much discussion about this relationship has been made by "modern" scholars in the West, including the suggestion of a possible homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan. As I see it, what is significant in this friendship has nothing more sexual issues. Jonathan was a key factor in David's ability to escape being killed by Saul. Their friendship was a necessary part of David's survival. This makes their friendship part of the plot that moves the story forward from Saul's kingship to that of David's, all in God's good time.

These stories were preserved by different groups of Israelites who used the oral tradition to keep all parts of this larger story alive. This is why attempts to find cohesion and chronology in this text is fraught with so many obstacles.

What are your questions about this week's readings?

What are your thoughts about David's wives?

How do you see the friends between David and Jonathan?

What about the story of the medium at Endor who Saul sought out to bring Samuel's spirit back from the dead? How does she fit into the story?

How does Boadt's reading on biblical archaeology help you understand these texts?

Remember, when you respond, use **REPLY ALL** to share your comments with everyone.

I wish you the joy of the Risen Lord. Over the past three weeks three family/friends have gone home to God: my 105-year-old aunt, my 86-year-old cousin, and an 89-year-old priest I worked with in southern Alabama. May they Rest In Peace and Rise in Glory, and May God comfort those who mourn them.

May God watch between us while the apart from the another

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