

24: David spares Saul again

Notes for 3 Aug

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Read: [1 Samuel 26:1-25](#), [Psalm 142](#)

Brueggemann's Morality Play

I've been reading one of our suggested commentaries for our Samuel study, "First and Second Samuel" by Walter Brueggemann, and he has an interesting theory (which I've floated in class before) which may be important for this week's study. So, let us entertain Brueggemann's theory for a few minutes.

He posits that the books of Samuel are not so much a straightforward historical record but are more a sort-of [morality play](#) in which the characters, whilst being actual flesh and blood real people, are portrayed more in a fictitious manner in order to promote some overarching narrative. In this week's study this comes to a head. Chapter 26, says Brueggemann, is actually the same story as Chapter 24 -

*"We have already seen this tale told in Chapter 24. To record only the tale, chapter 24 is not enough. Israel, however, knew this tale was crucial for its future, its faith, and its self-understanding. Israel could not leave the story with such a simple telling. The same narrative is retold in chapter 26".
Brueggemann p 183*

So, rather than chapter 26 being titled "David Spares Saul Again" (as it is in the NLT), it should actually be "David Spares Saul, Retold".

- Given what happens at the end of chapter 24 and what happens at the end of chapter 26, what do you think of this idea?
- Overall, how comfortable are you with the idea that sizeable chunks of the OT might be best viewed as poetry or morality plays? I've heard this idea being used to explain, for example, the book of Job, but never to explain a book as seemingly 'historical' as Samuel. Job would make good sense as a morality play, but 1 Samuel...?

Discussion

The story is fairly straightforward. Saul hears that David is holed up somewhere and sets off to find him. In a role reversal, where Saul the hunter becomes Saul the hunted, Dave and Abishai walk into Saul's camp and walk right through all the sleeping guards and into Saul's tent. A handy spear is to be found right next to Saul's bed. Abishai is up for seizing the opportunity and killing Saul there and then.

David says 'No'.

Don't kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the Lord's anointed one? Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday, or he will die of old age or in battle. The Lord forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed!

So, he takes the spear and a jug of water and returns to his own camp.

I assume v13 begins in the morning. David taunts Abner, Saul's right hand man. Saul recognises David and calls him "my son, David". David and Saul have some to and fro. The chapter ends with the last face to face meeting between the two. David is vindicated and Saul apologises.

Questions

- v11. David will not kill Saul. His reason? Saul is the Lord's anointed. We saw last week that David was very ready to wipe out Nabal (plus a good few 'collateral damage' others). Why the difference? Is the simple commandment of "Don't murder" not enough for David?
- v12. The sleep of Saul and his men was induced by Yahweh. Yahweh makes David safe - there's an explicit reference here to God directly looking after David. In chapter 24 David was simply 'lucky'. Do you read anything into the differences here? (Also, how did the author of the story know that Yahweh was responsible for the deep sleep?)
- v14. David calls out Abner, *not* Saul. Is this a slight at Saul? Is David acknowledging that the real power of Israel lies with Abner and his ideas?
- v15. David refers to the 'king' rather than uses Saul's name (3 times). Is he taking on the role rather than the man. Saul is irrelevant, it is the role that is important. Discuss...
- v17. Saul calls David 'my son'. What do you make of this? Is Saul having a change of heart? Why?
- From Brueggemann:
David then exhorts Saul to sort out his reasons for the pursuit of David (v19). Saul's pursuit may be instigated by Yahweh (which we do not believe, neither does David). Or perhaps Saul has acted on bad advice. Either way, the endless, relentless pursuit of David will cause David to leave Israel, to leave the land of Yahweh, and to depart the rule of Yahweh. To be driven from the land is to be dispatched where he must serve other gods who rule other lands (cf Josh 24:14-15). David will violate the first commandment, and it will be Saul's fault! Finally, David appeals to Saul not to drive him away, to die away from the face of Yahweh (v20). This is a desperate, poignant appeal. How odd that while the narrative traces the growing success and legitimacy of David's theological claims, David's actual situation vis-à-vis Saul grows more and more precarious.
Brueggemann p 186

What do you make of this analysis?

- v23-24. David's claim to righteousness is based on a specific action - he did not kill Saul. David seeks nothing from Saul, only from Yahweh. These are the last words from David to Saul. Has David broken free of Saul with this statement?
- v25. Has Saul now lost? His words to David are very strong. Has he given up?

As of the end of this chapter the narrator of Samuel has laid out the *theological* case for David's legitimacy. The rest will follow.