

David's Victories, David's Officials

Notes for 23 Nov

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Read: [2 Samuel 8](#)

Preamble

Andrew began his notes last week with this:

By our standards he [David] was a genocidal maniac: killing with impunity, wiping out cities and their entire populations - men, women and children. He condoned or ignored revenge killings, and by our modern western world standards would be considered an international criminal.

Agreed...

2 Samuel 8:2 is one of the most unsettling and chilling verses that I can recall in our our studies of the books of Samuel:

He also defeated the Moabites and, making them lie down on the ground, measured them off with a cord; he measured two lengths of cord for those who were to be put to death, and one length for those who were to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute.

I bet they became servants to David, and I bet they paid tribute...

Two things to note here. Firstly, the author of 2 Samuel *chooses* to add this note about the Moabites (along with some gruesome detail in v4 about deliberately maiming horses). Other conquests don't get any similar notes. From this I think we might reasonably conclude that this form of random execution was worth mentioning - even to the author, *at the time of writing*, this was unusual behaviour.

And secondly, and most disturbingly, in v6 and v14 we read that "the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went".

In the nearly 5 years of VV studies we have always tried hard to contextualise what we read. We've had a go at putting ourselves in the text - if we were there what would we do? What would we think?

So... what would you do? What would you think?

Just *how* can one human do this to other humans and be considered in any way honourable?

(continued)

Othering...

At the risk of invoking [Godwin's Law](#), let's consider the Nazis for a moment.

In 1941 General Erich Hoepner of the Panzer Group 4 stated:

The war against Russia is an important chapter in the German nation's struggle for existence. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slavic people, of the defence of European culture against Muscovite-Asiatic inundation and of the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the demolition of present-day Russia and must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron resolution to exterminate the enemy remorselessly and totally. In particular, no adherents of the contemporary Russian Bolshevik system are to be spared.

Guided by such statements, and the "[Guidelines for the Conduct of the Troops in Russia](#)" document, the Wehrmacht's troops marched east.

Historians Alex J. Kay and David Stahel [argue that](#), including crimes such as rape, forced labour, wanton destruction, and looting in addition to murder, "it would be reasonable to conclude that a substantial majority of the ten million Wehrmacht soldiers deployed at one time or another in the German-Soviet War were involved or complicit in criminal conduct". The German Wehrmacht is regarded as being a "crucial factor in the most horrendous crime perpetrated by any nation in modern history" in regard to genocides committed by the regime.

In the best spirit of VV, let's put ourselves into the 'text'. You are a Wehrmacht soldier marching through Poland.

So... what would you do? What would you think?

When the war is over and the [victors put the vanquished on trial](#) what defence would you offer for your actions? What defence would your commanding officers proffer?

Let's return to the actions of David in 2 Samuel 8. I spent some time searching for commentaries on this chapter. Brueggemann says nothing at all about v2. Various online commentators skip over it with unseemly haste. I was particularly [offended by this](#)

But David sacrificed his own family relationships [previous reference had been made to the fact that David's great-grandmother was a Moabite, and the Moabites had offered him sanctuary from Saul] to fulfill God's will and a prophecy that the Moabites would serve the Jews because of their wickedness. From this account, God reveals that a Spirit-led leader makes personal sacrifices to serve God.

What?!

Discussion

- That fact that the author of 2 Samuel notes the unusual manner by which the Moabites were culled removes our usual 'excuse' that these were very different times from today and that we cannot apply our morality to their times. When you read the first 14 verses of 2 Samuel 8 what do you think of David's morality? What do you think the author of 2 Samuel 8 makes of the incident?

- In previous VV discussions we have discussed that maybe David was becoming transformed. The shepherd boy and harp player was long gone. The marauding bandit of no fixed allegiances was gone. He was now King of a sizable nation (see map). Must he necessarily be brutal? If so, *how* brutal? Even the Nazis had [limits...](#)
- I don't expect an answer to these, but...!
 - Try and explain to an intelligent historically-aware person how the horrors of these verses can contain the words, *twice*, "the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went"
 - Did the Lord give the Moabite-culling order to David...?
 - ...or was this more of a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* ('after this, therefore because of this') argument? David was a brilliant military leader and won all these battles. Therefore David *clearly* must have been blessed by the Lord.

Expansion



The map gives a good indication of the extent of David's kingdom at the end of chapter 8.

The taxes were coming in, the treasures were arriving in Jerusalem (vv 7, 8, 10, 11, 12) and 'David won a name for himself' (v13, NRSVA). And, lest we forget, 'the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went' (v14, NRSVA).

In v11 we read that David dedicated to the Lord all these treasures.

- A question for the historians... What would dedicating treasure to the Lord have meant, practically speaking? Would it have been melted down and refashioned into some implements for worship? Any ideas as to what these might be?
- Or was this a euphemism!?

The chapter closes out with a statement that 'David administered justice and equity to all his people' and a list of important job titles and their holders.

- The author is keen to emphasise that 'David administered justice and equity to all his people'. Why? Might this be a reference back to v2 and the possible unease with which the author records those events?
- David made his sons priests, according to the NSRVA. Other translations use 'ministers'. If they were priests, should David have done that? Were priests not supposed to be Levites?

Postamble...

- Take a look at [1 Chronicles 18](#), which covers the same events as 2 Samuel 8, in very similar detail - except for the method of killing the Moabites. Do the historians amongst us have any insight into these two slightly different accounts?
- The next chapter is about David's care and concern for Mephibosheth. How do you square up, in your own thinking, the David of 2 Samuel 9 (or Psalms 23, and many other scriptures...) with the David of 2 Samuel 8:2?
- Is [this](#) relevant?