

Adult Teaching Resources

November 24, 2024



Looking Ahead

November 3—Ruth 1:1-2:23 (RCL 1:1-18)—From Tears to Action

November 10—Ruth 3:1-4:21 (RCL 3:1-5, 4:13-17)—From Empty to Full

November 17—1 Samuel 1:1-28 (RCL 1:4-20)—Longing for a Son

November 24—2 Samuel 23:1-7—Thanks for the Promises

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Thanks for the Promises

2 Samuel 23:1-7

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. (2 Sam. 23:3b-4)

Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group. Share what our Lesson Writer wrote about the TV game show called “Queen for a Day.” Then, ask everyone to share their response to the question, “Would you like to be queen, or king, for a day?”

What leisure activities do you envision for that day?

What business activities do you envision for that day?

What would be the best thing that could happen to your position in that day?

What would be the worst thing that could happen to your position in that day?

How would the people know you were a good ruler in just one day?

Spend some time in conversation and discussion before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What is this passage? (The last words of David)

How is David described? (son of Jesse, the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel)

What does the spirit of the Lord do? (speaks through David; his word is upon my tongue)

What did the Rock of Israel say to David? (One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.)

How is David’s house like this with God? (he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire)

What are the godless like? (like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear)

What will happen to them? (they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot)

Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer points out, “The heart of the text is twice named an “oracle.” This is a bit surprising: the word *nēʾum* (“utterance,” or “oracle”) is generally limited to the speeches of prophets who had received a direct word from God, and here David claims to have done so.” Do you think you have ever experienced someone with an “oracle?” Who was it? What did that person say? How did their words influence you?

Our text refers to David as a prophet. Of all the “David stories” in the Old Testament, what label do you attribute to him? Why is that?

Our text lists four descriptive titles for David. Which one most matches your understanding of David? Is there another title, not listed, that you would add to that list?

What do you think it means to have the Lord speak through someone? When have you heard God speak through someone? How did you know their speech was divinely inspired?

Even though we live in a country without a king or queen, what do you think a king or queen’s reign should be like? What would the ruler need to do in order to be considered good? What is “right and just” ruling in a country?

What does wise leadership look like in a leader? Who, in your opinion, has displayed wise leadership in your lifetime? Where do you think that wisdom was based?

Our Lesson Writer provides a clearer translation of the metaphor of a truly just leader drawn from nature:

(He is) like the light of morning at sunrise,
a cloudless morning,
like the brightness after rain,
(that brings) grass from the earth.

What metaphor(s) would you suggest for a truly just leader?

David claimed that his rule met the standard that pleased God when he said, “Is not my house like this with God?” What other rulers/leaders could make the same claim? Is that claim something that we desire for our own country? Why do you say that?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Israel’s covenant theology taught that human obedience would lead to divine blessing.” Do you agree or disagree that human obedience leads to God’s blessing? Why do you say that?

So What?

Remain in the large group. Share with everyone these words from our Lesson Writer, “Having declared his own rule to be just and therefore worthy of reward, David compared it to the destiny of those who do not fear God or lead rightly. “The godless are all like thorns that are thrown away,” he said, thorns so sharp and injurious that they had to be piled up for burning with a spear shaft or an iron bar rather than by hand (vv. 6-7)”

Making Connections *continued*

Ask these questions for large group conversation and discussion:

Share an example of a godly leader. What made/makes that person a godly leader? How are the people treated in that system?

Share an example of a godless leader. What made/makes that person a godless leader? How are the people treated in that system?

In explaining David's black and white judgment of good and bad leaders, our Lesson Writer says, "that good leaders who practice justice bring order, beauty, and prosperity to their people, while evil or selfish leaders bring ruin to their countries and ultimately, to themselves." Where do you stand on that statement? Do good leaders bring those qualities? Do evil or selfish leaders bring ruin? Why do you say that?

As a person of faith, how much "godliness" do you think leaders of our country should have when it comes to laws, governance, and social policies?

The Challenge

This week, regardless of your status in life, live so that others can look to you and say you are a good leader, one who brings order, beauty, and prosperity to those around you.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the leaders in our life. We pray that all leaders have the qualities of kindness, mercy, justice, love, and grace. Help us to do our part in living out those qualities so that others might come to know you. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Stories that didn't fit—At the end of 2 Samuel is a collection of traditions attached to David that didn't fit well into the narrative but were considered too important to leave out. The primary narrative ends at 2 Samuel 20:26, and doesn't pick up again until 1 Kings 1.

Chapter 21 of 2 Samuel describes events from early in David's reign in which David appears in a rather negative light, such as when he surrendered seven of Saul's sons to the Gibeonites for execution (21:1-14), and a series of battles with the Philistines in which someone named Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, not David, killed “Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam” (compare 1 Samuel 17, especially v. 7). Putting these stories in chronological order would have cast a shadow over David's rise to power, in which the narrator stressed only positive aspects of David's character and decision making.

Chapter 22 purports to be a psalm of David celebrating God's choice of David and the divine aid that enabled him to be victorious in war. It is virtually identical to Psalm 18.

Chapter 23 contains today's text, known as “the last words of David” (23:1-7), along with a list of heroic exploits carried out by David's most valiant warriors (23:8-39). The last warrior named is Uriah the Hittite, whose betrayal and death David had engineered in 2 Samuel 11.

Chapter 24 is the story of a census, paralleled with significant differences in 1 Chronicles 21, in which David's numbering of the people led to divine punishment and David's purchase of Araunah's threshing floor to build an altar – a spot that later became the site of the temple.

Last words?—The last words of David as recorded in the Deuteronomistic History are found in 1 Kings 2:1-9, and they contain both blessing and bitterness. In that text, David is a weak and on his deathbed when he first blesses Solomon as his successor, then orders him to shrewdly contrive an excuse to execute Joab and Shimei. David had borne grudges against both of them, but political expediency had not allowed him to kill them during his own reign.

It is likely that later editors or preservers of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua—2 Kings, with the exception of Ruth) wanted David to be remembered more favorably, and so they either preserved or began a tradition identifying this more affirmative poem as “The Last Words of David.”

The Chronicler's history of David deletes all references to wrongdoing and presents David as the ideal king. In 1 Chronicles, David's last recorded words are in a strong public speech in which he announced plans for the temple and endorsed Solomon as his successor (1 Chronicles 29).

Digging Deeper *continued*

A surprising parallel—The introduction to the “oracle” attributed to David in today’s text is surprisingly similar to an ancient oracle attribute to the pagan prophet Balaam, who was moved by God to bless Israel.

Both Num. 24:3 and 24:15 begin

*The oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor,
The oracle of a man whose eye is clear.*

2 Sam. 23:1 includes:

*The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
The oracle of the man whom God exalted.*

Some scholars note this similarity as evidence of the oracle’s antiquity, suggesting that it was a longstanding tradition rather than a late composition.

The prophet David?—In Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, he referred to David as the ancestor of Jesus the Messiah, saying: “Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on the throne” (Acts 2:30). Peter’s claim that David had predicted Jesus’ resurrection is an example of a very loose quotation and exegesis of Ps. 16:10 that would not pass muster in a seminary classroom, but it was a common practice during the first century.

Psalm 16, while attributed to David, is clearly a personal prayer for protection and deliverance. In v. 10, the psalmist prays “For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.”

Peter changed the text from first person to third (“I” to “he”) and shifted its meaning from a personal prayer to a prediction about the coming Messiah:

“Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,
‘He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption’” (Acts 2:31).

A later insertion?—Many scholars regard v. 2 as a later addition designed to bolster David’s prophetic image, in part because the term translated as “word” is not the expected *dābār*, but *millāt*, a word that is characteristic of late Hebrew.

Another argument for v. 2 being a later insertion is that v. 3 already includes an introduction to the oracle: “The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me” It seems unlikely that the original writer would introduce the oracle multiple times.

God as a rock—The use of “rock” as a metaphor for God’s protection (v. 3) is common in the psalms. Psalm 18, for example, uses it three times: “my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge” (v. 2), “And who is the Rock except our God?” (v. 31), and “The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!” (v. 46). The same psalm appears in 2 Samuel 22.

Digging Deeper *continued*

A contemporary song written by Michael O’Shields and made popular by Petra employs the image in its chorus, frequently repeating:

*The Lord liveth, and blessed be the Rock
and may the God of my salvation be exalted.*

Poetry in motion—Hebrew poetry is characterized by a rhythm of sense, rather than sound. Rather than having lines that end with the same sound, Hebrew poetry usually consists of couplets or triplets of lines that repeat, reverse, or expand upon the same thought.

Prophetic oracles were typically couched in poetry, and the passage attributed to David in 2 Sam. 23:3b-4 is no exception. It consists of two parallel lines that set up the condition of a just king, followed by two extended couplets elaborating on a metaphorical description of what such a king’s rule is like.

Obedience and blessing—The books of Samuel, part of the Deuteronomistic History, include one illustration after another of how Israel or its leaders prospered when they were obedient, but suffered when they turned away from God. Even David was not immune to trouble: the Deuteronomistic author showed that God prospered David and gave him success as long as he was obedient and sought God’s way (1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel 10). Once David “fell off the wagon” through his affair with Bathsheba and his resultant betrayal of Uriah, however, his rule was tarnished and his kingdom was troubled.

The book of 1 Chronicles also recounts David’s rise and reign, but deletes all references to his shortcomings and presents him as the ideal king, without spot or blemish. It’s surprising, then, that the present text appears in 2 Samuel rather than 1 Chronicles. Perhaps it is an earlier attempt to rebuild David’s reputation, similar to the Chronicler’s later and more thoroughgoing revision of his legacy.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Should modern governments be theocracies?

Israel, ideally, was a theocracy in which God was the nation's true king while the man on the throne was to act as God's adopted representative. There was no separation of church and state in Israel, as we know today: the Israelites' very identity and existence was centered on their special relationship with God. This made it appropriate for Israel to have a state in which divine and human laws were one and the same, so long as the rulers rightly interpreted God's teaching and showed justice to all, including aliens in the land.

Should such a government exist today? While some extremely conservative citizens hold to the myth that America was founded as a Christian nation and is God's "new Israel," the truth is that America has been pluralistic from the beginning. While we may draw on biblical principles as examples of just laws, and our culture is no doubt strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, most of us know that it would not be right or fair to draw up laws based entirely on one leader or one party's particular interpretation of what God expects.

Even the modern state of Israel was established as a secular country. Despite efforts by the minority ultra-Orthodox to impose their own interpretations of scripture as the law of the land, the founders of Israel recognized that a government should not force sectarian laws on a pluralistic society. The closest thing we have to theocracies today are strongly Muslim areas in which a rigid interpretation of sharia law is forced on all residents regardless of their faith. That alone should be example enough to warn against the dangers of combining politics, power, and religion.

That does not mean that modern presidents, legislators, and court officials cannot learn from this text and lead the country in a way that respects human rights and treats all people fairly. They may do so in part due to a personal respect for God and for biblical teaching, or out of an innate sense of what is right and good. The important thing is that those who lead should lead rightly: those who have power should use their power for the common good.