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—**J. Daniel Hays**,
Professor of Biblical Studies & Dean,
Pruet School of Christian Studies,
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“Leadership is crucial to the well-being of any organization, not least that of the Christian community—whether that be of a local congregational, the wider denominational level, or of parachurch missional and welfare/development agencies. *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, edited by Benjamin K. Forrest and Chet Roden, constitutes a unique contribution to the literature dealing with Christian leadership, especially because of the broad biblical approach adopted, the caliber of the scholars enlisted for the project, and the essays each has contributed. Most parts of the Bible are explored, noting their particular historical contexts, and highlighting the various aspects of leadership they reflect and/or mandate. It’s good to see a crossover from academic to practical theology in these essays, something that will make them attractive for many readers. This text makes an important contribution to the study of Christian leadership, and one that deserves a wide readership.”

—**Colin G. Kruse**,
Senior Lecturer in New Testament,
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“The saying is true: ‘Everything rises and falls on leadership.’ This is true for government, businesses, organizations, and it’s true for churches. Never has there been more of a need for godly and bold leadership in our pulpits than today. This is why I’m grateful for this new work *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*. While many people are writing on the subject of leadership, very few are offering principles and examples of leadership from a biblical point of view. This book strikes a great balance between helping readers understand the theological foundations of biblical leadership and giving practical wisdom and insight for leading in today’s culture. Every pastor and teacher will benefit from having this resource.”

—**Jack Graham**,
Pastor,
Prestonwood Baptist Church

“Paul exhorts us to ‘preach the Word.’ Forrest and Roden have taken this charge into account in a book that focuses the leader’s attention on Scripture. Just a quick search through the table of contents and you will recognize the names of a number of Bible scholars who are also biblical leaders who preach and hold up the Bible as being paramount in their leadership. They model Scripture for us in their leadership and that’s refreshing. The editors’ point can’t be missed— not only are we to preach the Word, but we’re to lead by the Word.”

—**Aubrey Malphurs,**

Senior Professor of Educational Ministries, Leadership, and Pastoral Ministries,
Dallas Theological Seminary

“Finally a book on leadership that takes the biblical revelation seriously. The authors do not start with a format or set of principles and then plug in biblical texts; they first start with the biblical revelation and then discern leadership principles from that revelation. Naturally this book will not be a ‘how to’ book on leadership or provide wise pastoral lessons on leading God’s people; instead the reader will be exposed to the biblical text—and in turn—biblical truths as foundations for leaders. If you are looking for a quick resource for leadership principles this is not the book for you. If you want to know what the counsel of God’s word says about leadership, then you will find value in this book.”

—**Steven M. Ortiz,**

Director, Charles D. Tandy Institute of Archaeology,
Professor of Archaeology and Biblical Backgrounds,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

Theology for the Everyday Leader

BENJAMIN K. FORREST
AND CHET RODEN

EDITORS

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FOREWORD

Books on leadership abound, and what is offered is typically helpful, practical, and readily applicable. Authors of such works have usually spent significant time exegesis wisdom from the world of business, psychology, management, and various other domains of knowledge focused on the study of human behavior. A lot of attention has been given to group dynamics and attempts have been expanded to create greater understanding of why humans behave as they do. This has naturally led to becoming more attentive to how environments might be managed to produce prescribed outcomes. I repeat, much of this has been helpful.

However, in spite of the usefulness of this research, there is also a need for two notes of caution. First, as I listen to Christian leaders discussing the subject of leadership, I often hear them discussing the latest and greatest publication sure to fix their leadership flaws. With my curiosity piqued, I quite often obtain a copy. In most instances, the practices advanced have much to offer and are often built upon principles clearly taught in scripture. However, sometimes these texts use competing cornerstones for building a leadership foundation. What a careful reader might see, is that authors often attempt to yoke biblical *principles* with unbiblical *practices, postures, or perspectives*. The latest and greatest is surely the latest but only time will tell if it is the greatest. More dangerous and disconcerting is the realization that all too frequently books on leadership that become very popular advance views on leadership that are totally antithetical to the clear teachings of scripture.

Thus, I am grateful for our Christian brothers and sisters who have committed themselves to extracting the best research on leadership from the literature, passing it through the filter of the scriptures and providing us as Christian leaders great information and insight into how to lead. In fact, the entire Christian community owes these writers a debt of gratitude. Forrest, Roden, and the various contributing authors have provided us with a very helpful and somewhat unique book on the subject of leadership. Moving across the panorama of biblical literature, they offer insights on leadership gained from spending time with the scriptures. Their purely bibliocentric approach to the subject of leadership, covering the breadth of biblical teaching on the subject, makes for a great read. As we journey from Moses to the Apocalypse, we are treated to an in-depth overview of the contributions to Christ-centered leadership discoverable in each of the various books and genres of biblical literature.

I could go to great lengths now to tell you what I found in these pages that refreshed my soul and encouraged me to be more biblical in my daily leadership. Instead, I think I will end this foreword by simply telling you that in my many years as a leader, I have never found a book quite like this one. The editors and the authors have expended great energy in unpacking for us a comprehensive look into the minds and hearts of the great leaders encountered in Scripture. A careful read cannot help but make you a better leader. Since everything rises and falls on leadership, I encourage you to read on.

—**Ronald E. Hawkins**
Chief Academic Officer & Provost
Liberty University

CHAPTER 8

OUR REPRESENTATIONAL REIGN:
ROYAL LEADERSHIP IN THE
UNITED MONARCHY

J. Michael Thigpen

The united monarchy, spanning the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, offers readers a stirring and sobering portrait of leadership. Sin—adultery, rebellion, murder, and idolatry—sits uncomfortably alongside obedience, wisdom, and faithfulness. Leadership is not a tangent in the narratives of the kings. Leadership is front and center, as each king wrestles in unique ways with how to follow God, lead the people of Israel, and establish the fledgling monarchy for which the people had begged. Although it is true that Saul was rejected, David was granted the eternal line of kingship, and Solomon was the greatest king, none of these kings fit neatly into the categories of godly or sinful. Their stories are complex and belie simple summaries. Yet, by surveying these three portraits together, paying attention to the variations and to the common themes, we can trace the key contours of a theology of royal leadership.

THE ORIGINAL SETTING

From Judges to Kings

Israel's first king, Saul, is exactly what the people desired. He is from a powerful family, in his prime, and handsome. Literally head and shoulders above his peers (1 Sam. 9:1–2), he is the ideal king.

The situation only gets better for Saul. He is chosen by the Lord and duly anointed king by Samuel, the prophet whose words never failed (1 Sam. 3:19). Saul was commissioned by God to deliver Israel from the Philistines. God chose Saul to do this because he is attentive to his people and has heard their cries for deliverance (1 Sam. 9:16). After Saul left Samuel, the narrator confirms that God changed his heart, sent his Spirit to

empower him, and all of the prophesied events came true (1 Sam. 10:9–10). Saul is now both the people's ideal image of a king, and he is chosen and empowered by the Lord to accomplish his task as the leader of the nation.

However good this sounds, we know that the story does not end well. And it is not just Saul's story that haunts leaders. David, the second king in this new kingdom and the man after God's own heart, will commit adultery and murder. His family is forever tattered and divided. Even Solomon, who was granted wisdom such that no king would ever rival him, mired himself in idolatry and set the country on a course of division, war, and divine punishment. How does this happen when these kings are chosen by God, duly anointed, and empowered by God to fulfill their duties?

Despite their glaring failures, each king also has great successes. Even Saul leads his people well for a portion of his reign. David, despite his sins, is the king against which every subsequent king will be measured. And Solomon, who led the nation into idolatry, is Israel's wisest and grandest king. How did these successes happen alongside the unquestioned failures? Why is David a measuring stick when he so obviously failed? What resources do these texts give us as leaders today to learn to be more faithful leaders, more devoted followers of Christ?

To unwrap these questions, we need to delve further into the biblical portraits of each of these three kings. We need to understand how and why they succeeded, and when and why they failed. It is in the details of their experiences that we will uncover how God intended his kings to lead. Although the narrative accounts are too long to exegete in detail here, we can trace out the key themes and movements in each king's story, and then construct a theology of leadership in the united monarchy. We begin with three portraits of three ideal kings.

THREE PORTRAITS: THREE IDEAL KINGS

Saul: Head and Shoulders above the Rest

It is tempting to write off Saul as an illegitimate king. After all, he is thoroughly rejected by God in the end. He both loses the kingship for his family line (1 Sam. 13:13–15) and his individual reign (1 Sam. 15:27–29). Yet, if we take the details of the biblical account seriously, Saul is not illegitimate. He is not “fated” to fail. He is chosen by God, identified publicly by the Lord's prophetic spokesman, and equipped with the power of the Spirit to accomplish his mission of freeing the people from Philistine oppression. So what happened? Although the failure plays out most evidently in 1 Samuel 13 and 15, key elements are subtly laid out for the reader in the introduction of Saul. At the same time we learn about his ideal leadership qualities, we also see key character issues that are never addressed and lead to the unraveling of his kingdom.

A holistic reading of his reign suggests that Saul was fundamentally driven by fear, which compromised his leadership. Notice his fretfulness

in 1 Samuel 9:5. He does not lead the search for the lost family donkeys. He is led by his servant who is prepared for the search. The servant, not Saul, has the funds to honor the seer, and has knowledge of and faith in the prophet's ability.

Saul is told that he has been selected to be the leader of Israel and that he will save Israel from the Philistines.¹ He is given the instruction to “do what your hand finds to do” (1 Sam. 10:7, ESV) because God will be with him to accomplish the task of freeing the Israelites from oppression.² Then, after he accomplishes his task, he is supposed to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel to come and sacrifice. What was his hand supposed to find to do? Note that the prophesied coming of the Spirit on Saul will take place at Gibeath-elohim, the hill of God, where there is a Philistine garrison. The phrase “do what your hand finds to do” is well-translated in the *JPS* as “act when the occasion arises, for God is with you.”³ As convincingly argued by V. Philips Long, Saul's gathering of the people and waiting for Samuel at Gilgal, *after Jonathan attacks the Philistine garrison*, is the narrative continuation of Samuel's charge to Saul in 1 Samuel 10:5–8.⁴ This connection indicates that the opportunity Saul was to have seized in 1 Samuel 10 was to attack the Philistine outpost. The text does not directly tell us why he failed to do this, but when the reader sees him go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel, after Jonathan's successful attack on the Philistines, we know that Saul's failure was not because he did not understand Samuel. Having avoided his first task as king, Saul then fails to mention any of his encounter with Samuel to his uncle (1 Sam. 10:16), and he hides when selected by lot in front of the people (1 Sam. 10:22). His evasions seem to indicate that Saul is afraid of taking on the weight of his new role as king.

The trail of Saul's failures continue on in the two climatic episodes in chapters 13 and 15. In 1 Samuel 13, when confronted by Samuel over his

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1. This is made clear to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9:16. The Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 10:1 has the commission as “Has not Yahweh anointed you to be prince over his inheritance?” The Septuagint preserves a longer commission, “Has not the Lord anointed you as ruler over his people, Israel? And you shall rule over the people of the Lord and you shall save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. And this will be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you to rule over his inheritance.” The shorter Hebrew text appears to be a result of skipping from the first occurrence of “has not the Lord anointed you” to the second. The NIV and HCSB retain the shorter MT version noting the longer form in a note. The ESV and NET versions incorporate the longer LXX form. The longer form appears to be original. See David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 281–282; and Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 83.
 2. All translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.
 3. Though rare, a similar phrase is found in Judges 9:33. There, Abimelech is warned about a plot against him and is given permission to “do to him what your hand finds.” The apparent thrust of the idiom is to “seize the opportunity at hand.”
 4. V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, SBLDS 118 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).

failure to wait for the prophet, Saul indicated that he felt his leadership was slipping away as the people began to scatter, so he ignored the word of the Lord and sacrificed without Samuel. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul ignored the Lord's command to utterly destroy Amalek. After initially trying to pass off his disobedience as a prelude to worship, that they spared the best to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:15), he finally admits that he sinned because he feared the people, and followed their lead (1 Sam. 15:24), instead of leading the people himself.

It is true that the fundamental sin Saul commits repeatedly is the rejection of the word of the Lord (1 Sam. 13:13; 15:23), but the text is clear that he made the choice to reject the word of the Lord out of fear. The difference in Saul's life between when he leads out of fear and when he leads out of faith is powerfully illustrated in two scenes that are often overlooked in surveys of Saul's kingship.

After being presented to the people and anointed by Samuel, Saul is confronted by what he seems to fear most, the people not following him (1 Sam. 10:27). Yet, in the face of public disrespect for his God-ordained rule, Saul responds not with fear but with silence. It would be tempting to read this as also being a fearful act, but this reading is not supported by the immediate context. After his stirring leadership of the people and the victory over Nahash the Ammonite, Saul refuses to be enticed to kill those who stood against him. If his silence was due to fear, then we would expect that in this situation, emboldened by victory, he would respond harshly, but he does not, even though he is pushed by some of his followers to do so. Why does he reject revenge? How does he have the strength not to follow the lead of the people, as he does later in 1 Samuel 15? He tells the people encouraging him to violence against his detractors, "No man will be put to death today, because today, the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel" (1 Sam. 11:13). Saul's restraint is grounded in his understanding of who won the victory, and who is responsible for him being king. Saul's wise leadership is grounded in his understanding that royal leadership is grounded in God's saving activity.

If the Lord is the one who accomplishes the salvation of Israel, then it is also the Lord who establishes and upholds the reign of the king of Israel. Having empowered Saul with his Spirit, the Lord led him to victory. He was beginning to fulfill his word that Saul was called to be king to deliver the people from the surrounding enemies. When Saul operated out of faith instead of fear he was a powerful, gracious, and effective leader. Saul was rejected as king because of his rejection of the word of the Lord, but it is clear from the narrative account of Saul's reign, that his vacillation between fear and faith was the root of his sinful choices.

Saul was the ideal king in the eyes of the people, and he was the legitimate, God-chosen and empowered king. He was powerfully effective when following the prophetic word and trusting in God to deliver salvation for the nation and for him. Saul, when he was operating out of faith and not fear,

was an ideal portrait of a godly leader who handled opposition and temptation for revenge by trusting in God instead of himself or the people.⁵

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

As much as readers have a tendency to see nothing worthwhile in Saul, there is an even stronger tendency to gloss over faults in David, especially faults that show up prior to his sin with Bathsheba.⁶ Yet, if we are to truly learn about royal leadership, we must embrace the successes the text shows us in Saul's life and the warnings it issues from David's. Only then will we have a holistic and textually grounded theology of leadership from the united monarchy.

David's entry into the story confirms our prior reading that one tenet of royal leadership is understanding that it is grounded in God's saving activity. The king is not the one who saves. He is the appointed representative of the Lord who saves. David is not chosen because he is the people's ideal portrait of a king. He is in fact quite the opposite. Where Saul was handsome, tall, and the very picture of a regal leader, David seems more like the runt of the litter. Samuel did not naturally see David as a potential king. Saul, even in his tormented state, does not initially see David as a threat to his throne. Yet the Lord chose David to be king. David is like Saul in that he, too, is the Lord's chosen king; yet unlike Saul, David is better suited to be king (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 16:7).⁷ The question of how David is better suited, prompted by 1 Samuel 13:14 and 1 Samuel 15:28, receives an initial answer in David's encounter with Goliath.

David, as Saul's armor-bearer, had already displayed his ability to represent God. David, equipped by God's Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13) was known by reputation to be cared for by the Lord (1 Sam. 16:18).⁸ When Saul was tormented by the evil spirit, David's soothing presence represented what Saul had in fact pushed aside in his rebellion, the empowering and sustaining presence of the Spirit on the king. Now as the Philistine warrior, Goliath, taunts Saul, mocks the Lord, and frightens Saul's army, David steps in to represent God in battle. That David understood himself to be

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5. There is much more that could be said about Saul's characterization in the text of 1 Samuel. Our survey here can only barely scratch the surface. For a brief, but penetrating summary of the literary presentation of Saul, see Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC 7 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 35–36.
 6. Further examples of Saul's successes include: "his deliverance of the Jabeshites (1 Sam. 11:1–11); victories against Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, Amalek, and the Philistines (1 Sam. 14:47–48); enforcement of certain Torah regulations throughout society (1 Sam. 28:9); and bringing of increased economic prosperity to Israel (2 Sam. 1:24)." *Ibid.*, 36.
 7. For an excellent exploration of the meaning of the 1 Samuel 13:14 and its relationship to 15:28 and 16:7 see Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Heart of YHWH and His Chosen One in 1 Samuel 13:14," *BBR* 24.4 (2014): 467–489. DeRouchie's study is compelling and correct in its conclusion that there is a dual emphasis in 1 Samuel 13:14 on the Lord's sovereign choice and on David's suitability.
 8. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 184–185.

a representative of God, and not the savior of the day is made clear in the text. First, David presents himself as Saul's servant. David understands that even though he has been anointed, God has not yet removed Saul; as such, David is a willing servant to the divinely chosen king who, for the moment, is still on the throne. Second, although David begins his warrior's résumé with his fearless defeat of the lion and bear, he concludes it with the testimony that it was the Lord's deliverance at work when he successfully defended the sheep. Finally, the fundamental issue for David was that Goliath had defied the Lord. David knew the punishment for his blasphemy was death.⁹ David does not fear his youth, the rebuke of his brother, the seasoned Philistine warrior, or death, because he trusts in the Lord and because he understands the battle is the Lord's.¹⁰ Already at this early stage David leads both Saul and the men of Israel through his courageous example and his words of encouragement (1 Sam. 17:32). Other positive aspects of David's leadership are artfully tucked in the narrative and they further the contrasts between David and Saul. Unlike Saul, David is a good shepherd who is careful to obey his father's instructions even though he is unexpectedly about to confront Goliath (1 Sam. 17:20–25).¹¹

Like Saul, the narratives about David's life are too long to exegete in detail here. Instead we will survey common themes from three vignettes that are integral to his portrait as king: his encounter with Nabal and Abigail, his mishandling of the ark, and his sin with Bathsheba. These particular stories are instructive because they help reveal why David, despite his sinfulness, can still be considered the king against which all others are measured. These help the reader see why Saul sinned and was rejected, while David sinned and remained on the throne.

In each of these three stories about David we see him sin—spectacularly.¹² In the case of Nabal and Abigail, David who is so praised for his restraint in the face of Saul's pursuit, is in real danger of “sully[ing] his reputation by acting violently against a fool” for nothing more than ingratitude and disrespect.¹³ Abigail is the wise one in this narrative, and she is used by the Lord to restrain David. The reply David makes to Abigail is instructive. Note that he praises God for providing Abigail to keep him from guilt. He also understands that had he attacked Nabal, it would have been an attempt to provide salvation with his own hand (1 Sam. 25:33). He listened to the Lord through the words of Abigail and relented of his plans.

9. Though his argument is tentative, Bergen shows how the literary portrayal of David's fight with is intimately connected to the Torah and its instructions on blasphemy. *Ibid.*, 195–196.

10. This is not to say that David's motives here are pure. It is interesting that he inquires of the reward.

11. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 177.

12. This phrasing is not to celebrate David's sinfulness, but rather to think of it in the manner John Piper suggests when considering the utter depths of humanity's sinfulness in light of the gracious and saving sovereignty of God. John Piper, *Spectacular Sins: And Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

13. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 249.

In a second vignette, just before his attempt to relocate the ark, we read that David's kingdom increased because of the Lord's presence with him (2 Sam. 5:10). David recognized his reign was established by God and that his exaltation was for the sake of the Lord's people, Israel (2 Sam. 5:12).

The rising tides of David's success caught the attention of the Philistines. Hearing of their impending attack, David sought the Lord (2 Sam. 5:17–21) and was victorious. The Philistines tried again to defeat David, and again upon hearing of the military advance, David immediately sought the Lord's will. This time, the message was not straightforward. This battle plan was more complicated, and had a unique set of instructions. David was not to make a frontal attack. Instead he was to approach from the rear, but the attack was not to begin until he heard marching sounds in the tops of the trees (2 Sam. 5:22–25). Then David was to attack, knowing that the Lord had gone before him to assure the victory. David did exactly as instructed and was again victorious.

Following these two attacks, David gathers the people and considers moving the ark into the fortified city. The people agreed that the idea was from the Lord and they proceeded to collect the ark which had been neglected during Saul's reign.¹⁴ Yet, unlike the previous two episodes where David was victorious on the battlefield, here he suffers a stinging defeat—at the hands of the Lord himself. As a result of David's attempt to move the ark, Uzzah is killed by the Lord when he reached out to steady the ark on the cart.

Unlike the incident with Nabal and Abigail, David's initial response to rebuke is anger and fear. David was in a new position in his relationship with the Lord. He had always had success, but now he finds himself at odds with the Lord and unsure of how to proceed. Instead of seeking the Lord, David halts the proceedings and temporarily stores the ark.¹⁵ What went wrong? David had painstakingly followed the Lord's direction in battle. He had followed the plans of the Lord in minute detail, which was a marked contrast from Saul's approach to the word of the Lord. Yet, Uzzah had died. Although it appears likely based on 1 Chronicles 13:2 that David and the people sought permission to make the move, they failed to honor

14. Although there is no record of a specific inquiry, there is nothing in the text which indicates the move itself was against God's will or that David did not inquire of the Lord prior to the move. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13 has David explicitly seeking the people's agreement on whether this idea was "from the Lord." It is therefore unlikely that the underlying flaw in David's actions was a break in pattern from the prior two stories where he sought the Lord prior to initiating military action.

15. Commentators disagree over whether David's anger was directed toward the Lord, toward Uzzah, or toward himself. For a discussion see A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 104; and Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 330. Baldwin's interpretation is the most compelling. "David, for whom everything had been going so well, reacted with hot indignation: he was angry at the Lord's intervention. . . . David in his humiliation blamed God for the incident and opted out of the task of taking the ark on to Jerusalem, partly because he was also *afraid of the Lord*" (emphasis original). Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 222.

the Lord by moving the ark in accordance with the instructions given in the Torah for its care. First, the ark was to be carried by its poles, which were never to be removed. They were never removed, presumably so that no one would attempt to move it without them (Exod. 25:14–15)!¹⁶ Even though David was concerned that the Lord grant permission to move the ark, he was not concerned *enough* with the holiness of God to follow the instructions on *how* to move the ark. It should have been moved by its poles, by the Levites who, even though charged with carrying the holy things of the tabernacle, were not allowed to touch them (Num. 4:15).

Support for this interpretation is found in the following episode where the ark is successfully carried by the Levites into the city.¹⁷ A mere six paces into their journey, they stopped to sacrifice. David's anger and fear has turned to repentance, learning, and obedience. Rather than shrinking from the Lord or the people in fear, he joyfully leads the celebration of the renewed relationship, fully honoring the holiness of the Lord.

The last vignette in our survey of David's leadership is his sin with Bathsheba. Although it is commonly asserted that David's problems begin with his decision to stay home (2 Sam. 11:1) and not go to battle, it is far from clear whether this comment is intended as condemnation or is simply introducing the scene.¹⁸ His absence from the battlefield is not raised again and plays no further role in the narrative, other than setting the stage. If it is deemed wrong for David to be home while the army is at war, the narrative does not make that point explicit.

What the narrative does make explicit, in painful detail, is that the king who has consistently asked and inquired of the Lord, now only makes inquiries about the woman he desires. Then, having committed adultery, he plots to cover it up, and failing to do that successfully, he prepares for murder. Finally having achieved his victory over Uriah, he brazenly brings Bathsheba into the royal residence to live as his wife. At every turn his open secret mocks the Lord, whom he represents on the throne. The text at this point is brutally short. Bathsheba "became his wife and bore him a son, but what David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:27).

When confronted by his sin through Nathan's parable, David is laid bare. His response to the parable shows the reader that he understood the just measure that was due such brazen sinfulness. Such a sinner deserved death. He who showed no pity was due no mercy (2 Sam. 12:5–6). Hearing the judgment of the Lord, David simply responds, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13). There is no justification like we saw in

16. See Stuart's instructive comments on the permanency of the poles. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 567.

17. First Chronicles 15:26 specifies that it was in fact the Levites who carried the ark in this second attempt.

18. Compare Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 153; Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 247; and Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 363–364.

Saul's responses to Samuel. There is no anger and fear as we saw in David's response to Uzzah's death. David penitently accepts his just punishment. Based on Nathan's response to David's confession (1 Sam. 12:13), it seems likely that David expected to die for his sin.

David, though not perfect, was responsive to the Lord's discipline. This is the running theme that links the three vignettes. It is also what paints the sharpest contrast between David and Saul. Both were sinners, but Saul rejected the discipline of the Lord and continued in fear not faith. David continued to sin, but in each case accepted the Lord's discipline, learned, and grew in his faith. David's life is not one of perfection followed by a sudden and swift fall. He struggles both before and during his reign with sin. Yet, unlike Saul, he responds to the Lord's discipline.

As significant as David's response to discipline is, we would be wrong to assume it as the basis for the covenant the Lord makes with David. David himself testified in 2 Samuel 7:21 that the Davidic covenant was not based on anything in him. Rather it was given by the Lord's sovereign choice alone.

David can thus be upheld as the measure against which all other kings are evaluated because he is a king by the grace of God. Though sinful, he followed after the Lord by responding in faith to the discipline he received. Saul started with faith and then fled to fear. He acknowledged his sin, but never truly repented and accepted the Lord's discipline.

Solomon: The Wise King

Solomon's reign is virtually synonymous with wisdom. God rewards Solomon's noble request for an ability to rightly govern the nation by giving him a wise and discerning heart (1 Kings 3:12). The case of the two prostitutes famously showcased Solomon's God-given wisdom, and led the nation to revere their just king. So how did this king—the one who made the right request of God, was granted wisdom, and who employed that wisdom to render justice in the land—end up so foolish? How could he, of all kings, marry so many women? How could he, in his marriages to these foreign women, bring their idolatry into his household? How could he build the temple of the Lord and yet lead the people into the worship of other gods? These are the questions we must pursue as we consider this last portrait of an ideal king.

Perhaps the key is found in the wisdom literature itself. In Proverbs 1:7 we read, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Wisdom and discipline the fool despises." Kidner's comments on this key verse are worth quoting in full.

The beginning (i.e. the first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind; cf. Eccl. 12:13) is not merely a right method of thought but a right relation: a worshipping submission (*fear*) to the God of the covenant, who has revealed himself by name (*the Lord*, i.e. Yahweh:

Exod. 3:13–15). *Knowledge*, then, in its full sense, is a relationship, dependent on revelation and inseparable from character (‘wisdom and training,’ 7b). When we fence off (as we must) limited fields of knowledge for special study, the missing context must be remembered, or our knowing is precocious and distorted, as at the fall, and we end by knowing less (cf. 3:7; Rom. 1:21–22), not more.¹⁹

Is there evidence in the narratives about Solomon that he set aside the fear of the Lord as a starting place and did not see his relationship with God as a controlling principle? This is exactly what the narrative suggests. He pursued knowledge as a thing to be mastered, instead of a relationship with the living God. He lost sight of maintaining a right relationship, and instead only sought right methods. This aspect of Solomon’s move from wisdom to folly is most clearly seen when we examine the role of the book of Deuteronomy in the telling of Solomon’s story.²⁰

The narrative of Solomon’s kingship is filled with implicit references to the book of Deuteronomy in general, and to the laws regarding kingship in particular. The laws of kingship are found in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. They specify, among other things, that the king must not acquire a great number of horses, and that he should not return to Egypt to gain his horses. It also states that he must not take many wives or amass excessive amounts of silver and gold. Finally, the law requires the king to write for himself a copy of the law that must be approved by the Levites. This copy of the law is to remain with the king so that he will read from it and learn to fear the Lord, so that he keeps the law and does not excuse himself from its obligations.

Having this text in mind when reading the account of Solomon’s reign is quite instructive. Now we can see the mention of gold surrounding the king (1 Kings 10:14–22), 12,000 horses from Egypt (1 Kings 10:26–29), and his many, many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1–4) echoing the laws regarding kingship.

In addition to these echoes from the law, we can see from Solomon’s own words that he was steeped in the book of Deuteronomy. References to deuteronomic ideas and texts are found throughout his temple dedication speech and prayer (1 Kings 8:16, 23, 32, 35, 37, 40, 51, and 53). The net effect of this aspect of the narrative is to affirm beyond any doubt, that Solomon was intimately familiar with the law. Whatever violations he committed, they were not for a lack of knowledge.

19. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 56.

20. For a detailed account of the narrative artistry in the account of Solomon’s reign, see J. Daniel Hays, “Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtlety in 1 Kings 1–11,” *JSOT* 28.2 (2003): 149–174. Hays is particularly helpful to see how the negative aspects of Solomon’s story are woven into the whole account and not just at the end of his life.

Solomon was given a wise and understanding heart. He knew the law, and he knew it well. It permeated his speech. But he failed to see that knowledge of the law should lead to knowledge of the Lord. He did not pursue a relationship with the Lord. Instead, he pursued the tools of governance and academic learning, separated from the fear of the Lord. He began with wisdom, but soon left it behind as a stepping stone instead of letting it be, in Kidner's terms, his life's "controlling principle." Learning about the law was not a substitute for learning to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of the law (Deut. 17:18–20). As such, we see the wisest man become the greatest fool, as he led his family and nation into idolatry, division, and divine punishment.

THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITED MONARCHY

Israel desperately wanted a king to be like the other nations. God knew that this time would come, and made provisions for it in the law. But the law mandated that Israel's king not be like the other nations. Their king must be submitted to the one true God. He must not view himself above his brothers, but serve as one of them. Together, fearing God and obedient to his ways, the king and the nation would prosper together. The three portraits we have studied lead to the following theological principles regarding royal leadership.

Motivation: Salvation or Fear

To lead God's people, the king must not seek to provide for his own salvation, or seek his salvation through the people. Instead, he must place his faith solely in God's saving grace. This faith that salvation only comes from God must drive how the king views his kingship, how he leads in battle, and how he deals with the word of God. If God is the source of salvation, then obedience to his word is the only real option. Kings who abandon this approach to leadership will inevitably lead from a position of fear instead of faith. *Godly leaders must be motivated by their faith in God as the sole source of salvation.*

Discipline: Obedience and Repentance

As we saw in each of the three portraits, leaders will fail and sin. Although leaders must strive not to sin, how they respond when they do will dictate the course of their leadership. Saul never truly accepted rebuke and correction. Instead he made excuses, confessed without genuine repentance, and continued in the same sin. Solomon, in his three encounters with God (1 Kings 3:14; 9:3–9; 11:11–13) was warned what would happen should he choose to follow other gods. Yet, even though he knew the word of the Lord, he failed to take it to heart. He allowed it to be mere knowledge, disconnected from a renewing relationship with the Lord. As a result he mired himself deeper and deeper in sin, failing to respond to the Lord's correction.

Like Saul and Solomon, David sinned greatly. Yet at each occasion, when confronted with his sin, he responded with humility and true repentance. Even when it took some time, as in the episode with the ark, David did not stop following the Lord. He worked through the discipline until he could once again lead the people obediently, and joyfully before the Lord. *Godly leaders must not despise the discipline of the Lord.*²¹ They must welcome it as a sign of the Lord's love for them.

Wisdom: Knowledge and Relationship

God's people need wise leaders. But wisdom flows not out of mere knowledge, but out of a deep relationship with the living God. Solomon was wise, accomplished, and well-regarded internationally. He was, by every observable external measure, successful. And yet, he was a fool. He traded the wonder of a relationship with the Lord for gold, women, and fame. He treated the word of the Lord as an object to be studied instead of a path to knowing the God of the universe more intimately. True wisdom is godliness. It is founded on the fear of the Lord. It is a relational knowledge of God, not just knowledge about God. True wisdom leads away from sin not to it. *God's people will only flourish when their leaders are godly.* Human greatness is not enough. Only godliness—true wisdom—will lead to a flourishing people.

LEADERSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

Royal Leadership?

This essay has been focused on a royal theology of leadership. Now it might be assumed that the “royal” language is because the targets of the study were kings. This is only partially correct. To fully appreciate the applied significance of these texts, we must understand that all believers are “royal leaders.”

Where does this idea come from? Initially we see it in Genesis 1. The language and imagery related to God's creation of humanity are royal. Humanity was created to be God's vicegerents. That is to say, humanity was created to exercise delegated authority given to us by the sovereign ruler, YHWH. As his royal representatives, we are given a representational reign. We display our connection to God, and reflect God to the world.²² We can extend this idea that we as the people of God are royal leaders by considering Peter's metaphor for the church. Peter declares, “you are a

21. See Hebrews 12, which draws heavily on Proverbs 3. The relationship between God's love and his discipline is consistent across both testaments.

22. The literature on being created in the image of God is vast. The following resources are excellent places to begin: J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Ryan S. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation*, JTI Sup 14 (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016); and John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9, *esv*). Humanity in general was created with a royal task to exercise dominion over the world on God’s behalf, and we as the church were called out of darkness into the light to be a royal priesthood. That is, we are to be a people who are connected to God and reflective of God in the world.²³ So we are royal leaders, and as such need to learn from the theology of royal leadership found in the narratives of Samuel and Kings.

Our Representational Reign: Connected to God and Reflective of God

Godly leaders must be motivated by faith in God as the sole source of salvation and leadership

It is easy for leaders to subtly shift away from trusting in God to trusting in themselves, their plans, their past successes, and the accolades of observers. One sure sign that this has begun to happen is when fear becomes the motivation for actions. Just like Saul who acted in the name of expediency when Samuel was late, and who sought to please the people when they wanted to save what was devoted to destruction, leaders who cease to view God as the sole source of not just their salvation, but their leadership, will be motivated by fear. When we act out of fear, we allow those who evaluate us to serve as the measure of what is right. Keeping followers is the most significant “good” for a leader driven by fear. So as we seek to learn from Saul’s successes and failures we can employ two diagnostic questions. *First*, what is our reaction to those who openly question our leadership? *Second*, what do we fear? When we are consumed by whether or not people might abandon us instead of whether we are faithfully connected to and reflective of God, we have likely shifted from faith to fear. We must trust in God alone, like Christ who was willing to entrust himself to the one who judges rightly (1 Peter 2:23–34) instead of demanding to defend his own reputation. Saul, when leading out of faith that God was working salvation—that God was the origin and power behind his leadership—was willing to face adversity with peace and silence. He was able to handle the temptation of others to retaliate. He was able to lead others away from sin by refusing to act out of fear that the group opposed to his leadership might grow. When acting out of fear, he did whatever people demanded, to preserve his following at all costs.

23. To see this theme traced out from creation to new creation, see Christopher A. Beetham, “From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Vicegerency, and Kingdom,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 237–254.

This leadership principle does not reject communal wisdom, a plurality of leadership, or the priesthood of all believers. It does not set us on a trajectory of solitary leadership disconnected from those we lead. This is proven through David's example, where we learn that godly leaders must not despise the discipline of the Lord, which often comes through those around us.

Godly leaders must not despise the discipline of the Lord

For me, seminary was a wonderful time. I learned so much from godly professors who knew and loved the Word, and who had deep and meaningful ministry experience from around the globe. But perhaps the greatest thing I learned in seminary was how critical accountability is. A friend in school asked me at the beginning of our time there if I would be willing to meet regularly. I assumed he wanted to study together, or to go over ministry plans. I thought perhaps he might even want me to help him with some of the academic things that were a struggle for him. To my surprise (and if I'm honest, my shock and horror) he wanted an accountability partner—and he wanted to be *my* accountability partner! Each week we would gather to ask four simple questions. What Scripture have you been meditating on? How have you reached out to others to share the gospel? Have you put your mind, hands, or eyes somewhere you should not have this week? And how can I pray for you? The prospect frightened me, because for me sin was something to be hidden, wrestled with, and finally defeated—so that if it ever came out publicly, it was in testimony of how I *had* struggled with that now-conquered sin.

David's life teaches us that sin never stays hidden, and that we need others in our lives to regularly challenge us with the discipline of the Lord. We are, as James instructs us, supposed to confess our sins to one another, so that we might be healed (James 5:16). This is especially important for leaders. It is so easy to realize how the Word teaches, corrects, instructs, and reproves others, without seeing how it does that for us. David shows us that leaders will sin, but that sin can be overcome if we are willing to embrace discipline.²⁴ For pastors, there can be a real struggle to find genuine accountability and the community of support that we so desperately need. The temptation to be viewed as an example can lead pastors to push away deep and penetrating accountability. But pastors must model confession and repentance, even if just within the context of ones fellow elders. The temporary pain of vulnerability is worth the reward of wisdom, understanding, and righteousness (Prov. 3:13; Heb. 12:11).

God's people will only flourish when their leaders are godly

Another way to state this principle would be: *Great leadership is not enough*. It is not enough that plans are accomplished, awards are given,

24. This does not address the question of whether the *specific* sins of David would disqualify an elder. Whether or not one remains an elder is not the issue. Whether or not one continues to follow after God wholeheartedly *is*!

numbers increase, and that everyone acknowledges success. If there is not godliness, the greatness is a mirage. It is success built on a foundation of sand that will ultimately crumble, either in this life or under the weight of divine evaluation (1 Cor. 3:10–15). Solomon was wise and accomplished more than the greatest leaders, yet he became a fool; ultimately the people he led did not flourish but floundered. As punishment for their idolatry, the nation was torn in two and set on a path toward exile.

Knowing a lot, even a lot of Scripture or theology, is not the same as having a vibrant and living relationship with the God of the universe. One of the most frightening realizations I had as a young scholar was meeting men and women who knew the Scriptures better than I likely ever will, but who also actively rejected Christ. They could quote extended sections in Greek and Hebrew, but had no love for God. Knowledge of the word is no substitute for a relationship with Christ. The royal leadership that God has created us for is a relational leadership. As we get to know him better and better, we become more faithful representatives of him in this world. Yes, to do this we will come to know more and more about him through his Word, but this knowledge is not abstraction—it is intimacy. It is coming ever more to know God, not to know *about* him.

The church, our families, our communities do not need great leaders. They need godly leaders, through whom God might accomplish the great act of reconciling people to himself. This is the grand task of our representational reign. We come as ambassadors of the great king, whom we know personally, and we invite others to see and taste the goodness of his kingdom where they too might become citizens. Godliness in leadership, not greatness, leads to flourishing among the citizens of the kingdom.

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