

Session 6: The Deuteronomistic History

D3. The monarchy

In session 3 we looked at the story of the anointing of Saul in 1 Samuel 9 and 10. Earlier in this session, we read passages from 1 Samuel 8 and 12 in which the prophet Samuel talks about the choice of a king.

In 1 Samuel 9 and 10, one of the source documents incorporated into the Deuteronomistic history, Saul is handsome and capable. In chapter 11, he proves his leadership and in 11:14-15 Samuel is enthusiastic about the new kingdom.

Samuel's speeches in chapters 8 and 12 are the work of the Deuteronomistic compilers. These passages give a very different picture: to ask for a king is wickedness; it means rejecting Yahweh as king and is the same kind of unfaithfulness as that shown in the time of the judges. Nevertheless, Yahweh will allow a king as long as he obeys Yahweh's voice.

In the book of Deuteronomy kings are only grudgingly accepted: they must obey the law and must not exalt themselves above their fellows. For Hosea, kings are a mistake, more likely to lead the nation astray than to save it. Yahweh has granted kings in response to their request and now in judgement he takes them away (Hosea 13:10-11).

Compare this ambivalence about the role of the king with the treatment of David in much of the Old Testament, and in particular the Deuteronomistic history.

1 Samuel 13:14

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people.

1 Samuel 16:6-7

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'

1 Kings 15:1-5

Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. ... He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David. Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

The first mention of David tells us that he is to be a king 'after Yahweh's own heart'. In the story of David's anointing, Samuel is impressed with Eliab, who has all the characteristics of Saul, whom Samuel loved: tall and handsome. But he is told that Yahweh looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart. Then David is introduced as ruddy and handsome and, following

his anointing, the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him. The Spirit does not depart, as it had done with the judges and with Saul, but remains with David.

The passage in 1 Kings is directly from the Deuteronomic editor. Here it provides an explanation for why Judah was spared despite the unfaithfulness of king Abijam. The reason is Yahweh's love for David.

Activity 6.7

Read the following passages:

2 Samuel 7

Psalm 89

Psalm 132

Make a note of the promises made to David in these passages and the terms on which he and his dynasty are said to reign.

In 2 Samuel 7:18, David sits before the Lord, an enormous privilege since in all representations of the heavenly court everyone stands before Yahweh (for example 1 Kings 22:19). Before David can build a house for the Lord, the Lord is to build a 'house' or dynasty for him. This dynasty is to be a perpetual dynasty. Even if his successors are disobedient, Yahweh will not take away his *hesed* or covenant love.

Psalm 132 celebrates the promise to David in verses 11-12 and links this with a similar promise to Jerusalem in verses 13-17. We will look more closely at the origin of this promise in the next section.