

Presentation on: Perdue, Leo G. “Is There Anyone Left of the House of Saul: Ambiguity and the characterization of David in the Succession Narrative.”

Leo Perdue builds his case systematically by initially adding other voices to his own. He moves quickly through these voices and the characterization of the narrator before he gives the reader his thesis. The reader, prior to this point, may not be sure where Perdue is heading in this article. Great weight is placed with the narrator as crafter of information and, thus, is highly influential in couching the character of David. In this manner, Perdue is almost telling the reader that he or she should be cautious in discerning the motive of the narrator or risk receiving a less than honest depiction. This also applies, of course, to those who comment on the Succession Narrative, including the author of the article. Everyone is suspect.

Perdue successfully points to two incidents, which portray a “kinder, gentler” David (2 Samuel 9 & 10) and contrasts these incidents with the David of 2 Samuel 11 and Uriah. Using these incidents, Perdue is laying out a very supportive argument for his thesis found on page 71 of the article. Perdue cites the next shift in David’s character in 2 Samuel 12. Nathan’s parable interprets David’s behavior and David repents.

Perdue moves his argument pointing to motives displayed by David in his public and private encounters. However, he may not have wanted to place too much weight on speaking about motive. Since the narrator rarely supplies the reader with insight into what David is thinking i.e. telling the reader, what is garnered about motive is concluded from whatever the narrator’s does show the reader. Again, the reader is left to make a decision about motive rather than being presented with an absolute. This may be a weak point in Perdue’s argument. For example,

nothing shown in the narrative treatment of the opening of 2 Samuel 9 about Mephibosheth indicates that David is not being genuine. To presuppose that the narrative in 2 Samuel 21 is foreshadowed in 2 Samuel 9 is unsubstantiated. The Harper Collins Study Bible (NRSV) notes that 2 Samuel 21:1-14 *probably* once was the introduction to Chapter 9 but there is no absolute certainty indicated. In fact, the narrator shows David's actions as indicating loyalty to Jonathan (2 Samuel 9: 1,3,7). Perdue, however, reads into the narrator's motive and suggests David is acting out of political cunning and craftiness.

Perdue makes assertions that, again, the narrator does not support. In interpreting the Ammonites' response to David, he concludes that the suspicions are valid because the narrator raises these suspicions. Thus, another side of David is revealed. Again, Perdue speaks to David's motives that the reader is not given.

Perdue's approach has been to point to the method of the narrator that establishes the ambiguity of David's character. However, his own interpretation is more prominent in his argument and it is weighed heavily on the side of presenting David as deceitful and treacherous. Even when the narrator shows a side of David that represents *hesed*, Perdue discounts it as a deceitful ploy. This is evident in Perdue's assessment of Nathan's encounter with David after the death of Uriah. The narrator presents Nathan as a messenger from God to David. Perdue interprets Nathan action as a trick to entrap David. Is God in on the "trick", too?

Perdue fails to highlight that David's depiction takes a different focus after the murder of Absalom, perhaps even understandably. Perdue points out that the narrator does authenticate David's suffering at the death of his son yet Perdue continues to question the genuineness of David's behavior. The complex relationship between David and Joab heightens after Absalom's death. One might ask who is the actual king and what that say about David's character?

Perdue brings a new insight to aspects of David's character the reader may pick up on but not dwell on. Even in the midst of Perdue's argument, the readers remembers that Samuel informed Saul that the Lord sought and found a man after his own heart who would be ruler (2 Samuel 13:14). That man was David. Even with the proven ambiguities in his character, that man was still David.

Perdue systematically and methodically points to incidents that display David in differing lights. The ambiguity draws the reader to come to his or her own conclusion about David, the man. Perdue's argument does reveal the multi-faceted personality of a complex individual in leadership. Not unlike many of us, however. In Perdue's interpretation, he cannot attest to what the narrator or narrative does not reveal. The crucial question in the Perdue article comes in the conclusion. After stating the case for the narrator's intentional ambiguous portrayal of David through times of compassion and instances of treachery, the reader is asked by Perdue which David he or she believes. I believe the article successfully displays the different sides of David through Perdue's interpretation of David not necessarily through the narrator's perceived intention.

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