

Assessing David's reign (1 Kings)

How are we to evaluate David and his reign? It is noteworthy that while Solomon gained more wealth, land, and renown than his father David, it is David whom the books of Kings and Chronicles acclaimed as Israel's greatest king, the model against which all other kings were measured.

We may gain hope for ourselves from God's response to the very positives and negatives we see in David's life and actions. We are impressed by his fundamental piety even as we blanch at his political manipulation, lust, and violence. When we see a similar ambivalence in our own hearts and actions, we take comfort and hope in the God who forgives all our sins. The Lord's presence with David gives us hope that even in the face of our faithlessness, God stays with us as the relentless Hound of Heaven.

Like Saul, David combined greatness and faithfulness, with sin and error. We may wonder, then, why God preserved David's reign, but not Saul's. Partly, it may be because David's heart remained true to God (1 Kings 11:4, 15:3), however errant his deeds. The same thing is never said of Saul. Or it may be simply because the best way for God to carry out his purposes for his people was to put David on the throne and keep him there. When God calls us to a task or position, it is not necessarily us he is thinking about. He may choose us because of the effect we will have on other people. For example God gave Cyrus of Persia victory over Babylon not to reward or benefit Cyrus, but to free Israel from captivity (2 Chronicles 36:22-23).
