

Then he said to his disciples,
"The harvest is plentiful, but the
laborers are few; therefore pray
earnestly to the Lord of the
harvest to send out laborers."
Matthew 9:37-38



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the "landscape" we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we're learning and doing. This is a monthly publication of Grace Fellowship Church, Mansfield, Ohio.

ElderTalk: "No Kings? Know the King!" - Part II

MATT GODSIL

David vs. Saul

We return to our examination of the title of "King" in Scripture. God's perspective on kingship might be the best way to process current events in leadership, both among the nations and within the church since it is grounded in His truth. This is an opportunity to reflect on God's Word in light of our present time and place in the world.

In this article, we will be comparing David, a shepherd boy turned king, with Saul, the first king of Israel. Our sources are the books of Samuel and Chronicles. I chose David as a pivotal human figure in the Old Testament because many messianic prophecies during Jesus' time pointed back to him.

So, to begin, I present two questions:

1. What is it about David that makes his throne the Messianic Throne in Scripture, especially during Jesus' earthly ministry?
2. How is the Messianic Throne prophetically tied to the fulfillment of the prophecy given to David through the prophet Nathan?

David and Saul, the first two kings of Israel, are often compared to highlight differences in character, leadership, obedience to God, and the outcomes of their reigns. Here is a clear comparison and contrast of their lives and subsequent reigns in the Kingdom of Israel.

Background and Anointing

We are first introduced to Saul in 1 Samuel 9 (ESV):



King David by Nicolas Cordier (c. 1567-1612)



Saul Under the Influence of the Evil Spirit by William Wetmore Story (1819-1895)

"1. There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. 2. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people."

We meet David in 1 Samuel 16 (ESV): "11. Then Samuel said to Jesse,

'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.'

12 And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him, for this is he.' 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah."

Saul was a still good looking, tall, physically impressive former donkey herder from the tribe of Benjamin. David was a handsome, young shepherd

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David vs. Saul *(Continued from page 1)*

boy—overlooked even by his family—from the tribe of Judah. Saul was chosen by God through Samuel in response to the people’s demand for a king while David was chosen by God for his heart and faith, anointed secretly by Samuel.

Relationship with God

There are considerable differences between Saul and David in their relationship with God. Saul was disobedient: offering sacrifices unlawfully, sparing the Amalekite king and the spoils. David was generally obedient, frequently seeking God in decision-making.

But if we examine the roots of their obedience issues, we see that Saul was prideful, insecure, and often more concerned with appearances and approval. David, by contrast, is described as “a man after God’s own heart.” When confronted with sin, he was repentant and humble. Instead of repenting for disobedience, Saul made excuses and blamed others. David took responsibility for his sins and repented deeply.

In Psalm 51, David laments: “3. *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.* 4. *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.*”

Leadership and Reign

Saul’s leadership style was often rash and impulsive, driven by fear and jealousy. David, by contrast, was more strategic and courageous, regularly seeking God’s counsel. During his reign, Saul grew jealous of David, alienated God’s prophet Samuel, and even became estranged from his own son Jonathan. David, however, built strong alliances with Jonathan, developed the mighty men, and promoted unity among the tribes of Israel.

Saul experienced some early military success, but his exploits declined. David unified the kingdom and achieved major military victories throughout his reign. Ironically, both men reigned for 40 years.

Both also experienced moral failings. Saul unlawfully offered sacrifices, cut corners in obedience, and even consulted a medium. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and orchestrated the death of her husband Uriah while he was in battle. The great difference, however, is that Saul rationalized and deflected responsibility, while David acknowledged his sin, fasted, wept, and wrote psalms of repentance.

Legacy

In light of these failings, their legacies diverged. Saul committed suicide after his defeat at Mount Gilboa, where his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua also fell. David, however, died peacefully, passing the throne to Solomon. Yet even David’s sons brought turmoil: one raped his sister, others murdered each other, one led a rebellion against his father, and another tried to usurp the throne.

Saul’s dynasty ended with him. David’s legacy, though marked by family strife, endured for centuries and was fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Saul is remembered for losing God’s favor and the departure of the Spirit. David is remembered for maintaining God’s favor despite his sins since God remained in covenant with him, promising an eternal dynasty.

Conclusion

Saul was an answer to the people’s demand for a human king. But he failed to lead with obedience and humility, descending into broken relationship with God through continued rejection of His commands.

David was flawed in many ways as well, but he consistently repented. He led with courage and became the standard-bearer of kingship in Israel until the throne was fulfilled by his descendant, Jesus of Nazareth. It is in this truth that God defined David’s reign, choosing him to carry forth the Messianic promise.

Some additional classical artwork depicting the King David and King Saul saga



Bathsheba at the Deathbed of King David (c. 1646-50) by Jan van Noordt (private collection in Budapest, Hungary)

Below: The Suicide of Saul (1562) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna, Austria)



Above: King David - “Oh, that I had wings like a Dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest” [Psalm 55 - 6] (1865) by Frederic Leighton, (Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA)

IN HOC SIGNO VINCES

JOHN KURTZ

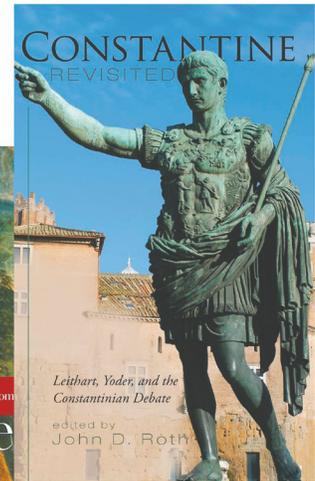
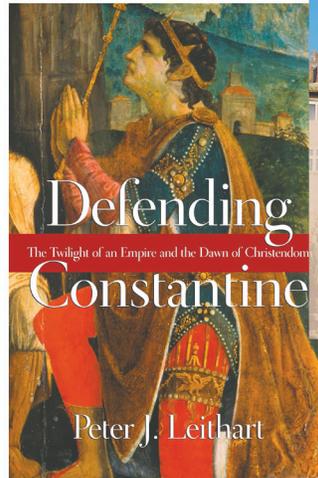
Perhaps it is in my genes (my mother was a Latin major in college!), but I have been fascinated by things Roman ever since my three and a half years of Latin in high school. My interest in the “goings on” in the early church has also been a long-time fascination, perhaps whetted even more by watching the extremely well done, but still “in progress,” video series depicting the story of Jesus and His Apostles, *The Chosen*. Those interests led me to want to learn something further about the Roman Emperor, Constantine, the man to whom God gave those words *IN HOC SIGNO VINCES* (*In this sign, conquer*) in a vision of a cross in the sky prior to going into a battle against an apparently overwhelming enemy back in 312 AD. That vision, and the subsequent victory on the battlefield which followed, led to Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, an event which changed the course of history, at least in so far as the Christian Church has been concerned.



Visione della Croce (Vision of the Cross) by the School of Raphael (1520), Sala di Costantino, Rome, Italy

The question of what really happened to Constantine in 312 AD and what was the total effect upon Christians and the Church which followed has been the subject of considerable debate over the years among theologians and certainly some of us lay folks as well. From the theological standpoint, there have been two names which have stood out, at least in recent years. One is a Mennonite, the late John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), and the other Peter James Leithart, a Reformed Church pastor (born 1959). The two men have approached the subject from somewhat opposite

sides of the Christian spectrum, as it were, Dr. Yoder being a staunch pacifist; whereas, Dr. Leithart is a



Reformed Church pastor and a believer in “a just war” when necessary.

Before even realizing that there was any controversy involved in the “Constantine affair,” I saw two books, one considerably more lengthy, on the subject, and so purchased both for reading at a later date, not actually realizing at the time the the shorter volume was actually a collection of essays written as commentary on the earlier and longer volume (372 pages), written by Peter Leithart and entitled *Defending Constantine* and published by InterVarsity Press in 2010. Being one who really prefers “shorter reads” over “hefty tomes,” and not immediately realizing that it actually pertained to the other book, I decided to take on the shorter book of only 199 pages, *Constantine Revisited*, edited by John D. Roth and published in 2013 by Pickwick Publications. While I don’t recommend the reading of a commentary about anything prior to having read the subject of that commentary first, in this case it seems to have “worked” since the commentators, essayists in the case, have seemed very fair and also quoted large enough portions of both Dr. Leithart’s book and the writings of Dr. Yoder to make things understandable.

While giving a reasonable coverage of the actual life of Constantine the Great, a flawed man and sinner like the rest of us, who ruled over the Roman Empire from 306 AD to the time of his death in 337AD, Dr. Leithart gives his understanding of the effect which Constantine and his rule had upon the Christian church of the period and its attitude toward war and militarism, from the viewpoint of a Reformed Church theologian. of course. The book edited by Dr. Roth, also a Mennonite, contains a series of ten essays on the subject with

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IN HOC SIGNO VINCES

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an introductory chapter by Dr. Roth and a brief concluding “Afterward” by Dr. Leithart, with about equal content in the essays in between from various Anabaptist and Reformed scholars as well as one by a Roman Catholic.

Neither of these volumes is easy reading, but thought provoking they most certainly are, especially in light of today’s political situation in the United States as well as the wars, war mongering, and protests so prevalent in the 21st century. The subject matter covered in both volumes by each of the writers involved is (or should certainly be) “food for thought” for every Christian. Just what does God intend our stance and attitude to be toward “Church and State” matters and toward violence and war? These are “deep” subjects, but ones which call for our better understanding. A “read” through these two books is a step in the right direction toward a better comprehension as to how God wants His people to think, act and live.

Some Quotes about

history repeating itself:

Winston Churchill: He is known for saying, *“Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”*

Mark Twain: While the exact quote is disputed, Twain is often associated with the saying, *“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”*

King Solomon: in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 1:9), *“That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.”*



A fall favorite from the camera lens of Mary Beth Adams

October 2025

	1	2	3	4		
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



- 1, 8, 15, 22, 29** **CONNECT** groups for all ages (6:30-8:30 PM, every Wednesday).
- 4** Games Reach Family Game Night, 6:30-8:30 PM, Foursquare Gospel Church, 383 Davidson St., Mansfield.
- 5** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Exodus 32:9; 33:3; 34:9.
- 6, 13, 20, 27** *Keys to Freedom* Groups: Men, 1 PM, Multi-Purpose Room; Women, 6:30 PM, Godsil home; Women, 7:00 PM, Frankenfield home.
- 12** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on James 1:22-25.
- 18** Fall Harvest Party, 5:30-7:30 PM
- 19** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on 2 Samuel 12:1-13.
- 26** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Galatians 5 and 6.

Grace Fellowship Church

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- Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor
- Jadaé Fox Elder
- Matt Godsil Elder
- Cameron Karger Treasurer
- Kay Berry } Office
- Jadaé Fox }

(A complete list of church functionaries will return next month)