

The Literary Context for the David Cycle

King David in History and Legend
Park Avenue Synagogue
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February 4, 2026

Topics

- History, Prophecy, Narrative, Myth
- The Deuteronomistic History
- The Ark Narrative
- The “Saul Cycle”
- The History of David’s Rise
- The Succession Narrative
- What is the literary character of these narratives? (1Sam 25)

Reading the David Cycle as "History"

- Emphasis on the text's connection with historical facts
- Dependent on archaeological record while also guiding archaeological research
- Assumes that the text dates to the 9th century BCE at the latest
- Layers on readings at different historical moments (e.g., the Babylonian period)
- Simplifies the literary engagement with the text

The David Cycle as “Prophecy”

- Reads the text as anticipating further developments
- Christianity → David as an ancestor to Jesus
- Judaism → Promise of a Davidic messiah
- Foregrounds prophetic figures in text: Samuel & Nathan
- Significance of text is not the world it *speaks from* but the world it *anticipates*
- Core text: 1Sam 7

2 Sam 7

- Layered: Nathan gives 2 oracles connected with David's desire to build a temple
- David described as of exemplary piety
- 2nd oracle transformed into a regnal oracle
- Prediction of "throne of his kingdom forever" in v 13

The David Cycle as “Narrative”

- Emphasis is on text as a literary work
- Focus on its internal composition, stylistic elements, complex thematics
- History and Prophecy not irrelevant, but secondary to text as a literary artifact
- Encourages atomistic reading of separate literary units and then subsequent thematic situation
- Often ignores or glosses over historical/“diachronic” reading of textual layers/composition in favor of “final form”

The David Cycle as “Myth”

- Places emphasis on the literary function of the text and its capacity to shape and sustain an “identity”
- May or may not be “historical” but connection is primarily to how it is read, make use of in later moment
- Bruce Lincoln: “Myth is ideology in narrative form”

The “Deuteronomistic History”

Literary Cycle running from Deuteronomy – 2 Kings

Overlaps somewhat with “Former Prophets” (Joshua-Kings)

Emphasis on cyclical nature of divine relationship with people of Israel

Moral order to history given in Deuteronomic code (Deut 12-26)

Composite/editorial work

Saul-David material is at the centerpiece (1 Sam 9-1 Kgs 2)

The "Ark Narrative"

Core is 1 Sam 4-7

Bracketed by Samuel material (1 Sam 1-3, 8)

Sequentially follows on Judges

Describes Samuel as a judge/prophet/priest

Ark Narrative traces movement of Ark toward Jerusalem

Strong anti-monarchic tone (1 Sam 8)

1 Sam 8

- Anti-regnal narrative
- Ironical placement before Saul's anointment in 1Sam 9
- Echoes anti-monarchic bias in Judges narratives like Judg 9 (Abimelech)

The "Saul Cycle"

Narrowly: 1Sam 9-15 (Saul's reign → loss of divine favor in ch 15)

Broadly: 1Sam 9-31 (Begins with Saul's anointment and ends with his death)

Latter designation overlaps with the History of David's Rise (1Sam 16: anointment of David)

Material describing Saul, Benjaminite king over all Israel

Tragic/ironic figure

Foil to King David

The “History of David’s Rise”

Conventionally: 1Sam 16-2 Sam 5 or 2Sam 6

2Sam 5: David’s elevation to kingship

2Sam 6: Movement of Ark into Jerusalem

Overlap with Saul material shows movement of divine favor away from Saul and onto David

Saul’s loss of divine favor provokes madness and violence

Propagandistic element: love of Saul’s children (Jonathan, Michal) for David indicates his fitness to rule

The "Succession Narrative"

2 Sam 9-20, 1Kgs 1-2

Describes David secure in his kingdom and difficulties in his house

2 Sam 11 is the hinge point for David cycle

Tragic narrative of David's loss of divine favor and the dissolution of his house

Culminates in succession and David's instruction to Solomon

1 Sam 25

- David in the wilderness of Paran
- Illustration of the ambiguity of Davidic narratives
- Is David a king in the making? A bandit warlord? Both?
- What is Abigail doing?