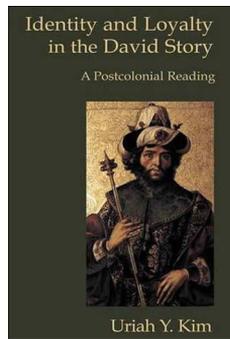


○ **REVIEW OF URIAH Y. KIM, *IDENTITY AND LOYALTY IN THE DAVID STORY: A POSTCOLONIAL READING*, HEBREW BIBLE MONOGRAPHS 22**

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It is becoming increasingly apparent that the character of David in 1 Samuel - 2 Kings 2 is very complicated. Interpretations that picture him either as the purely pious shepherd or solely as the Machiavellian mafioso rising to power by killing anyone in his way do not do justice to this complex character. While many modern interpretations of David are available, Uriah Kim, Professor of Hebrew Bible at Hartford Seminary, has offered a different interpretation: a postcolonial David.

In *Identity and Loyalty* Kim continues his program of a postcolonial reading of the Deuteronomistic History, having set out his program in *Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005). In this reading strategy, Kim seeks to allow his own social context, as ‘an Asian American Christian’ (p. 13), to inform a reading of David. Such reading strategies are a helpful aid to better understanding in a field dominated by white, western, mostly affluent voices.

In the first chapter, Kim sets up the concept of a postcolonial reading of David. Key factors lie in the concepts of identity, which in Kim's reading means largely who is and who is not considered an ‘Israelite’, and loyalty, which he examines in the David story in terms of the Hebrew word *hesed*, often translated ‘loving-kindness’ or ‘loyalty’. Kim proposes a reading of David which envisions him as ‘a Machiavellian man of *hesed* who was willing to cross various boundaries of difference in order to form his kingdom’ (p. 27). He reads the David story through the lens of *hesed* in order to see ‘neither the David of the narrator (and faith) nor the David of his enemies (and modern skeptics)... [but rather] a post-colonial David who represents a third way of reading the David story’ (p. 30).

In the second chapter Kim introduces the term *hesed* as a postcolonial term. He interacts with research that describes *hesed* largely as a term of loyalty between two parties in a previously existing relationship. Alternatively, Kim proposes that *hesed* also incorporates acts that form new relationships and encompasses the semantic range that he describes using the Korean word *jeong*, a term that describes the ‘affection-and-kindness’ which is expressed to others outside of normal boundaries (p. 54). It is this *jeong* side of *hesed* that Kim finds helpful as a postcolonial term. Kim’s discussion of *hesed* is very helpful in holding together the two elements that are expressed in this key biblical term, namely the concept of loyalty and the concept of ‘loving-kindness’ or *jeong* in Kim’s terms. However, though Kim spends much time in this second chapter showing how *hesed* incorporates both loyalty and *jeong*, he spends the next several chapters bifurcating the term in his reading of the David story. Throughout his analysis of the David story he treats characters and actions as incorporating either the loyalty side or the *jeong* side of *hesed*. Though the term incorporates both ideas to Kim, very rarely in his reading of the narrative do we see the actual word used to incorporate both aspects of the term. This leads one to wonder whether there are more contexts where the concept of *hesed* is used to convey both loyalty and *jeong* than Kim allows in his reading of the David story.

In the next two chapters Kim offers an interpretation of the David story using the theme of *hesed* as a lens. He analyzes the story in two parts: the rise of David in 1 Samuel 1 – 2 Samuel 5 (ch. 3) and the kingship of David in 2 Samuel 5 – 2 Kings 2 (ch. 4). In David’s rise, Kim views David as a man who receives a remarkable amount of *hesed* (both loyalty and *jeong*) from both people and God but who seems to withhold his own *hesed* from anyone. In David’s kingship he sees David’s overwhelming *hesed* (*jeong*) for his sons as being a major theme. But he also notes the reality that David’s kingdom is sustained by many characters showing *hesed* (loyalty) to David. Through this interpretive strategy Kim unfolds a complex series of relationships that creates an interesting lens through which to read David’s story.

In the fifth and perhaps most important chapter for his reading of a postcolonial David, Kim examines how David builds his kingdom through the process of hybridisation. In his reading of the hybridisation of David’s kingdom, Kim notes that David’s coalition ‘went far beyond David’s own ‘tribe’ or ‘people’. His success in forming his kingdom rested on his ability to forge a *hesed*-relationship with various constituents across boundaries and differences’ (p. 149). Here, Kim contrasts Saul’s policy of nativism with David’s policy of ecumenism. David was much more willing to work and form relationships with people of other ethnic identities, which can be most clearly seen in his army which is ‘made up of Hebrews, Philistines (Gittites, Cherethites, and Pelethites) and others’ (p. 167). Kim’s David is by no means a saint. He still considers David to be a Machiavellian man who was not afraid to use the sword. But Kim sees in David’s policy of radical inclusivism an aspect that could be very helpful in today’s political and societal climate.

In the sixth chapter, Kim proposes that though David built his kingdom on an egalitarian hybridisation model, later editors have implemented a process of purification into the David tradition. This purification process is one which, contra to David’s hybridisation model, greatly contrasts those who are true Israelites with those who are not true Israelites, who are, in some significant sense, ‘other’. As support for this, Kim points to two key features of the David narrative: 1) David’s characterisation as the quintessential fighter of the Philistines, and 2) the narrative of David, Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite in 2 Samuel 11, where the narrator stresses Bathsheba’s Israelite status and Uriah’s Hittite status, or rather, his status as other. Though there may be

some legitimacy to Kim's contention of the existence of purification in the composition process of the Hebrew Bible, his characterisation of David as egalitarian and the final redactor(s) as nativist(s) may be overstating the case. Take for example, the story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah. Kim notes 'that Uriah was the faithful one, not David. It was David who acted like a *nabal* (a fool or a foreigner). It was Uriah, not David, who behaved as a man of *hesed*' (p. 215). Kim's concern is that the narrator, despite the positive and faithful qualities of Uriah, continues to label him as a 'Hittite', which Kim reads as 'other', asking, 'Why did the scribes not claim Uriah as their own, as an Israelite, who was indeed loyal to Yahweh?' (p. 203). Why did they continue to label him as a 'Hittite'? Kim's answer is that Uriah is a victim of identity politics. It is because of this purification process that Kim believes that Uriah 'was called a Hittite and killed as an "outsider"' (p. 215). But another reading is entirely possible, and perhaps more likely. Kim notes that Uriah acts faithfully in not going in to Bathsheba while the army is at battle and is depicted as much more faithful than David. In light of this behavior Uriah's status as a 'Hittite' is not a critique of Uriah but of David! The narrator, here, is acting as the true egalitarian in depicting a foreigner, one who is not born into the people of Israel, as the true Yahwist and David, who of all people enjoys a special relationship with YHWH, as someone who is unfaithful, both to his people and to Torah. It seems that the redactor(s) may be much more sympathetic to Kim's postcolonial interests than he thinks.

Kim's epilogue is also worth mentioning. In closing his discussion of a postcolonial reading of David, he reflects on his own status as a person of hybrid identity and compares his reading of David, somewhat prophetically, to a young, up and coming politician, Barak Obama, who at the time had not yet won the Democratic nomination. Obama's vision of race relations (and one might add, his charisma) is very similar to what Kim sees in David. This comparison and Kim's reflections in the epilogue are eminently worth reading.

While Kim's approach by its very nature cannot offer a final interpretation of David's story he does present a unique lens through which to read it. His contributions to our understanding of the importance of the concept of *hesed* (both the loyalty and *jeong* sides) are an aid to our reading. His recognition of the egalitarian policies of David are very interesting and worthy of reflection. Furthermore, his sensitivity to the possibilities of purification and the white, western domination of biblical studies ought to help all interpreters (especially those of us who fall into that camp) to read the story of David with fresh eyes.