Nathan Encyclopedia Article

Nathan

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Nathan

NATHAN (tenth century BCE), or, in Hebrew, Natan; a prophet in the court of King David. Nathan is presented in the Hebrew scriptures as a prophet and intimate of David's court, appearing in three different scenes. In the first scene (*2 Sm.* 7:1–17), Nathan is consulted by David about the king's plans to build a temple for Yahveh. Nathan approves of the plan, which will be carried out by David's son, and also promises David by divine oracle the establishment of a perpetual dynasty. This scene constitutes the climax of the Deuteronomist's account of David's reign, in which Nathan acts as the spokesman for the historian's royal ideology.

In the second scene (*2 Sm.* 12:1–15), Nathan presents to David the divine reprimand for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. By means of a parable about an unjust rich man who robbed a poor man of his only lamb he is able to get David to condemn himself. He also predicts future troubles for David's household.

In the third story (*1 Kgs.* 1), Nathan is part of a court conspiracy in which he advises Bathsheba of a plan to persuade the senile David to make Solomon king instead of his older brother Adonijah. The plan is successful, and Nathan and Zadok anoint Solomon even before David's death. Here divine guidance plays no part in the events, only human ambition.

These last two scenes are part of a literary work known to modern scholars as the succession story, which some would date to the time of Solomon and thus have it reflect a historical memory of these events. But there are reasons to believe that the succession story is a late fiction and tells nothing about the nature of prophecy in the time of David. Also suspect is the Chronicler's attribution to Nathan of historical chronicles that he suggests are his sources for the reigns of David and Solomon (*1 Chr.* 29:29, *2 Chr.* 9:29).

See Also

Bibliography

Treatments of the prophet Nathan are invariably included in the broader studies of King David. A more detailed review of the scholarly discussion on these texts may be found in my book *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, 1983), chap. 8.

New Sources

Bodner, Keith. "Nathan: Prophet, Politician and Novelist?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 95 (2001): 43–54.