

ABSTRACT

THE GAMIFICATION OF KINGS: TEACHING JUDEO-CHRISTIAN KINGSHIP THROUGH FINAL FANTASY XV

by

T. Wade Langer, Jr.

The history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship is a difficult topic to teach for pastors and religious educators alike. Most congregants and students find the field uninteresting and irrelevant to the loftier concepts of faith and discipleship. However, since an understanding of the overarching kingship narrative of the Bible is vital for fully understanding concepts such as soteriology, messianic hope, the image of God, and even the nature of God, a curriculum that a participant finds immediately compelling could be useful.

This research sought to evaluate a curriculum specifically designed to increase a participant's interest in Judeo-Christian kingship by examining parallels between the biblical texts and an analogous video game, *Final Fantasy XV*. Drawing upon the work of both biblical scholars as well as educational experts like Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky, this study applied theories of game-based learning, or gamification, to religious education, testing the impact that using *Final Fantasy XV* to teach the history and theology of Judeo-Christian Kingship had on a participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. To fully evaluate these areas, a multi-method approach used the following instruments: a Pretest/Posttest, John Keller's *Course Interest Survey*, a series of journal prompts, and a focus group. The research was conducted across four weeks with sixteen

college-age participants, all members of the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation campus ministry.

The research found that the curriculum had significant impact on each participant. Knowledge of and interest in the history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship increased as a result of the study and all participants offered examples of how the study affected their moral and religious behavior. Ultimately, the research showed that game-based learning is conducive to teaching religious concepts.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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by

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The director of *Final Fantasy XV*, Hajime Tabata, and publisher, Square-Enix.

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

The history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship is a fundamental concept of Christian thought that illuminates the nature of God, the rebellion of humanity, and the reconciling work of the Messiah. However, many either find the topic difficult to understand or generally uninteresting, resulting in a limited understanding of salvation and atonement theologies. This project seeks to develop a resource that offers a framework for teaching Judeo-Christian kingship that proves appealing to the uninterested, effective in instruction, and transformative for behavior of participants. This first chapter explores the nature of the project with emphasis on the difficulty of teaching the history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship.

Personal Introduction

Stories of kingship have always thrilled me. As a child, I would feverishly read the tales of King Arthur and Camelot long past my bedtime. I devoured *The Lord of the Rings* movies though it was Aragorn's ascension to kingship, not Frodo's quest to destroy the ring, that thrilled me as a teenager. Any movie, book, or video game that told stories of kingship immediately became my obsession. So, when I became a Christian, I was elated to find stories of kingship in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures. Of course, the sagas of heavyweights like Saul, David, and Solomon naturally held my interest but I was wildly drawn to the stories of lesser known kings and leaders. I was fascinated by the way that leadership evolved from Moses and Joshua to a robust line of judges and, ultimately, into a grand lineage of kings. I nurtured a deep curiosity about the division of the kingdoms and the dual monarchs across Judah and Israel, taking particular interest in

seemingly inconsequential kings like Zimri. These stories instantly became my favorites in all of scripture. This was no fleeting interest; these stories were instrumental in teaching me theology, life lessons, and how God interacts with humanity.

I quickly realized I was alone in my fascination of the Bible's kingship narratives. Fifteen years of work in local churches revealed to me that most Christians gravitate toward a handful of biblical concepts and stories: the origin stories of God's people (Genesis-Judges), wisdom literature (Psalms and Proverbs, primarily), the Gospel stories, and narratives surrounding the early church. Occasionally I would meet someone who loved the Davidic stories of Israel's early kingship. Even so, I discovered that few, if any, even knew—much less enjoyed—the rich saga of monarchs following David's reign.

As a pastor, I tried to remedy this by offering Bible studies, hoping that my passion might spread to those I led. This failed miserably. Each time I organized a study on biblical kingship, only a few people enrolled. That group, upon discovering the study would address more than simply King David, would eventually dissolve. There was simply no interest in anything but a cursory knowledge of the Jewish kings. After all, as one person told me, "What does it matter? We need to learn about essentials like creation, the Law, and the Gospels. The rest is just special interest and history." Eventually, I surrendered to that idea though I personally still nurtured a deep affection for these stories.

In late 2016, I was playing the latest entry in a favorite, long-running video game series: *Final Fantasy XV*. As is the case with many of the games I play, this game's story was complex and emotionally charged. It followed a young man—Noctis—as he

ascended the throne of a kingdom divided and ravaged by war and strife. As I played, I found remarkable parallels between the game's plot and the Hebrew Scripture/Old Testament kingship stories. I also discovered jaw-dropping similarities between the fictional world of the game and Christian atonement theologies. These analogues forced me to regularly halt my play of the game to consult scripture—an exceptionally odd phenomenon for most gamers. Nevertheless, I found that my play of the game coalesced with my personal Bible study in such a way that playing the game became something of a spiritual discipline.

Upon realization of this, I wondered if I might be able to use this experience to foster an interest in Judeo-Christian kingship among my congregation. As a campus minister at the University of Alabama, I figured that college students might be open to an innovative idea like a “video game Bible study.” So, I announced a four-week Bible study based on *Final Fantasy XV* though I did not tell anyone the biblical focus of the Bible study.

Twelve people showed up the first day. To each I gave a reflection journal that would serve to guide their personal study and gameplay, complete with the scripture references I had found useful in my own playthrough. The plan was simple: we would play through certain portions of the game on our own between group meetings and study the scriptures provided. Then we would record in our reflection journals the insights and similarities that we discovered between the scriptures and the game. In group meetings, we would share our findings, view specific clips from the game, and highlight stories of the biblical kings as they pertained to theological understandings of kingship, ultimately pointing to messianic theologies.

Upon completion of the course, reviews were positive. Some said they had never understood the “middle part of the Bible” but now they had a deep appreciation for it. One person even said that the biblical stories he discovered through playing the game changed his life and made him put his faith in God (he joined the study because he was a gamer, not because he was a Christian).

Following this study’s completion, my career began to take a drastic turn. In addition to my role as a campus minister, I joined the faculty at the Honors College at the University of Alabama. The administration asked me to design a new course for the upcoming semester. The course I proposed was called “Playing a Parable: Judeo-Christian Kingship in Final Fantasy XV” and would be an evolution of the Bible study I had previously designed.

Since the class would meet twice each week for an entire semester, I expanded the curriculum significantly. I included additional historical information in lectures, heightened the academic rigor, added assignments for evaluation, and slowed the pace of gameplay to maximize discussion in class and afford time for more extensive research. Beyond that, the course layout remained largely the same.

At the request of newer students in my campus ministry, I chose to offer a revised and expanded version of the Bible study that would run concurrently with my class’s schedule. The material would be the same as the class, though there would be no assignments for evaluation for this study’s participants.

Upon completion of these courses, reviews and evaluations continued to be positive. For the Bible study version of the course, participants were particularly encouraged in their faith (recorded on the final night of the Bible study).

- “This has been the single most important Bible study I have ever joined. My faith, my understanding of the Bible, of the kings, and of Jesus are forever changed.”
- “I look at the kings of the past and I see so much of myself. And I see how Jesus fully overcomes their sins and proves Himself as the true King. That makes all the difference for me.”
- “I’m not sure I ever fully understood what it meant to say that Jesus is ‘King of Kings.’ I do now, especially in light of the kings that failed before him.”
- “I have never worshipped God as much as I have in this Bible study.”

Similarly, university-administered, anonymous evaluations offered positive results as well.

- “The course content, although odd, proved itself as an incredible learning experience and an interesting mesh of two very different genres, religious texts and Japanese role-playing games. The course was fun, laid out and organized nicely, and although experimental, ended up being very close to perfection.”
- 67 percent of students *strongly agreed* that the course was a valuable learning experience.
- 33percent of students rated this course as average, 33 percent rated this course as above average, and 33 percent rated this course as excellent.

One student, in our final class session, reviewed the course by saying, “This course may have changed my life. I took this course because I love this video game, but now I think I may also love the Bible. I am going to start going to church again for the first time in six years.”

With these three informal cases, I realized that this instruction method for explaining Judeo-Christian kingship has potential to make the topic immediately appealing (even to non-gamers) and effective for teaching the material. Therefore, I

designed this project to further assess the appeal and effectiveness of this instructional method.

Statement of the Problem

Even though an understanding of Judeo-Christian kingship is important to understanding the overarching drama of God and humanity, most Christians ignore the topic as it seems unappealing or irrelevant. As a result, many Christians become proficient primarily in matters of the Torah and early Jewish history as they pertain to Christian theology and doctrine, settling for a more cursory understanding of the lineage of kings as the topic fails to immediately contribute to seemingly more lofty and essential matters of faith.

A fuller understanding of the theology and history surrounding the kingship narratives ultimately reinforces and enhances one's Christology, particularly with respect to Jesus as the "King of Kings." Additionally, such theology is vital to understanding concepts of soteriology, atonement, and missiology. Because the material itself is often viewed by many as irrelevant and mundane, a contextual instructional method that is innovative and immediately appealing could prove beneficial in teaching the material. Addressing this dilemma for those within a college ministry context is the purpose of this project.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact that using Final Fantasy XV to teach the history and theology of Judeo-Christian Kingship has on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of 18-25 year-old University of Alabama Wesley Foundation students over four weeks.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the research in determining the effects of using Final Fantasy XV to teach Judeo-Christian kingship.

Research Question #1

What changes in knowledge of Judeo-Christian Kingship occurred as a result of the study?

Research Question #2

What impact did the study have on attitude (interest, motivation) toward Judeo-Christian Kingship?

Research Question #3

What changes in behavior occurred as a result of the study?

Rationale for the Project

The study of Judeo-Christian kingship is fundamental to a fuller understanding of God's nature, the potential of the *imago dei*, Christology, and ultimately atonement theologies. First, taken as a whole, the stories of the Jewish kings illuminate primary attributes of God's nature seen throughout the whole of scripture, including God's creativity (or power to create), justice, provision, wrath, sorrow/disappointment, and compassion. These attributes form together a robust understanding of the character of God. While some prefer a god who is compassionate over a god who is wrathful, the stories of the kings suggest that Yahweh is simultaneously both (and more). A proper knowledge of how God interacts with the kings synchronizes disparate aspects of God's nature and personality, making for a stronger, more biblically sound theology overall.

Secondly, the attributes conveyed by God's interactions are also the example by which the kings—God's servants for the purpose of rule—are to govern. The demand for a human embodiment of each of these attributes is unveiled as kings struggle to realize the full breadth of their own ability to rule as God's appointed human liaisons. This call to embody the characteristics of God's nature extends to all who bear God's image. Therefore, as students explore the struggles of the kings to live into the paradigm of God's image, they can begin to understand the nature of their own *imago dei*.

Thirdly, by examining the ultimate failings of the kings in leading Judah and Israel to faithful living, students can better understand Jesus as the "King of Kings." Whereas kings of the past failed to be mediators between God and humanity, sullyng themselves with the ways of the world, Jesus succeeds.

This inevitably develops a more robust Christology as Jesus not only embodies all the attributes of God revealed in the stories of the kings, but also satisfies the divine demands of each attribute. In Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the justice, wrath, compassion, disappointment, creativity, and provision of God are all synchronized in a way that no king or mediator had done previously. Again, juxtaposing Christ's example against the Jewish kings reveals new depths of Christology, i.e. atonement theologies. When a person understands the failings of kings prior to Jesus, a deeper appreciation of Jesus' kingship is gained. That appreciation leads to theological insights that will ultimately inspire robust belief and faithful living.

Finally, as this project involves research of college students, learning the ascension stories of each king allows adolescents to contemplate the trajectory of their lives as they evaluate the triumphs and failures of each king's choices. Thus, the study of

kingship for those on the cusp of adulthood may offer an opportunity for personal development as students make important life decisions, thereby having an important impact on their current behaviors.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms used in this project are defined as follows.

Judeo-Christian Kingship

Judeo-Christian kingship in this project will refer to the realm of study associated with the history and theology surrounding the kings of Israel and Judah as they pertain to the messianic kingship of Christ. Elements exclusive to Jewish theology and history of kingship will be specified as such.

Biblical Kingship Narratives

Biblical kingship narratives refer to the stories of the pre-monarchic leadership of Israel found in Exodus-Judges, the monarchic history found in 1 Samuel-2 Chronicles, and the demise of the kingship in exilic/post-exilic histories as stated in the major and minor prophets.

Attributes of God's Nature

The attributes and descriptors of God's nature described in this project—primarily God's creativity, justice, provision, wrath, disappointment, and compassion—are metaphors. This is not an exhaustive list, but a general overview of the necessary attributes that must be explored in understanding God's relationship with humanity, particularly the kings.

Ascension/ Ascension Story

Ascension stories refer to the practical process and spiritual journey involved in one being named/anointed/chosen to be king. Each monarch has an ascension story that describes the nature and means of his or her coronation. A typical ascension story follows four progressions: trials, relationships, an assumption of responsibility, and the delivery of justice.

Gamification

Gamification, sometimes called “game-based learning” or “edutainment,” refers to a tactic of using games of any kind to teach a concept. While gamification is often used to teach a new skill or train new employees, this project will largely use the term to refer to the teaching of an educational curriculum at the college level.

Delimitations

This project will exclusively research college students at the University of Alabama ranging from 18-25 years of age. Because college students are essentially preparing for their next chapters, they are in the midst of their own “ascension stories.” Thus, parallels can easily be made between the ascension stories of Jewish kings and those of the students.

While the study of Judeo-Christian kingship would presumably prove beneficial for people of all ages, this research will focus exclusively on college students. Therefore, contextualization of the material—particularly the use of a video game in teaching—may cater to the interests and concerns of 18-25 year-old college students to the exclusion of other groups.

Review of Relevant Literature

This section will offer an organized collection of research that contributes to the project. The research will be organized according to the four primary themes that I have identified in my study of Judeo-Christian kingship, and include biblical and theological resources that detail the history of sacral kingship, messianic concepts, and the details of the reigns of particular Jewish kings. In my research, I found Shirley Lucass' *The Concept of the Messiah in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity* to be of utmost value as a central hub leading to the most significant voices in the field, such as Frankfort, Mowinckel, and Collins (Lucass).

Additionally, research will explain the rationale for using gamification as a viable teaching tool, building on the work of Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky (Fletcher 18). Using Keller's *Motivational Design for Learning and Performance*, the research will focus on how to increase one's motivation and interest regarding educational topics. It will also generally explore the effects education generally has on one's behavior. This section will summarize research surrounding the use of gamification in a variety of educational settings—training for military or medical personnel, instruction in mathematical or scientific fields, and analogous learning in the humanities—as well as make a case for its use in other fields, particularly the humanities. The research will include pioneers in this field such as Wainwright and de Freitas.

Research Methodology

Because the research is focused on determining the effects on a person's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior as a result of using a video game to teach the concepts of Judeo-Christian kingship, this research will be multi-faceted.

Type of Research

This is an intervention-style of research. Therefore, the methods follow a standard form of research related to changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of participants before and after an experience (in this case, a curriculum).

Participants

Members of the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation campus ministry, ranging between the ages of 18-25, were invited to participate in the study through announcements during worship services and online communication means. Participants included both men and women of good physical and mental health. They held varying attitudes toward and knowledge of Judeo-Christian kingship. They also had varying interest in video games. While most identified as Christians, one did not.

This selection was intentional as the research hopes to determine as broad a study as possible within the confines of the campus ministry. The design of the research was to measure whether or not there was improvement so it was beneficial to have as many different starting points as possible for the individuals.

Instrumentation

Five instruments were used in this research.

First, a written consent form was given to participants at the initial information meeting and was accepted until the beginning of the first session of the study. (See Appendix B)

Second, a Pretest/Posttest was given to determine the knowledge of the concepts taught in the course. (See Appendix D)

Third, open-ended Journal Prompts were given after each session of the study and were completed by participants. These prompts allowed for open-ended responses that helped measure effects on a participant's behavior. (See Appendix E)

Fourth, an adapted version of Keller's Course Interest Survey was administered at the end of the final session following the Pretest/Posttest. This measured a participant's attitudes toward the material and course. (See Appendix F)

Finally, a Focus Group was held following the final session after the Course Interest Survey was administered. The Focus Group allowed for an open-ended reflection that helped measure not only the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of participants, but also allowed for other unpredicted observations to be made. (See Appendix G)

Data Collection

Data was collected over a four-week period. To ensure confidentiality, students selected private alias. Demographic information was collected at the initial introductory meeting. The Pretest/Posttest data was collected immediately after being administered following the first and fourth teaching sessions. Answers to journal prompts were collected at each subsequent session except for the final entry which was given during the final class. The Course Interest Survey data was collected immediately following its administration. The Focus Group conversation was video recorded.

All data was locked in my personal office of my home, where I live alone, in a locked desk drawer. Any digitized data was secured in my own personal password-protected cloud. No academic records or information that is FERPA protected was collected. Data will be destroyed and deleted six months after the project's conclusion.

Data Analysis

All open-ended responses (Pretest/Posttest responses, Journal Prompt responses, and Focus Group Responses) will be coded according to 1) knowledge, 2) attitudes, and 3) behavior. Keller's *Course Interest Survey* will be coded in the manner standard to this particular method.

Generalizability

Replicating this project in other settings could prove beneficial to gather broader demographic data. Since this project will evaluate how the use of a video game impacts an 18 to 25-year-old student's learning, the project should be able to be replicated in similar contexts. However, some factors may contribute to a lack of transferability. Financial or technological disparities could hinder participation in the study in some contexts as gaming can be a costly hobby. Stigmas surrounding gaming (a perceived lack of academic rigor involved in gamification, for example) in some communities could prevent interest in participating in such studies. Finally, the date of release of the game (2016) could cause this study to become dated.

Project Overview

Following this introduction will be a literature review in Chapter 2, providing in-depth history and theology of Jewish kingship and a review of the use of media, with an emphasis on video games, as resources for education and instruction. Chapter 3 explains how the research methods were designed to evaluate the effects of the study on the participants. Chapter 4 analyzes the data produced from the study. Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the contextual instructional method in teaching Judeo-Christian kingship.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will explore the historical, biblical, and theological concepts surrounding Judeo-Christian kingship that will be considered in the curriculum (or knowledge component) of this project. It will open with the history of kingship, starting with the origination of kingship in Egypt and following its evolution up to its appearance in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament. Since there are so many kings to be explored, Jewish kingship will then be examined through the lens of five unifying themes: the trials of kingship, the relationships of kingship, the anointing of kingly responsibility, the delivering of kingly justice, and, finally, the downfall of kingship. The literature will then turn to the redemption of kingship, examining Jewish messianic theologies, and, ultimately, Christian understandings of how Jesus enhances and fulfills each aforementioned kingship theme.

Finally, the literature review will conclude with research surrounding teaching methods that utilize game-based play and interactive technologies or video games as educational tools.

All this undergirds this project's curriculum, specifically designed to enhance a participant's knowledge of, attitudes toward, and behaviors resulting from an understanding of Judeo-Christian kingship.

Knowledge: Historical Foundations

Jewish kingship is an evolution of what is known as "sacral kingship." Sacral kingship is a concept that refers to the deep ties between a civilization's royalty and its

deities. While Jewish kingship clearly delineates between the monarch and God, there is a significant progression from early Egyptian and Mesopotamian concepts of traditional sacral kingship.

Egyptian Kingship

Since the conception of kingship in the Egyptian Pharaoh, the idea of an ordained ruler who transcends mortality into either godhood or demigod-hood has persisted in theocratic monarchical traditions (Frankfort 5, 33). When founded in Egypt, sacral kingship declared the reigning royal—in this case, the Pharaoh—to also be divine (Frankfort 5, Lucass 40, Mowinckel 28). That is, the Pharaoh was a god.

There is a lack of consensus regarding the extent of a Pharaoh's divinity. Some contemporary scholars have argued that the divinity of Pharaohs was merely symbolic though still seriously regarded (Lucass 40, Baines, O' Connor). Other scholars promote a literal divinity, or that Pharaoh is literally a god. Early scholar Frankfort argues this, as does contemporary scholar Francis Oakley who affirmed this in 2008 (Lucass 40, Frankfort, Oakley).

Scholars debate whether divinity was bestowed through bloodline or through coronation. Frankfort asserts that divinity accompanies birth for Egypt and other ancient near eastern cultures (42), which would explain the potency of the final plague delivered upon Egypt in the Exodus story—the death of the firstborn, including Pharaoh's son, a god. However, more recent scholars like Silverman contend that divinity seems to be received by the royal only upon anointing or coronation (Silverman). This act of anointing would eventually carry over to the anointing of future kings in the Hebrew texts as in the cases of Saul and David's anointing stories.

The role of Egyptian Pharaohs was to “maintain order and to keep at bay or overcome the forces of chaos” (Lucass 48). Lucass states that this was done through political means as well as through religious rituals (48). The king’s mere existence was enough to create balance in the spiritual realm, ushering in peace for both Egypt and the cosmos. Death of a Pharaoh—or the death of Pharaoh’s son, as in the Exodus account—was not only a political defeat, but would throw the cosmos, and ultimately Egypt, into chaos.

To assist in this cosmic regulation, Pharaohs appointed positions such as priests or seers who would advise and perform spiritual tasks (Lucass 48-49). Priests throughout Egypt and Mesopotamia served as intermediaries between humanity and the divine, carrying on the rituals and rites of the cult and relaying divine guidance for everyday affairs (Yoon 48). Even so, the Pharaoh would remain the central focus of these rituals or ceremonies. For instance, this is seen in Genesis 41 when Pharaoh appoints Joseph to the role of an advisor and gave Asenath, daughter of Potiphera the priest, to him as a wife, thereby aligning Joseph with the priests (Genesis 41:41-45). The role of priests at this time, however, was simply to assist the Pharaoh in spiritual tasks and duties. This was a role that would expand into a far more robust vocation in Jewish kingship’s adaptation of it. Even so, whatever power priests in Egypt may have had, it was only on loan from the god-king, Pharaoh.

Mesopotamian Kingship

Meanwhile in Mesopotamia—also known as the regions surrounding Egypt like Canaan, northern Africa, and Syria—a different understanding of kingship is offered. In excavated Sumerian cities, literature and art tell the stories of hierarchy where, over and

above the city, are the gods or goddesses lay ultimate claim over the city. Therefore, the true king of Mesopotamian cities is a divine being, not a human representative of the divine being. One of the most famous examples of this is the story of Marduk, a divine being who gains kingly authority over humanity from the rest of the divine assembly by successfully defeating Tiamat (Matthews and Benjamin 15-18). By fulfilling this trial, Marduk proved his worthiness to rule and was given humanity from the other deities.

In the Sumerian murals, the citizens of the city are depicted beneath the gods. One citizen stands simultaneously over and among the others as a human king crafted by the divine king (Mowinckel 33). Kingship, though in these earliest times of Egypt were thought to be gods, was later relegated to “representatives of the god” throughout Sumeria, or as some Mesopotamian kings referred to themselves, a “child,” “beloved,” or “favorite” of the divine (Lucass 43, Brische 163). This king represents the people before the gods and as such “he must expiate and atone for the people’s sins and must personally submit to the rites of atonement” (Lucass 43; Mowinckel 38-39).

This is a marked difference from Egyptian concepts of kingship. Instead of being the focal point of worship like the Egyptian kings, the kings of Mesopotamia were more akin to priests who lead the citizens in worship while maintaining governing authority over them. These priest-kings served as both political and religious intermediaries who discerned and brought about the will of the divine king through political actions among the people while pleading the case of the people to the divine assembly by performing religious rituals and ceremonies on their behalf (Frankfort 252).

These priest-kings also cared for the citizens of whatever region over which they held authority with a compassion peculiar to kingship up to this point. In poems or

liturgies, the kings are even referred to as “shepherds” who care for their flocks with great care and devotion (Lucass 44; Lauderville 292). This theme is later embraced by the Hebrews who describe King David as one who “shepherded [the people] with integrity of heart” and “with skillful hands he led them” (Psalm 78:72 New International Version).

Israel’s Kingship

Having spent considerable time in Egyptian and Mesopotamian lands during the years following their exodus leading up to the time of Joshua’s conquests, the Israelites adopted many aspects from the surrounding cultures, namely their concepts of kingship. Frankfort says that “the ancient Near East considered kingship the very basis of civilization” and that “only savages could live without a king” (3).

Under Moses’ leadership, that king was identified solely as Israel’s God, Yahweh—much like the Sumerian communities—with Moses as an adapted priest-king, and Aaron as the more traditional priest. In this role, Moses served as an intermediary who brought petitions from the Israelites to Yahweh and Yahweh’s law to the Israelites. This allowed for Israel to be formed into a distinct religious identity from the surrounding civilizations with Yahweh as its true king, just as Marduk and others served as kings of Sumerian cities with human priest-kings set above ordinary citizens. This can be found in many Psalms, which seemingly mimic Mesopotamian festivals of Marduk’s annual enthronement (Anderson 564). For instance, Psalm 93 declares:

Yahweh is king!

He is robed in majesty.

Yahweh is robed!

He is girded with strength.

Indeed, you have established the world,
 It will never be moved.
 Your throne is from primordial time,
 You are from everlasting. (Psalm 93:1-2)

Though at the heart of Israel's religion was the conviction that its god, Yahweh, was its king, Israel longed to have a central, human political leader. From Moses to Joshua to the slew of judges who would govern thereafter, Israel participated in a trial-and-error experiment of what an earthly leader would be for their tribes.

When each leader or judge died, there was a time of significant departure from following Yahweh, who would give them over to their enemies, leading to an eventual defeat for the Israelites. Then, upon defeat, the Israelites would cry out to Yahweh for salvation. That salvation would come in the form of a new judge who would usher in a time of peace and prosperity until he or she died. This cycle would continue, ultimately culminating in the foreboding final verse of the book of Judges: "In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25; Birch *Theological* 211; Olson 725).

Even though Israel prospered greatly under the authority of a central leader, the judges of Israel exhibited an abiding resistance to kingship throughout the period of the judges. This is most evident in Gideon's response to the Israelites who ask him to become their king: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23). This is a memorial proclamation of Yahweh as king (Buber 59).

Yahweh's title as "king" is not merely meant as leader of the Israelites though. Yahweh is also heralded as king of all the cosmos (Buber 107). Therefore, following Yahweh's laws (the Torah) not only secures their placement in the land (Birch

Theological 185-186) but also offers a stability to the cosmic and the natural order of things, similar to how both Egyptians and Mesopotamians viewed their gods (Buber 126-127, Birch *Theological* 220). To ensure corporate following, conserving their claim to the land and balancing the cosmos, leaders from among the people were selected to either embody or represent the deity and direct the people into adherence of the divine will.

Taking from both Egyptian and Sumerian cultures, Israel crafted its own unique three-pronged version of sacral kingship. At the request of Israel's citizens, God would remain king of all, but an earthly king would be reluctantly permitted to govern and wage war while working alongside a priestly prophet serving as a religious and spiritual advisor (1 Samuel 8). The inclusion of the role of prophet into Israel's governance would decentralize the spiritual authority of leadership, rejecting a sense of pure theocracy in Israel.

From both Egypt and Mesopotamia, Israel adapted the role of temple priest into a prophetic spiritual guide for the king. While priests were largely limited to temple actions, prophets were more "employees of the society, an institutional link between the two members of the covenant—the community and the deity" (Yoon 60). In addition to traditional priestly ritual duties, the prophet would "discern and announce the word of the Lord," "legitimate the king's appointment," and serve as the "king's counsel and conscience" (Birch *Theological* 270). This would often be done publicly through prophetic speeches, the style of which could range from legal to poetic (Petersen 28-29). Prophetic speeches often invoked the refrain, "Thus says the Lord," throughout the message, weaving back and forth between indictment, justice, and hope (Peterson 28-30, Birch *Theological* 359-360, Birch *Samuel* 1060-1064). However, for more specific

instances of counsel for the king, the prophet would send oracles via royal officials except in the most important cases in order to prevent potential alteration of the message (Yoon 67-69). Messages of this severity were delivered primarily when the “kingship seemed to be critically threatened” (72).

Particularly from Mesopotamia, Israel adopted the practice of appointing a non-divine, earthly “anointed one” from among the people who would lead them. Frankfort clearly describes this new understanding of sacral kingship and makes a distinction between the chiefly theocratic nature of kingship in Mesopotamian cultures and that of the Hebrews.

The Hebrew King normally functioned in the profane sphere, not in the sacred sphere. He was the arbiter in disputes and the leader in war. He was emphatically not the leader in the cult. The king created the conditions which made a given form of worship possible: David’s power allowed him to bring the Ark to Jerusalem; Solomon’s riches enabled him to build the temple; Jeroboam, Ahab, Manasseh, and others had idols made and arranged for “groves” and “high places” for the cult of the gods and fertility. But the king played little part in the cult. He did not, as a rule, sacrifice; that was the task of the priests. He did not interpret the divine will; that, again, was the task of the priests, who cast lots for an oracle. Moreover, the divine intentions were sometimes made known in a more dramatic way when prophets—men possessed—cried, “Thus saith the Lord.” These prophets were often in open conflict with the king

precisely because the secular character of the king entitled them to censor him. (Frankfort 342)

This is not to say, however, that a king's authority was void of spirituality. Some scholars maintain that the king was conceived in "mythological terms as the son of God, in a way that was influenced by Egyptian tradition," leading to a robust understanding of kings as the anointed ones (Collins, Yarbrough, and Collins 47). Ultimately, the Jewish king was the one who enacted God's will, compassion, and justice in the world and was held accountable by the prophet's role.

This role would continue to evolve over time, transitioning especially after the fall of Israel and Judah—the demise of Israel's kingship—to a concept of a future king called the Messiah (Lucass 15).

Knowledge: Biblical and Theological Foundations

The history and theology of Jewish kingship can be divided into several categories which will be explored in the following section. The first four categories describe an ascension story or how a king ascends to the throne. These include the 1) trials of kingship, 2) the relationships of a king, 3) the anointing of kingly responsibility, and 4) the delivering of kingly justice. Each of Israel and Judah's kings encounter one or more of these stages in their reign though the most memorable kings would effectively fulfill all four. David, the most beloved of all the kings, will be fully examined in each of these categories with secondary attention being given to the details of other kings.

The next category considered is 5) the downfall of kingship which will detail not only the failings of individual kings but also the ultimate demise of the kingship in Israel and Judah.

The final category to be examined will be 6) the redemption of kingship and the Messiah. This examination will juxtapose Jewish concepts of the Messiah with New Testament Christian prophecy fulfillment theologies.

Trials of Kingship

In the Torah, God reveals to Moses and the Israelites why they have spent so long wandering in the desert en route to the Promised Land.

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

God has been testing the Israelites, refining their hearts and teaching them how to live into a new identity. In the same way, God uses a time of testing and specific trials to reveal the hearts of Israel’s kings, a rite that may have been adapted from a common Mesopotamian trope.

The trials of a king are well-documented across Mesopotamian kingship lore, from Marduk to Gilgamesh (Arnold and Beyer 38-40, Abusch 618-619, Sonik 741). These trials, ranging from killing a wild beast, finding an obscure treasure, defeating a common enemy, or felling a divine being, earned the victor the respect and honor due a king. Trials like these ultimately served two purposes: 1) reveal the character and heart of a king and 2) increase the influence of the king.

The Trials of King David. Israel's King David faced his trial in Goliath, Philistine champion of Gath. While killing Goliath seems insurmountable to the other soldiers of Israel, the scriptures make clear that David is not to be underestimated. As a skilled shepherd, David has protected sheep from both lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34-36). David, then, is not the underdog (Kuruvilla 490). However, David's confidence is not placed in his skills as a warrior; David is confident in God (1 Samuel 17:37). When David defeats Goliath, he immediately gains the respect and honor of the community to the point that King Saul immediately views him as a potential threat. Goliath's defeat paves the way for David's eventual kingship.

The Trials of the Jewish Kings. While most Jewish kings simply ascended to the throne by virtue of their birthright, other Jewish kings faced trials that served as initiatory rites that revealed their character as they were oriented to kingship. For example, Saul was anointed by Samuel as a result of diligently searching for his father's lost donkeys though that may also be a symbol of Saul's futile pursuit of kingship—an intriguing juxtaposition to David, who was commissioned while already tending a flock (1 Samuel 9; Rudman 521, 524). Solomon's character was proven by choosing wisdom when he was offered whatever he desired from God (1 Kings 3:1-15). Solomon was also tested through a custodial dispute between two women arguing over a child (1 Kings 3:16-28). Even King Omri, the lesser known sixth king of Israel upon its division from Judah, proved his worth by defeating both Zimri (who was only king for seven days) and Tibni, another claimant to the kingship, before ascending the throne himself (Hayes and Hooker 27).

More generally, trials of the kings, particularly following the divide of the kingdom after Solomon's reign, focus on three key areas: trust in the divine will, the rightful use of power, and finally, the lure of idolatry. Overcoming tests in these areas often reveals a king's character and heart. For instance, when a king proved to be particularly faithful, scriptures describe the king by saying that the king "walked with God" or "inquired of the Lord" (1 Kings 22:5-7; 2 Kings 13:4) or "did what was right in the Lord's sight" (1 Kings 15; 2 Kings 12:2). Many kings have such phrases, often invoked for the kings' overthrow of idolatrous practices. For Judah, these "good kings" include Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, Manasseh (at the end of his life), and Josiah. In fact, Josiah, whose greatest achievement was returning the nation back to faithfulness to the Torah, is described by two revealing phrases: "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" and "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 22-23). Through his trials, Josiah is arguably the most beloved king of Judah (excluding David and Solomon). Israel, meanwhile, only boasts briefly of one "good" king: Jehu, who removed Baal worship from Israel, though he eventually succumbed to unfaithfulness toward the end of his life (2 Kings 10:31).

Upon completion of trials, a king will often gain influence, becoming highly regarded by those aware of the king's deeds. This influence leads to the next ascension step—the invaluable relationships that will support the king's reign.

Relationships of Kingship

Unlike Egyptian and Mesopotamian sacral kingship, Jewish kingship was designed to decentralize power through the king's key relationship with the prophets. However, there are a number of relationships—both good and bad—that impact a king's effectiveness. These relationships can be characterized as protectors, advisors, caretakers, dear friends, and even villains.

The Relationships of King David—*Saul, the Villian King*. King David's most robust relationships centered upon a complex dynamic with his antagonistic king, Saul. Their relations were complicated in that Saul violently pursued David to save his own kingship yet was nonetheless the Lord's anointed for David. That is, he was simultaneously David's enemy to be defeated and David's king to be honored (a dynamic that will be explored more fully in later sections). While the majority of the literature paints David as a heroic victim of Saul's insecurities, some scholars maintain that Saul's actions were justified to preserve his throne from an undermining usurper (Sostre 239, Brooks 144). Warranted or not, Saul's murderous pursuit and repeated attempts to ensnare David develop a resilience in David and prove David's faithfulness and compassion.

Jonathan, the Dear Friend. Next, David held close relationship with two of Saul's children. First, David's friendship with Jonathan, Saul's son, is well-researched, perhaps due to its peculiar ambiguity. Scripture tells that the two's souls were "bound to one another" and bound by a covenant they had made together (1 Samuel 18). This has been interpreted in myriad ways ranging from purely political (Fleming) to the hyper-controversial sexual (von der Horst and Ruehter, Horner, Heacock). Nevertheless, David receives reassurance in difficult times and, perhaps inadvertently, the entire kingdom as a

result of Jonathan's loyalty (Westbrook 108; Birch *Interpreter's* 1120). David's relationship with Jonathan was of great support to him though it would strain Jonathan's relationship with his father.

Michal, the Caretaker. Next, David's relationship with Michal, Saul's daughter, impacted David's kingship in that Michal goes to great lengths—even putting herself in danger by deceiving her own father—to protect her husband even if he does not reciprocate (1 Samuel 18; Lawton 425). In her best-known episode, she orchestrates David's escape from her father by helping him rappel from a window for “she could not bear to live in case she were deprived of him” (Josephus 187). Unlike his relationship with Jonathan, however, this relationship has the potential to bear children and enjoining both the houses of David and Saul, possibly serving as a central aspect of David's usurpation of the throne (Westbrook 109-110).

The Three Chief Protectors. 2 Samuel 23 tells the story of three warriors who stood above all the others as David's chief protectors during his later years as king: Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shamah. The account describes the fierce loyalty and devotion of the warriors surrounding David.

These are the names of the warriors whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the Three; he wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time.

Next to him among the three warriors was Eleazar son of Dodo son of Ahohi. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle. The Israelites withdrew, but he stood his ground. He struck down the Philistines until his arm grew weary, though his hand clung to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. Then the people came back to him—but only to strip the dead.

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee, the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils; and the army fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the middle of the plot, defended it, and killed the Philistines; and the Lord brought about a great victory.

Towards the beginning of harvest three of the thirty chiefs went down to join David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. David said longingly, “O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!” Then the three warriors broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the Lord, for he said, “The Lord forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it. The three warriors did these things. (2 Samuel 23:8-17)

Scholars regard this as significant because, in a rare moment of vulnerability, the king “is unfettered by royal pretensions and office,” sharing “his basic, human desires with his men,” and—through David’s response to the water retrieval—proves David’s “solidarity with his men, not his elevation above them” (Birch *Interpreter’s* 1376). This also shows David’s growth and responsibility as a king though that will be explored more fully in the next section.

Prophets, the Advisors. Unlike many kings, David maintained positive relationships with prophets and priests, perhaps due to his own faithfulness to Yahweh’s commands. While David’s time with Samuel was brief, David was legitimized and

anointed by Samuel, thus ensuring a claim to the throne (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Samuel would later grant David protection while David fled from Saul (1 Samuel 19).

After Samuel, David held good relationship with the priests at Nob even after taking the blame for the town's slaughter at the hands of Saul. The sole survivor of the Nob massacre, Abiathar, serves as prophet and priest for David, providing "legitimacy for David's moves to advance his kingship" (Yoon 108).

Yoon suggests that another important prophet for David was Gad, though he is only mentioned twice in the scriptures (119). Gad serves as a political advisor to David while David is in Moab, helping him both to escape Saul (again) as well as continue to develop his own army of supporters (1 Samuel 22:1-5; Yoon 125; Birch *Interpreter's* 1145). Because of this brief interaction, Gad saved David's life and preserved his kingship. Later in David's life, Gad would play an even more critical role in bringing David back to faithfulness to God (2 Sam 24) and legitimating "the future site of the temple in a revelation received through an angel of God" (1 Chronicles 21-22; Yoon 142).

Finally, the prophet Nathan serves as a crucial deliverer of oracles that will fully direct and realign David's kingship. In 2 Samuel 7, Nathan informs David that he will not build a house for God (the Temple), but that God will build house for David, or a dynasty. Later, when David acts deceitfully in his affair with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband, David only maintains his kingship because of Nathan's intervention which leads David to repentance (2 Samuel 12).

The Relationships of the Jewish Kings. Like David, each king's reign was either enhanced or hindered by key relationships. Such relationships always included the prophet and often included family members and government officials.

The prophet was the primary relationship of the king as the prophet 1) announced the word of the Lord to the king, 2) served as the king's counsel and conscience, and 3) legitimated the king. If a king had a strong connection to the prophet, the king was often successful. Notable kings and prophet relationships include King Asa and Azariah (2 Chronicles 15), King Jehoshaphat and Micaiah (2 Chronicles 18), King Jehoash and Jehoiada, and king Uzziah and Isaiah (2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah). If relationship with the prophet grew weak, the king would fail as will be discussed see in a later section.

Other relationships proved vital to a king's success as well. Some relationships were informed by familial ties such as Asa's relationship with his idolatrous grandmother or Josiah—who became king as a mere child—and his mother. Other relationships were politically motivated, like the arranged treaty-marriage of Athaliah of Israel to Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 8:16-18; 2 Chronicles 21:6). Many kings maintained close ties with their governing and military officials. Though he had no legitimate claim to the throne, Jeroboam I, having gained influence through a position given him by Solomon, led a rebellion against Solomon's son Rehoboam and earned the loyalty of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, though this act effectively split the kingdom in two (1 Kings 12). However, this was among the only positive instances of such relationships as most kings were betrayed by their trusted military captains.

Whether advisory, familial, or prophetic, a king's relationships informed and undergirded the king's understanding of the world. That understanding would be integral to the next stage of the king's ascension: the king's adoption of kingly responsibility.

Anointing of Kingly Responsibility

There comes a moment for nearly every king which lays an extraordinary burden of responsibility upon his shoulders. While this new responsibility certainly comes during a ceremonial anointing by a prophet, as in the case of Saul or David by Samuel, it also comes in moments when the gravitas of the kingship is felt due to severe circumstances or conflicts. Such gravitas demands a different form of kingship than what had dominated the ancient-near east up to that time. Scholars maintain that a consistent biblical model for this kind of kingship is that of a shepherd, a concept taken from Yahweh's own example (Lucass 106). Unlike paradigms of kingship that came before, a righteous king in Israel will "gather in those who have been scattered... bind up the crippled, strengthen the weak" and care for those under his care (Lucass 106, Ezekiel 34:11). This necessary sense of responsibility is not instinctual but must be developed oftentimes through the aforementioned trials. Regardless of how it is attained, this third step of an ascension story serves to transform a king from a callous and distant ruler to a monarch who rules for the sake of others. In this section, those stories will be explored, beginning with King David.

David Bears the Burden of Responsibility—*David and the Priests of Nob.*

Upon his anointing with oil by the prophet Samuel, young David, still a shepherd boy and occasional harp player for king Saul at the time, is thrust into a new world of giant-slaying and kingly responsibility. Because of this moment, it is merely a matter of time

before David takes the throne as “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:3). However, Saul remains king, even though the anointing has shifted to David, and naturally becomes jealous, if not paranoid. This leads Saul to murderously pursue David in an attempt to defend his throne. David, fleeing Saul, escapes to the city of Nob, the town where he assumes incredible responsibility, which is a critical progression in his ascension story.

Upon arrival, David visits Ahimelech the priest who promptly inquires as to why David is alone. David lies, saying that he is on an important mission from the king and his men will meet him at a designated point. However, David is in need and asks Ahimelech the priest for food. Ahimelech responds that all he has is the sacred bread, a bread reserved for the priests. This bread was a relic of the Exodus, the “showbread” or “the bread of the presence,” described in Leviticus 24:5-9 (1 Samuel 21:1-4; Birch *Interpreter’s* 1139-1140; Porter ch. 4).

You shall take fine flour and bake it into twelve cakes, using two tenths of an ephah of flour for each cake. These you shall place in two piles, six in each pile, on the pure gold table before the lord. On each pile put some pure frankincense, which shall serve as an oblation to the lord, a token offering for the bread. Regularly on each sabbath day this bread shall be set out afresh before the lord, offered on the part of the Israelites as an everlasting agreement. It shall belong to Aaron and his sons, who must eat it in a sacred place, since as something most sacred among the various oblations to the lord, it is his by perpetual right. (Leviticus 24:5-9)

This bread was ceremonial and sacred, symbolizing both the twelve tribes of Israel and how the Lord provided for the Israelites in the wilderness and is only meant to be eaten by priests, those who have kept Levitical holiness codes (Porter ch. 4). However, Ahimelech is willing to give the bread to David if he and his men have observed only one

such code: sexual abstinence (Birch *Interpreter's* 1140). David informs Ahimelech that they always keep Levitical codes of abstinence when on such militaristic missions but especially on the current one (1140). Ahimelech obliges and gives the bread.

David then asks the priest if he has a weapon available. The only weapon Ahimelech has is the sword of Goliath, which has been carefully preserved and wrapped in an ephod, or a priestly cloth. Again, David pursues a relic ordinarily unattainable but, either because of his claim of Levitical purity or Ahimelech's knowledge that he had formerly killed Goliath (1 Samuel 21:9), David is able to receive it and continues on his way. Thus, David is the beneficiary of the hospitality and loyalty of the priests of Nob who aid him in his escape from Saul. However, Saul's head shepherd, Doeg, was "detained by the Lord" in Nob, possibly studying the Torah or waiting for a skin defect—an uncleanness in Levitical law—to subside, bearing witness to the whole transaction (Reis 61).

It is important to note here that some scholars disagree on the merit of David's ethical violations (lying, eating of sacred bread under false pretense). A small number of scholars accuse David of manipulation, not only implicating him in the tragedy that will follow this but also orchestrating it for his own political gain (Green 93, Reis 60-61). They argue that a conspiratorial David "comes to Nob expressly to attain sanctified bread and this particular sword," as "consumption of holy bread and possession of Goliath's sword damages Saul's prestige," and knowingly receives these in the presence of Doeg, whom he counts on to inform Saul (Reis 61). The majority of scholarship, however, defends David's actions. Birch argues for David's innocence by making a larger statement about God and God's coming kingdom.

Ordinary boundaries between the sacred and the profane have been collapsed in the face of David's need and God's kingdom, which is coming in David [...] The importance of this story does not lie so much in the truth of David's statements but in the availability of holy things for what God is doing through David. (*Interpreter's* 1140).

Saul and his army, continuing to pursue David, come to the town of Nob and launches an investigation, leading his servant, Doeg, to reveal what he witnessed. Though Ahimelech defends his actions—after all, for all he knows, David is one of Saul's most loyal and respected servants, his son-in-law, and commander of Saul's bodyguard (1 Samuel 22:14; Birch *Interpreter's* 1148)—but Saul's anger is aroused. Saul commands his troops to kill the priests for aiding David. When they refuse to kill the priests, Saul turns to Doeg, who slaughters eighty-five priests as well as the rest of Nob, including its “men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep” (1 Samuel 22:16-19). However, Ahimelech's son “escapes the massacre and flees to David” (v. 20) and reports the news of this tragedy to David (v. 21).

It is here that David takes his next step toward his ascension.

Then David said to Abiathar: “That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family. Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me.” (1 Samuel 22:21-23)

David responds with kingly responsibility. Saul may have slaughtered the town of Nob, but the responsibility for the slaughter was on David's shoulders (Birch *Interpreter's* 1148). Up to this point, David has been fleeing for his own life, doing all that was necessary to survive—using key relationships like Michal, Jonathan, and Ahimelech. In

this instance, David takes responsibility for his own actions and for the people he will one day lead as king.

David with the Thirty and the Three. As mentioned in the discussion of David's relationships, the episode with the three warriors reveals a significant level of responsibility displayed by the king. The story, found in 2 Samuel 23, shows three brave warriors risking danger to fetch water for their thirsting king. When they return with it, however, David pours it out in sacrifice to the Lord, rather than drinking it. This is a refusal to be set above his people. Birch says that this story is "a fitting reminder near the end of David's story of the qualities that brought him to leadership and eventually to the throne, lest the temptations of royal power isolate him from the possibilities of solidarity with his people" (*Interpreter's* 1376).

Following this story, there is a list of David's warriors. Curiously placed directly after the retellings of the heroic adventures of the three, the list offers a potent remembrance of another episode that would test and refine David's responsibility: the list ends with Uriah the Hittite, whom David strategically killed in order to save his own reputation. While this story will be examined more fully, in the "Downfall of Kingship," the inclusion in this passage of Uriah's name serves as a reminder—albeit a painful one—of the responsibility David has to those who serve under him (Birch *Interpreter's* 1376).

Other Kings. Such a burden of responsibility comes to other kings sporadically, particularly in times of transition or need. A few highlights include Jeroboam, Josiah, Hoshea, and Zedekiah. Just before Solomon's death, God speaks through the prophet Ahijah, thrusting Jeroboam into responsibility as king of the northern ten tribes of Israel

that he will bring out of Solomon's idolatrous house (1 Kings 11). Upon hearing the reading of the newly found Book of the Law, Josiah sensed a calling to dismantle the idolatrous practices of Judah, reclaiming the covenant that both king and country had neglected (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34). Out of a sense of responsibility to the people of Israel and Judah, Kings Hoshea and Zedekiah tried unsuccessfully to rebel against the invading Assyrians and Babylonians respectively (2 Kings 17, 24).

Perhaps one of the most significant instances of a king recognizing his responsibility to the people he leads is found in Solomon's prayer at the newly built temple's dedication. In his prayer, Solomon mentions seven circumstances that his people will face: Juridical oaths, defeat in battle, drought, famine, foreigners, victory in battle, and exile (1 Kings 8; Rice 66-67). In this prayer, Solomon's words convey a deep concern for the people who will seek God in the temple that Solomon has built and allows hearers to understand his purpose in building it. These are the spiritual and physical needs as Solomon saw them, and so Solomon took the burden of solving those concerns by building a place where his nation might turn back to God. While the building of the temple itself is more of a justice/order event, the revelation of Solomon's concern in his prayer shows Solomon's kingly compassion that preceded the event.

Oftentimes, instances in which the king adopts responsibility over his people's situations preface an act of delivering justice and order. Such acts will be described in the next section.

Delivery of Kingly Justice and Order

As a representative of the divine, ancient near-eastern kings performed the will of the god or gods who anointed them, turning the secret wishes of the unseen deities into a

tangible reality for the people they ruled. As stated previously, political action that furthered the divine will was based on a king's subjective discernment of that divine will (Frankfort 252). This rudimentary concept progressed into Israel's kingship as well as revealed in the scriptures and the Law of Moses, though a Jewish king's discernment was held accountable by the additional role of a prophet who sought to maintain congruence with Yahweh's divine will. As a preface to this fourth step of a king's ascension story—the delivery of kingly justice and order—attention will now turn to several central attributes of Yahweh's will and character since a king's delivery of God's will hinges on engagement with such attributes. For the purposes of this study, six attributes of God from the Jewish texts (by no means an exhaustive list) have been highlighted as they inform a king's delivery of God's order and justice in the world: creational intent, provision, justice, sorrow/regret, wrath, and compassion. It must be noted that these attributes serve as metaphors in the way Scot McKnight defines them: "Metaphors are a divinely given means to avoid idolatrous claims of knowledge... an acknowledgement that we need to access the world around us in an indirect fashion, and that the idea of direct and complete access is an arrogant illusion that violates the multifaceted integrity of the created world" (39). The bible highlights these six metaphors, attributing them to God's nature. Just as God exhibits and acts according to these attributes, so must God's anointed representative, the king.

The Divine Attributes—*God, the Creator.* To understand the will of God for the world, an understanding of God's original intention and design for the world and humanity is necessary. Thus, an exploration of God as Creator is necessary. At the most basic level, this narrative is a simple one: God created the universe to reflect God's own

glory. Though the biblical creation stories include a breadth of theological insights, for the purpose of this project, only two concepts will be explored— 1) *Chaoskampf* and 2) the image of God.

The first chapters of Genesis recount a distinct creation story that reveals an important aspect of both God and the humans God creates. Typical of the Elohist and Priestly perspective from which it is written, Genesis 1 depicts God as the sovereign creator of the universe who brings a world that is formless, disordered, and riddled by watery chaos to order through spoken decrees (Collins *Hebrew Bible* 57-58). This passage introduces a central theme of the Hebrew scriptures called *chaoskampf*, or “the tradition of the deity who goes out to battle against the forces of chaos” (Crouch 2) found throughout ancient near eastern cultures (Middleton 342). In this tradition, God the Creator brings order to chaos by rightly setting the universe into being and declaring that, according to this order, the universe is “good.” From the beginning, this is the focus of the divine will—to bring order to chaos and to make all things right. This becomes particularly important as chaos makes a resurgence in the form of human rebellion in Genesis 3.

This task would not be undertaken alone, however. To join in the work of combatting the chaos, humanity is designed to serve as divinely appointed representatives, created “in the image of God,” a term that has been interpreted and adapted differently throughout history (Genesis 1:26-28). While some theologians in the past have maintained that the “image of God” refers exclusively to a physical form, such theology neglects the clear mandate God gives to combat chaos. Modern theologians, however, rely on a broader understanding of what it means to have human identity,

autonomy, and creative authority as a means of joining in God's work of creation (Jones, Peterson; ch. 1, Fretheim *Interpreter's* 345). Reformer Martin Luther suggests that this image refers to a human's "ability to reason, or an intellect, and a will" as well as the capacity to understand and even share the desires of God (Jones 30). Similarly, theologian Karl Barth denies that the image of God refers to a physical form but rather offers it as an "analogy of relation" (Jones 33). This type of nuanced interpretation dominates modern conceptions of the phrase.

In its original time period, however, the phrase "image of God" is meant to evoke conceptions of ancient kingship as the phrase, though a hallmark of Judeo-Christian theology, finds its original usage in ancient near eastern commissions of monarchs. For instance, Egyptian texts refer to pharaohs as "the shining image of the lord of all and a creation of the gods of Heliopolis... he has begotten him, in order to create a shining seed on earth, for salvation for men, as his living image" (Crouch 8). Other texts in Mesopotamia refer to a king who "is the perfect likeness of the god" or even "an image of Marduk" (Crouch 8). In all of these texts, the kings actively fight on behalf of the god whose image they bear to combat chaos in whatever fearsome form it appears (Crouch 13).

This is important in order to gain a fuller understanding of the creation accounts because, as Crouch notes, such terminology in the Hebrew scriptures is a deliberate attempt to extend this directive to all humanity, not just kings (9). That is, humans are meant to join in Yahweh's *Chaoskampf* to restore the original, good order of creation, using their own autonomy to carry out God's will. It is the desire and design of the Creator to thwart chaos alongside humanity.

Chaos continues to exist, however, largely through human action as a result of the Fall in Genesis 3. The mission of the Creator, then, is to address not only the cosmic chaos, but that which dwells within the human heart as well through the giving of Mosaic Law, the giving of land, the rise of judges, punishment for sin leading to mercy and forgiveness, and ultimately the installment of kings and prophets. When kingship arrived in Israel's history, the king was to lead all of Israel in combatting the chaos in the world around them through political and military action which would perpetuate the reign and kingdom of God throughout the world, usually at the expense of the "chaotic" peoples that opposed them (Middleton 351). This ideal of preserving and restoring the original creation is central to the divine will and is the impetus for each of the following attributes to be explored.

God, the Provider. In Genesis 22, Abraham gives the site of his son's near-sacrifice—a name revealing an important attribute of God: "The Lord Will Provide" (22:14). This name is meant to be a memorial pillar of the Jewish faith as it comes through Abraham, revered in Judaism and regarded by some scholars as the primogenitor king (Römer 13). Whatever God's people need—in this case, the security of Abraham's promised lineage—God will provide. This is an enduring trait of God throughout the Hebrew scriptures.

In Genesis 3, after the Fall of humanity and the resurgence of chaos, God provides for Adam and Eve by making them clothes from animal skins (Genesis 3:21). In the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God provided guidance through a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). God provided water and manna as food to sustain the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16-17). Most significantly, God

provided the Law and the ten commandments as a way of life that would secure possession of the Promised Land (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5:33). Then, God brought the Israelites out of forty years into migrant meandering, provided for them the Promised Land, and eventually raised up leaders, judges, and kings to govern them. God provided all these things and more as means by which to steer Israel back toward the original, divine intention. God gives all this, especially the law, “for the sake of the best possible life in community, a life of stability and well-being for all, especially the most disadvantaged” (Birch *Introduction* 127). Ultimately, God’s provision is meant to offer a structure for God’s people that delivers them from their bent toward chaos and restores God’s image in them. In the same way, a king who serves fully in God’s image will provide order and resources that lead the people back to the life God intends.

God, the Judge. As the giver of the Law, God is also the one who judges according to the Law and brings all offenders to justice. Justice is done when, according to the overarching concept of *Chaoskampf*, the rightful ordering of the chaos that is wrought by human sin is restored. Just as God declared what was “good” as Creator, God the judge declares the righteousness or unrighteousness of Israel. This is the purpose of the Law.

The Law is divided into two types of codes: purity codes and holiness codes. Purity codes largely deal with delineating between clean and unclean primarily for the purpose of one’s fitness to approach religious rituals and temple responsibilities—a primary concern to priests and prophets, though in the Second Temple Period there was a push for these to become everyday purity practices (Collins *Hebrew Bible* 145). Holiness

Codes deal with one's maintaining right relationship with God through holy living (Collins *Hebrew Bible* 151). Both Purity and Holiness Codes are accompanied by rituals for restoring cleanness and right relationship with God.

All Levitical injunctions reveal a foundational framework for God's ethics that is imperative for faithful kingly justice. From God's Law, humanity knows God's design and will for everyday actions and life. What's more, in combination with the overarching character of God in the Torah, God's character as a judge is revealed. In the *Journal of Law and Religion* published through Emory University, Randy Beck explores this connection.

Biblical narratives about divine justice rest on the foundation of God's character. Attributes that make God an ideal judge can be used to evaluate human judges. King Jehoshaphat makes this logic explicit when he instructs the judges of Judah: "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord. He is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes (2 Chronicles 19). God is just, so judges must be just. God is impartial, so they should be impartial. God will not take a bribe, so neither should they. (Beck 37)

A king, though fallible, must exhibit the same sense of justice as God does, being able to not only discern between what is right or wrong, but able to sentence, punish, and remedy accordingly for the sake of restoring order. This justice, however, leads to a number of subsequent emotions and responses from God.

God, the Sorrowful. The Genesis 6 account of Noah and the flood reveals another attribute that drives God's actions, saying, "And the Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart" (Genesis 6:6). Two emotions, regret

and grief, are typically not associated with God. And yet, these seemingly uncharacteristic emotions compel God to act in ways that are important to a discussion of kingship, as will be discussed in later sections.

First, it must be noted that the word “regret” in the Hebrew, *נחם*, can be translated as “repent,” “regret,” “was sorry,” or “renege” (Gerth vii). Therefore, inherent to the usage of this word is a foundational notion that whatever act-gone-awry associated with the verb is to be undone or remedied. In the case of Genesis 6:6, that act is the creation of humanity. This tension between God’s ability to regret, or especially repent, stands in stark opposition to belief in a perfect omniscience and foreknowledge of God, and creates a theological dilemma for many that is beyond this scope of this research (Gerth).

Yet, the notion of the divine having second thoughts about making humans is well-documented in Mesopotamian literature and texts, though it often comes as a result of humans overpopulating or being frustratingly noisy (Gerth 2-7). Israel includes this sentiment, however, to say something unique about Yahweh: God is grieved by the violence and wickedness of humanity and is willing to undo, and even “uncreate” whatever is necessary to solve it (Genesis 6:5, Gerth).

This same sentiment, and even the same verb, arises again in 1 Samuel 15 when God says to the prophet Samuel, “I regret the day I made Saul king,” a result of Saul’s disobedient actions in prior chapters. Following this declaration, Samuel sets out to anoint a new king, “a man after God’s own heart”: David (1 Samuel 14:14; 16:1-13). From then on, Saul begins to lose his kingship. While some argue Saul lost his kingship due to poor leadership, Samuel’s lack of support, or desertion of troops, it is God’s regret that sets his downfall into motion.

All of this points to a central aspect of God's nature: God is filled with an inner anguish and disappointment over humanity's state. Terence E. Fretheim, in his exhaustive work on the topic, refers to this anguish as God's suffering, something God has allowed to enter into the divine being (Fretheim *Suffering* 38). As a result, God acts to alleviate this. Therefore, God brings calamity. God withdraws blessing. God acts decisively to remedy whatever has gone wrong. Regret, sorrow, and suffering over the failures of humanity, then, are critical traits that those who are made in the image of God share. As those who both bear God's image and are anointed to restore God's image in their land, kings are to also exhibit such sorrowful regret and must act accordingly. That is, they must be mourn over the state of their realm, be adaptable when plans go poorly, and repentant when they fail.

God, the Wrathful. One aspect of justice is wrath, a key attribute of God displayed throughout the biblical literature that cannot be ignored. In the scriptures, God is depicted as a warrior-king who brings destruction on those who oppose Israel (Judges, Joshua, Isaiah 13, Jeremiah 15) and a strict enforcer of the Torah who will punish offenders with severe consequences including death (Leviticus-Deuteronomy). This is perhaps most potently seen in Exodus 32 when Moses is speaking with God on Mount Sinai while the Israelites are worshipping a golden calf.

God says to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it...I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation. (Exodus 32:7-10)

Walter Bruggemann makes two deductions based on this episode. First, the indictment God brings reveals that the Israelites have violated the covenant, making them “no longer ‘my [God’s] people,’ but ‘your’ [Moses’] people” (Bruggemann 931). Secondly, due to Israel’s rebellion, the covenant relationship is called off and Israel will be utterly destroyed (931). All promises of provision are nullified. They will no longer receive the land. They will be wiped out from the earth. From this passage, then, God’s wrath results in 1) a loss of God-given identity, 2) a nullification of the covenantal promises, and 3) utter destruction.

Fortunately, God’s wrath could be satisfied, though it would be through a substitutionary sacrifice performed by priests or prophets. This sacrificial system was a way to atone for any violations of the Law, intentional or unintentional (Collins *Hebrew Bible* 141). In her examination of all the sacrifices offered in the Law, Sarah Stokes Musser posits that sacrifices, including blood sacrifices, are about rightly offering to God rather than wrongfully taking from God in order to restore God’s image in a person (106-140). From a divine perspective, this satisfies wrath but for humanity, sacrifice properly reorders one’s life—again, combatting chaos. Regardless of whom or what would bear the wrath, there would be retribution.

Modern apologists work to satisfy the inherent tension between God’s wrath and God’s love (Carson, Murray). Donald Carson notes that God’s wrath is not necessarily part of God’s intrinsic nature, but is a vital aspect of God’s justice and love.

Wrath is a function of God’s holiness against sin. Where there is no sin, there is no wrath, but there will always be love in God. Where God in His holiness confronts His image-bearers in their rebellion, there must be wrath. Otherwise God is not the jealous God He claims to be, and His

holiness is impugned. The price of diluting God's wrath is diminishing God's holiness. (Carson 388)

Thus, in a destructive response to sin, God seeks to purge the world of all rebellion and chaos with terrifying ferocity *so that* God's original intention of creation might be restored. Wrath is not a virtue of hatred; it is of love and a desire for a better reality, a continuation of the *Chaoskampf*.

Following the example of their divine king, therefore, Israel's leaders channeled such wrath—couched in a vision of God's good intention for Israel—into military action against opposing nations and communal discipline and punishment for sin internally.

God, the Compassionate. While certainly displaying God's wrath, the conversation on Mount Sinai between God and Moses shows another side of God's nature: love. Moses responds to God's wrathful declaration with a bold assertion.

“Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (Exodus 32:11-14)

Moses appealed to another aspect of God's identity—God's compassion—in order to spare the Israelites from utter annihilation. While troubling for some to conceive of God changing a course of action, as seen in the earlier discussion on God's regret, such is the reality of God according to the biblical narrative (Brueggemann 932; Fretheim *Suffering*).

This compassion is God denying humanity what it deserves—exile, punishment, and death—directly opposing the punishment formula laid out in the Law. God is well within rights to obliterate Israel yet God relents. Justice, then, is not always dealt in punishment, but can be accomplished through mercy. For instance, Psalm 30:5 states, “[God’s] anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime.” To exiled Israel, God says, “In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:8). Such displays of mercy from the Divine King of Israel sets a standard of love and compassion that Israel’s earthly kings would do well to emulate.

Such compassion is not always employed by God. Through the prophet Zechariah, God says, “Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath... I did not relent” (Zechariah 8:14). It is the prerogative of the sovereign Judge to determine when and how justice will be done—either through mercy or through wrath. In the same way, a king—usually in consultation with the prophet—must determine whether a situation calls for wrath or compassion.

These six attributes contribute to the overall actions God takes as divine king of Israel. They interact both alongside and against one another to ultimately deliver justice and order to a creation thrown into chaos. Held in close tension with one another, these six attributes form an archetype for how a king in Israel must rule, act, and exist as God’s representative who will bring order to that chaos. It should come as no surprise, then, that King David—arguably the most beloved king of Israel and a “man after God’s own heart”—exhibits these traits and delivers godly justice for the majority of his reign.

King David's Delivery of Justice. Following the events at Nob, David is given opportunities to deliver justice. His first opportunity comes at the city of Keilah, under siege by the Philistines. Instead of hearing of the city's plight and immediately advancing with his army, David seeks God's will (twice) and confirms that such an attack against Keilah's enemies is in line with the divine intention. Acting according to God's wrath, then, David and his men deal the Philistines a "heavy defeat" and rescue Keilah (1 Samuel 23:1-5).

King Saul receives word of David's deeds in Keilah and heads toward the city. Meanwhile, David again inquires of the Lord, who directs him to leave Keilah, whose inhabitants will sell him out, perhaps for fear over what Saul did at Nob. David and approximately 600 men elude Saul's pursuit in the wilderness outside of Keilah until Saul is drawn away by another battle with the Philistines. David and his men continue to live in the caves and strongholds of En-Gedi. Saul finally returns to his pursuit of David and sets the stage for another opportunity for David to deliver justice (1 Samuel 23:6-24:2).

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."⁷ With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way. (2 Samuel 24:3-7)

Though David has spared Saul's life, the act of cutting off a corner of Saul's robe fills David with grief. This is possibly due to the symbolic nature of the act. David Gunn offers that the phrase used here is a euphemism for "cutting off the penis, thus leaving Saul without manhood or a future" (Birch *Interpreter's* 1158). However, David's grief could also stem from remorse over having struck, no matter how insignificantly, the Lord's anointed. By striking at Saul, David is in effect disrespecting the office itself (Birch *Interpreter's* 1158, Van Seters 100). Whatever the cause, David feels significant regret over his action, leading him to confront Saul.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you. Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand." (1 Samuel 24:8-14)

Here—still not a king—David is acting according to God’s kingly virtues. In this passage, David makes amends with Saul by confessing his action against Saul. David had violated the will of the Creator by striking at the God-ordained king. Therefore, David defers to the Lord’s judgement between them. God will provide retribution, wrath, and justice as God sees fit. The display of kingly grace and fortitude is enough to sway Saul who relents from his murderous pursuit and reluctantly admits, “Now I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand” (1 Samuel 24:21). However, Saul’s jealousy is only assuaged briefly before he continues his pursuit of David.

In an account similar to the former, David again has an opportunity to kill Saul. Unlike the former account, however, David exudes a kingly confidence he did not in the prior account. Standing before his enemies with Saul’s personal spear and water jug in hand, items he had stolen while they were asleep, David makes it known to Saul that he had the advantage over Saul but refused to kill him (1 Samuel 26). In this act, David presents divine mercy that is firmly grounded in power, not remorse, and confidence that God will serve as the ultimate judge between them. David needs nothing from Saul at this point, having “refrained from the temptation to violence as a means of power, but it was trust in the Lord’s ability to bring David’s future in God’s own way that enabled David to refuse violence as a means to his own future” (Birch *Interpreter’s* 1176). This is the final confrontation between Saul and David. Upon Saul’s death, David eventually ascends the throne as “a man after God’s own heart,” having acted according to the aforementioned attributes of God’s nature.

The Justice of Other Kings. Following David, the kings of Israel and Judah administer order and deliver justice to in ways unique to their particular situations, exercising the divine attributes in their current times. Some kings invoked God the Creator and restored God's original intentions by bringing destruction upon idolatrous practices, like Hezekiah in the temple (2 Chronicles 29) and Josiah, who tore down every altar in his kingdom (2 Kings 23). Out of sorrow over what their nation faced, some kings were prompted to act. Such sorrow can be seen motivating Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 23) and Amaziah, who avenged his father's death by executing his father's murderers (2 Kings 14). As a result of this kind of disappointment, some kings channeled wrath, typically in battle like Jehoash of Israel, who successfully warred against Amaziah of Judah and brought captives to Samaria, and Ahab who fought against the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 14). Likewise Zimri, Omri, Baasha, Jehu, and Pekah took matters of justice into their own hands and killed their unworthy predecessors, taking the throne for themselves. Then, there were kings who spared the rod of justice, as David did with Saul, like Rehoboam who heeded the prophet Shemaiah's warning against waging war against Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:21-24; Rice 103). Other kings provided needed systems and structures for their people, like Jeroboam I, who instituted policies and even built up sites of governance at Shechem, Penuel, and Tirzah; and Omri, who moved the palace to Samaria; and Jehoshaphat, who placed his sons in political office (Rice 105, Galil 42).

In their own way, the kings of Israel and Judah sought to bring order to the chaotic world around them. Despite their best efforts, however, the kingship would

ultimately fail. Through the eventual failure of trials, relationships, responsibility, and justice, the kingship would experience a fatal downfall.

The Downfall of Kingship

Eventually, the kingship of Israel would falter, and the nation would be overcome by opposing armies. While prophets in the scripture point to a variety of causes that exacerbated the threat of downfall, the missteps and individual failings of the kings ultimately led to the nation's demise. Just as each king's success can be measured according to his ascension story, each king's failure can also be traced to it as well. In this section, significant failings in each phase of the ascension story will be briefly summarized, starting with king David.

David's Downfall. David, traditionally known for exceedingly positive characteristics, had significant failings throughout his life as he was "prone to excessive violence, lust, and deception" (Bosworth 206). These tendencies ultimately led him to fail in each of the four themes of the ascension story.

First, David failed a significant trial in an early account of his kingship. After he had ascended to the throne, David faces a trial that exposes the depth of his own inner sin and rebellion. 2 Samuel 11 tells of a time when David should have been at war with his armies like other kings yet David stayed home. While on the roof of his palace, David sees a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing. David exploits his power as king and orders his servants to bring her to him, despite their attempts to inform David that she is married to one of his warriors, Uriah the Hittite. David moves forward with his desire. As a result, Bathsheba becomes pregnant. To cover this up, David unsuccessfully tries to force intimacy between Uriah, whom he has brought home from the battlefield, and his

wife. When this proves unsuccessful, David sends Uriah back to war and orders that he be assigned to the fiercest part of the battle, ensuring his death (2 Samuel 11:1-24). Thus, defying his responsibility to bring justice to those that violated the Law, David sentenced an innocent man to die.

For David, a simple temptation to avoid war culminated into a blatant misuse of power leading to an undeserved death. While the prophet Nathan would later lead David to repentance, this failed trial would not go unpunished. The son born to him and Bathsheba would die and “trouble against you from within your own house” would arise (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

That trouble came in the form of a tragic event that would culminate in a failure in the remaining ascension stages. David’ s son, Amnon, fell in love with and subsequently raped Tamar, the sister of Absalom, another of David’ s sons (2 Samuel 13). To make matters worse, when David hears of it, the scriptures say, “he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn” (2 Samuel 13:21). This led Absalom to take matters into his own hands. Absalom kills Amnon, doing what David refused to do.

There are several things that must be highlighted here. First, the relational poisoning of David’ s family dynamic happens long before Tamar is raped. David’ s treatment of women, as seen with Bathsheba, was a practice apparently passed on to his sons. Birch argues that “Tamar is a victim not only of Amnon’ s lust but also of David’ s sin and God’ s judgment” (1303). Secondly, David failed to take responsibility for neither Tamar’ s rape nor his inability to address what happened in his own family

(Reiss 230). While David is angry, this anger does not lead to a sense of ownership demanding action. As a result, there is no action, meaning that David has denied providing God's kingly justice. David could have employed any number of the six aspects of the divine image to bring justice. Instead, David chose to turn a blind eye to Amnon's sin, masking it behind love for his son. This failure to act ultimately led to David's son Absalom creating a rebellion right under David's nose, forcing David to flee Jerusalem, regroup, and finally deliver the justice to Absalom that should have been dealt to Amnon in the first place (Bosworth 207). These seeds of divisional chaos would continue to grow throughout the remainder of David's reign, later resulting in a schism of the nation of Israel following Solomon's kingship.

The Downfall of the Monarchy. In 931 BCE, following Solomon's kingship, the throne was contested (Galil 24). Solomon's son and rightful heir, Rehoboam, was an obstinate ruler who tried to prove himself through unusually harsh means. Meanwhile, Solomon's chief taskmaster, Jeroboam I, was well-liked and influential, particularly among the northern ten tribes of Israel. Having been crowned king by his followers, Jeroboam led a revolt against Rehoboam, effectively dividing the nation—and monarchy—of Israel in two: Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Jeroboam would create a new monarchy in the north as the first in a line of nineteen kings of Israel (or twenty, if Tibni is considered legitimate). Meanwhile, Judah would have twenty kings (and one queen) of its own in the south. Both lines would end, however, when the regions were overrun by invading nations. In 781, while Hoshea was on the throne, the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. Then, in 587, the southern capital of Judah, Jerusalem, under Zedekiah's reign, was captured and the temple was destroyed by

Babylon. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the most capable and useful Israelites were exiled into Babylonian lands for the purpose of training them in Babylonian culture (Daniel 1). It is during this time that the exiles recounted and recorded their history, asking the central question, “How did this happen?”

The answer comes in the form of the history of 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles, written by two groups of exiles called the Deuteronomists and the Chroniclers, respectively, during and after the exilic period. In these texts, exiled Israel seeks to explain the progression of events leading up to the ultimate demise of the kingdom, and the monarchy with it. For the purpose of this project, the kings in these texts will be briefly surveyed with attention to the undoing of the ascension story themes as the kingship was ultimately lost by the kings’ unsuccessful fulfillment of trials, relationships, responsibility, and justice.

Trials. Though individual trials of the kings are varied—from droughts and famine to wars and contested claims of kingship—every trial tests the measure of a king’s devotion to God. For instance, a lack of trust in God’s provision and word causes a king to trust in his own human power to provide—an act of rebellion ever since Moses first struck the rock in the wilderness. Such lack of trust caused the kings to resort to human tactics rather than depend on God. In Judah, Rehoboam was stubborn and bullish, trying to maintain his own ability to provide rather than honor the counsel of others. In Israel, this precedent was set immediately as Jeroboam I sought to secure his own position and power, ultimately leaving his nation vulnerable (Rice 116).

Oftentimes, instead of calling upon Yahweh during a time of trial, kings would turn to other gods and idols. Solomon, for example, was pressured into such idolatry as a

result of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, many of whom were foreigners who worshipped foreign gods. Such idolatry became constant even in the divided kingdom. In fact, only a handful of kings of Judah—Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah—overcame the lure of idolatry. Meanwhile, every king of Israel is said to have abandoned Yahweh in lieu of other gods. This may be due to Jerusalem, and therefore the temple, being located in Judah, causing worshippers in the north to adapt to new practices that were viewed as false (Rice 107). Regardless, the kings of Judah and Israel, taken as a whole, abandoned God for other gods and worship practices, exposing the wickedness of their hearts. As a result, the trials of Israel's monarchy were left largely unfulfilled, and led to the eventual downfall of the nation.

Relationships. Many Jewish kings were undone by key relationships, including members of their own guard. For instance, Nadab was killed by his military captain, Baasha; Elah was killed by Zimri, one of his officials, who was in turn killed by Omri, one of his own captains. Therefore, relationships in the kingship became more tenuous.

Because many kings were undone by their close relationships, some kings sought to rule in isolation. In fear of anyone contesting the throne, Judah's only queen, Athaliah, in her hunger for power, murdered the entire royal family (except Joash, her grandson who was hidden away before she could kill him) when her opportunity to ascend came (2 Kings 11). However, her isolation proved to be her downfall. In the seventh year of her reign, the prophet Jehoiada led a revolt against her, crowned her surviving grandson king, and sentenced her to death, even as she cried out, "Treason! Treason!" In her isolation, there was no one to answer her pleas, and she was killed.

More often, a king's relationship with the prophets determined the efficacy of his reign. This began with the first king, Saul, whose relationship with his would-be advisor, Samuel the prophet, ultimately led to his rejection as king (Wilson 178). As a result of three offenses—acting wrongfully as a prophet during a sacrifice (1 Samuel 13), failing to fulfill a hastily made vow (1 Samuel 14), and defying the divine mandate to utterly destroy the Amalekites in sparing the Amalekite king (1 Samuel 15)—God tells Samuel, “I regret that I made Saul king” (1 Samuel 15:11). From then on, Saul and Samuel are at odds with one another as Saul clings to an empty anointing.

This strife between kings and prophets carried on until the destructions of Israel and Judah. Ahab and Jezebel fought against Elijah (1 Kings 18-19). Jeroboam ignores the words of a nameless prophet (1 Kings 13). Zedekiah rejects Jeremiah's plea to surrender to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25). Each king who refused a prophet's counsel met his demise.

In Israel, the sacral kingship of Mesopotamia was intentionally split into kings and prophets to promote accountability and a division of power. When kings rejected this primary relationship, they rejected the God-designed monarchical office. The inevitable outcome was the removal of power, as seen in Saul, the first king, and Zedekiah, the last king. Such failure to adhere to accountable relationships was judged harshly by the Deuteronomists and Chroniclers.

Lack of Responsibility. In addition, kings who refused to take responsibility for the people they ruled were also condemned by the exiled historians. Ahab, who fell prey to the common downfalls of Israel's kings, is viewed negatively specifically for his mistreatment of Naboth, one of his citizens who owns a vineyard adjacent to the palace

boundaries. In the story, Ahab's wife takes measures to murder Naboth and obtain the vineyard for her husband. Ahab goes along with the plan. This neglect of his own responsibility over his citizens leads to a sharp rebuke from Elijah, who declares a curse upon Ahab's legacy (1 Kings 21).

Similarly, Ezekiel 34 rebukes all the "shepherds" of Israel, including religious leaders and kings, for using those they lead for their own gain (Ignatius). "Should not shepherds take care of the flock?" Ezekiel asks. Taking on the leaders' refusal to care for their citizens, Ezekiel declares a punishment:

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them."
(Ezekiel 34:10)

This indictment highlights the refusal of the kings to care for their kingdom the way God desires. Therefore, they will be stripped of their authority, impotent and incapable of delivering God's good justice and order.

Lack of Justice. While the monarchies of both Israel and Judah prove incapable of delivering the justice and order to chaos in specific instances, the impotence of kingship is most clearly revealed in the case of Zedekiah of Judah's reign. When King Jehoiachin was taken prisoner and all the exiles were deported from Judah, Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle—21-year old Mattaniah, whom he renamed Zedekiah—king of Judah (2 Kings 24). The Deuteronomist briefly explains that Zedekiah, though installed by Babylon, tried to undermine and rebel against Babylon (2 Kings 25). The prophet, Jeremiah, details that rebellion in his own biblical account, depicting Zedekiah as an indecisive leader who lacked conviction and obedience to the Lord. Jeremiah urges Zedekiah, and all Jerusalem, to submit to Babylon's authority and

accept the consequences of the failed kingdom of Israel (Jeremiah 29). Zedekiah refuses, though he is powerless against Babylon since he has been installed merely as a pawn. As a result, Jerusalem is overwhelmed and Zedekiah's sons are executed before him just before Zedekiah's eyes are gouged out and he is taken away in shackles to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). This defeat is not only humiliating for Judah; it is the final death knell of the monarchy of both Judah and Israel. The kingship was terminated, at least in its original form.

The Redemption of Kingship and the Messiah

The Messiah. During the post-exilic period following the fall of Israel and Judah, the prophets would continue to point to a future king who would reign over Israel and restore it to God's intention. Though the word had been used to describe all kings, this king would come to be known as the *Messiah*, an adaptation of the Hebrew *mashiah*, or "the Anointed" (Cohn-Sherbok 2, Shahaar 394). Shirley Lucass reinforces this, tracing the etymology of *Messiah* back to original concepts of kingship.

The rabbinic doctrine of Messiah, just as the Christian doctrine of Messiah, has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures and there is a general consensus that the term *meshiah Yahweh* or *Ha-melekh ha-mashiah* is not only the term used of the Israelite king, but is the source of the concept of Messiah. This is because it is from the sacral role of the king that the ideology which surrounds the concept is derived. (Lucass 15)

The Messiah would be the perfect evolution of prior concepts of kingship and would bring a new era of prosperity and hope to the people of Israel, and the scriptures reflect this. Through Jeremiah, the Lord says, "The days are coming... when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall

execute justice and righteousness in the land,” saving both Judah and Israel (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

This furthers a rabbinical interpretation that depicts the Messiah as one who will bring exiles back to Zion (Cohn-Sherbock 43). Such a framework is supported by the prophet Ezekiel who describes the coming king ushering in a revival of the days of David.

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall dwell in the land where your fathers dwelt that I gave to my servant Jacob; they and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever; and David my servant shall be their prince forever. (Ezekiel 37:24-25)

It should be noted that for Jews, this is not meant to be a symbolic return. In order for one to truly be a messiah, according to this rabbinical tradition, one must bring all exiles back to Zion.

Isaiah offers the most prophetic oracles regarding the coming king. In his messages, Isaiah describes the Messiah as a child named Immanuel— “God with us”— who will bring light to darkness (Isaiah 9), a descendant of David’s house who will bring both peace and justice (Isaiah 11), and a servant who will suffer on behalf of Israel’s transgressions (Isaiah 53). In one particularly hopeful passage, Isaiah prophesies that this leader will fulfill God’s will by rebuilding broken Jerusalem, showing compassion to Israel while restoring God’s intent for creation and pouring wrath upon those who oppose it.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor. (Isaiah 61:1-4)

The Messiah would be the perfection of Israel's kingship, leading to ultimate deliverance and salvation, restoring God's original design for Israel while bringing justice to the nations. This king would undo the sins of previous kings and restore Israel to its original glory.

That said, this Messiah would be a sort of king of kings, a moniker Christians would eventually give to Jesus. For Jesus to be the king of kings, however, he would need to would repudiate the failures of kings past and perfectly fulfill what they could not—overcoming trials set before him, establishing relationships that legitimated and supported his kingship, taking responsibility for the fate of his people, and delivering God’s order and justice to the people he would lead. In the following section, Jesus’ fulfillment of the ascension story paradigm will be explored.

Jesus, King of Kings—*Jesus’ Trials*. Jesus’ trials come in the three temptations he faces in the wilderness found in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13. Just as trials test and reveal the measure of a king’s heart, so Jesus’ temptations reveal Jesus’ heart as that of the fully actualized king. Additionally, some scholars posit that these temptations serve to test Jesus’ messiahship, testing whether Jesus will succeed where others have failed (Cureton 176).

The first temptation emulates a test of Moses (arguably the first “king” of Israel) and the Israelites in the desert from Deuteronomy 8 (Cureton 176-177). In this passage, God provides bread, or manna, from heaven, but it is an even greater test: “whether they will walk in my Torah or not” (Deuteronomy 8:2). The issue of provision in the desert was a constant temptation for the Israelites, even leading Moses’s disobedience and denial of entry into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12). It is an issue of trusting God as the Provider who has supplied all one needs. Unlike Moses and the Israelites before him, Jesus overcomes this temptation by embracing the scripture, “Man does not live on bread alone, but from every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4).

The second temptation is a temptation to exploit Jesus' authority and relation with God (Cureton 180). Twisting scripture, the devil tells Jesus to throw himself off the temple because angels will surely save him. This would be a sign for people to believe in and revere Jesus. This temptation emulates the temptation of many former kings who sought to leverage their position for their own gain, as discussed in previous sections. However, Jesus rebukes this thought by properly applying scripture—"Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). God's will would be accomplished according to God's design alone.

The third temptation is the temptation that led to the downfall of Israel: idolatry (Cureton 182). The former kings fell prey to this temptation continually, worshipping Baal and other Mesopotamian gods instead of Yahweh. At the time, such worship may have seemed prudent. For instance, Baal, the god of fertility, would bring an end to the droughts and famine that plagued the land. In the same way, the devil makes an offer to Jesus that seems enticing. After showing him all the kingdoms of the world, the devil says to Jesus, "All these I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9). This is a temptation of status and glory, as well as a temptation to bring peace and order to the chaos in the world without the need for Jesus' sacrifice. However, Jesus refuses and reaffirms a commitment to worship God alone—overcoming a temptation the kings before him could not.

Jesus' Relationships. Like the kings of the past, Jesus had several significant relationships that contributed to his overall ascension story and helped proclaim him as a type of king. For example, John the Baptist, the first significant kingly relation of Jesus, served as a prophet, "preparing the way" for Jesus (Matthew 3:3). Like Samuel and other

prophets before him, John legitimated kingship by heralding him in strong messianic language and even “anointing” him through baptism (Marcus 82). In his 2012 dissertation “John, Elijah, or One of the Prophets: How the Markan Reader Understands Jesus Through John/Elijah,” Donald Stephen Black asserts that Mark 1:11, in which God claims Jesus as God’s son, is widely believed to be a reference to kingship, linking Jesus’ baptism to the anointing of kings past (Black 113, supported by Collins, *Mark*, 213; Evans 448-50; Hare, *Mark*, 18, 103, 151, 200; Mann 194-95; Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 162). If Jesus is king, John the Baptist is his prophet.

As stated previously, the relationship of kings to various women in their lives were of great significance, particularly mothers and wives. Like kings before him, Jesus had meaningful relationships with women in his life. Mary, Jesus’ mother, followed Jesus and even initiated his first miracle (John 2). Mary Magdalene was healed by Jesus and followed him for the rest of his life, serving as the first witness of the resurrection (John 20). While it is largely believed Jesus was never married, some scholars argue that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife, though it is largely debunked (Sabar). Nonetheless, these two women had a significant presence in Jesus’ life.

Next, though Jesus surrounded himself with twelve disciples, three of them served as particularly important relationships for Jesus: Peter, James, and John. Reminiscent of David’s three warriors, these three were invited into Jesus’ inner circle and were present at many of the most intimate moments of Jesus’ ministry (Culpepper, *Luke*, 31-37). Not much is known about James except that he was John’s brother, formerly a fisherman, and likely assumed some role in church leadership following Jesus’ ascension (Culpepper, *John*, 38). More specific relations are known about the other two. Peter is loyal to Jesus,

even violently protecting Jesus at his arrest, declares rightly Jesus' identity, and will one day lead Jesus' Church as a result (John 18:10, Matthew 16:18). John, meanwhile, appears to be the closest to Jesus, as he is regularly referred to in his gospel as "the disciple Jesus loved," denoting a friendship akin to David and Jonathan's (Culpepper, *John*, 57). In the past, many kings were led astray by their close relationships. Jesus, however, Jesus exemplified strong relationships with those around him while maintaining his own sense of authority and integrity.

Jesus' Burden of Responsibility. Several episodes in the gospels show Jesus taking on the burden of kingly responsibility for others. This is first noted in Luke 4 in his first recorded sermon which was preached in his hometown. Jesus quotes the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61, saying,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

Upon reading the text, Jesus declares, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This is said to people he knew personally, having spent his life with them. Therefore, the message carefully omits the vengeful language used in the full passage of Isaiah 61:1-4 (Walker 324). If Jesus is a king, these are his people and he is declaring his intent to take responsibility for them.

Later in the gospel accounts, Jesus is "transfigured" on a mountain, witnessed by Peter, James, and John. Jesus, enveloped in white, is greeted by Moses and Elijah in what

appears to be a statement of fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah).

This instance recites the pronouncement from the royal-themed Psalm 2:7—“This is my son”—and recalls Moses’ transformational experience on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:12-18, indicating that the transfiguration is an anointing or coronation of sorts (Vinson 262-263; Choi, ch. 5). Immediately following the transfiguration, Jesus resolutely discusses with the three disciples what will happen soon—his suffering and death. The event of the transfiguration appears to be a point of conviction for what Jesus must do as he continues to carry the burden for humanity’s salvation.

This sense of responsibility carries on to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus’ resolve to bring order to the chaos of humanity through the cross is tested. After praying for the “cup to pass” from him if possible, Jesus is resolute even when his closest relationships (Peter, James, and John) fail him in his moment of need (Hicks 48). Similar to David’s realization at Nob when he took responsibility for Saul’s actions, Jesus places the responsibility for humanity on his own shoulders in Gethsemane and resolutely moves toward the cross.

Jesus Delivers Justice. In his assertion that Jesus fulfills the role of prophet, priest, and king, Fred Guyette invokes Karl Barth, a German theologian during World War II.

When Barth developed the theme of Jesus as King or "The Royal Man," the cross, resurrection, and the ascension were especially prominent in his thinking. Pilate's ironic declaration to the crowd in Jerusalem was "Here is your king" (John 19:14), but what kind of coronation does Jesus receive? It was a crown of thorns. Humility, obedience, and majesty all coincide in the account of events at Gethsemane and Golgotha. First John 1:14 represents a summary and a restatement of these themes: "We beheld his

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (Guyette 93)

The culmination of Jesus' ascension narrative, the delivery of justice and order, comes at the cross. Jesus, whom Christians believe to be both God and man, is simultaneously the one delivering kingly justice and the recipient of it. Such delivery of justice necessarily involves the attributes of God. Thus, every aspect of God is addressed, embodied, or satisfied in some way through the final hours of Jesus, particularly in the final words of Jesus before his death.

Jesus' final hours and words from the cross point to the characteristics of God described in this project. First, Jesus exhibits sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane over his fate, overwhelmed to the point of sweating blood, as he prays for "this cup to pass" from him. This sense of sadness continues to the cross when Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," invoking the beginning of Psalm 22. This crying out is meant to align Jesus with all who suffer in sorrow but it also offers a sense of hope and confidence in God amidst suffering (Boring 492, Perkins 723). This forsaking by God is similar to the forsaking displayed by God throughout the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus' cries are the cries of all who have been abandoned by God—from the generation of Noah, to Saul, to the exiled nations of Israel and Judah. Jesus adopts the sorrow of humanity even as he bears the brunt of God's sorrow over humanity.

As a result of God's sorrow, Jesus bears the wrath of God over humanity's sin, according to substitutionary atonement theories (McKnight). This is seen in the entirety of the cross, though it is highlighted in two significant phrases Jesus offers. It is certainly evident in the previously mentioned cry of abandonment as Jesus bears God's wrath as a result of God's sorrow. However, reminiscent of Israel's time in the wilderness, Jesus

makes a more carnal plea: “I am thirsty” (John 19:28). Jesus, under physical and spiritual duress, is in need. While in the synoptic gospels, when receiving a sponge with water or wine vinegar, Jesus remains in complete control as he expresses his need—a contrast from the Israelites who continually gave themselves over to chaos and sin in their times of need (O’ Day 832). Additionally, this could also be an allusion to the idea that Jesus is ready to drink the cup he prayed would pass from him in Gethsemane (833). If so, then this reveals Jesus as one who is determined, even eager, to drink the cup of God’s wrath on behalf of humanity. Jesus, unlike previous kings, turns the sword on himself on behalf of his people.

Jesus also points to the God who provides, even in the midst of pain. From the cross, Jesus entrusts his mother and his beloved disciple to one another, an act of provision for when he is no longer around (832). Additionally, in his final words from the cross, Jesus offers complete trust that God will provide in spite of his death, saying, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). These two phrases reclaim the idea that God is one to be trusted as the one who provides for needs, even when the worst events occur.

Additionally, Jesus’ words from the cross convey extraordinary compassion, even at his own expense. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” offers a martyr’s model prayer that seeks to offer blessing for the very ones who are persecuting him, a prayer adopted by martyrs in Acts and early church history (Culpepper, *Luke*, 455). Likewise, when Jesus is begged by one of the thieves crucified alongside him to “remember me when you come into your kingdom,” a plea that actually is not meant to be understood as the *parousia* but “when he is delivered from his suffering and comes

‘into his kingdom,’” Jesus responds that the thief will join him in “paradise,” originally meant to be a garden, alluding to the Garden of Eden (Culpepper, *Luke*, 458). Therefore, Jesus answers a request for entry into his kingdom by promising his own royal menagerie—the original intent of creation, another attribute of God’s nature displayed in the cross.

Finally, in Jesus’ words, “It is finished,” the justice of God is done both to and by Jesus, bringing the divine tension of God’s attributes to resolution and returning order to a creation gone awry is accomplished, completing all that God has given to be accomplished (Brown 288). Thus, in the cross, Jesus exemplifies all the attributes of the Divine King.

In his sermon “The Law Established through Faith II,” John Wesley invokes all these attributes as he argues that following Jesus involves honoring him not only Priest or Prophet, but especially king.

We may, at proper opportunities, dwell upon his praise as bearing "the iniquities of us all," as "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities," that "by his stripes we might be healed." But still we should not "preach Christ" according to his word if we were wholly to confine ourselves to this. We are not ourselves clear before God unless we proclaim him in all his office . . . not only as great "High Priest, taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God"; as such, "reconciling us to God by blood," and "ever living to make intercession for us," but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, "who of God is made unto us wisdom," yea and as remaining a King forever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood; as restoring those to the image of God whom he has first reinstated in his favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has "subdued all things to himself; until he hath

utterly cast out all sin, and “brought in everlasting righteousness.”
(Guyette 95)

Through Jesus’ act of sacrifice on the cross, Jesus makes order and justice possible for those who follow him, reestablishing them as co-creators made in the image of God. It is in this way that Jesus restores the intention of original creation and satisfies all the aspects of God’s nature. The satisfaction of these metaphorical attributes of God is what is called atonement, creating peace amidst the divine tension within human conceptualization of God’s nature, revealed through scripture (McKnight 35). For Christians, this is done by Jesus, the so-called “king of kings,” who repudiates, fulfills, and ultimately redeems the kingship of Israel.

Conclusion

The material in these sections serves as the foundation of the curriculum used in this research. The evolution, themes, and important figures of Judeo-Christian kingship are extensive, spanning over forty monarchs across a divided nation. Nevertheless, such knowledge is helpful as it pertains to an overarching theological understanding of the biblical narrative. The organization of this information into the ascension story paradigm is designed to make the complexities of the topic more easily understood.

Research Design: Introduction to Educational Play

Even with such an organization of the information, these concepts of kingship remain obtuse, uninteresting, and irrelevant to the student. To remedy such disinterest, the research employs a variable to supplement the primary curriculum: an accompanying video game. The use of video games in educational instruction, while a newer field of research, has proven largely positive. Originating in the realm of “edutainment,” a genre of video games that are instructional in nature (math games, typing games, etc.), the field

evolved from entertainment to being used for military training and healthcare. Today, video games are beginning to be used in a variety of academic courses, ranging from the sciences to the humanities. For the purpose of this project, gaming's use specifically in the humanities will be explored.

More generally, however, there must be a discussion of the overarching concepts behind "educational play." While the use of video games in education remains a developing field of research, much work has been done to broaden the scope of educational scholars like Vygotsky, Dewey, and Piaget, as "play is central to [their] learning theories" (Fletcher 18). Redefining play to include the use of video games will guide the following examination of a curriculum's impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Educational Play and Knowledge Acquisition

Educational play helps players retain information by simulating necessary elements of knowledge acquisition—cognition, emotions, memory, and behavior—of the outside world in a low-risk game. Though educational play had been explored previously, Piaget was the first to draw a correlation between play and cognitive development (Lytle 100). For instance, Piaget's research identified the evolution of a person's cognition, emotional capacity, and autonomy by examining children at various ages up to adolescence. Children begin play with a strong adherence to the rules offered by a source of authority. As they grow and mature, children may tend to break from such restrictions and invent their own rules (103). Vygotsky furthers this notion by theorizing that such play offers an emulation and evolution of societal and social rules in the world

outside the game (Lytle 107-108; Mooney 83). Through such an experience, a new realm of knowledge or behavior can be acquired.

Just as you cannot learn how to swim by standing at the seashore... to learn how to swim you have to, out of necessity, plunge right into the water even though you still don't know how to swim, so the only way to learn something, say, how to acquire knowledge, is by doing so, in other words, by acquiring knowledge. (Vygotsky 324; Daniels 35)

Such play offers a low-risk environment for a person to develop skills of cognition and reason that will be translated beyond the game. Used intentionally, video games serve as a new realm of such experimentation, knowledge acquisition, and behavior.

Early iterations of gaming as instruction included information-sharing games among students and faculty at Universities primarily used for training and instruction. (Wentworth and Lewis; Fletcher 18). This was mostly seen in a playful test of knowledge or trivia-style games. Over time, however, educational software went on to include training games for the military and medical fields as well, offering simulations for the purpose of emulating a real-life scenario, per Vygotsky's theories (Fletcher 48, 73-74).

This practice is known as constructivism. Constructivism is described as "a theory of learning that posits that people construct understanding from their individual and social experiences (Fletcher 371)." Scholars, including Piaget, Dewey, and Kolb, affirm that video games introduced in thoughtful ways can "support learning through experience (Kolb, 1984) and learning by doing (Dewey, 1933)" (Fletcher 371).

Often used for the purpose of training or situational simulation, however, video game constructivism has seldom been employed as a pedagogical technique in the humanities. Nevertheless, the potential for such use in the humanities is affirmed by

scholars. Marc Prensky, in his analysis of using games—specifically games with a complex and dynamic story—highlights the benefits.

The emotion in complex games, coming in more and more sophisticated ways, already approaches and surpasses that of many movies and books. Game designers employ a variety of techniques, from what advertisers call “SiSoMo” (sight, sound, and motion) to story, character, interactivity, sound, and music to produce emotion, and spend much of their design time thinking about the emotional effects of their game on the player. From a learning perspective, the advantage of having an emotional connection with whatever one is learning is increased memory and retention. (Fletcher 273)

The autonomy and sense of embodiment in a story-based game offers the player tangible, visceral emotional responses to a narrative game’s events, thus imprinting actual memories and emotions into a player’s experience.

The correlation between heightened emotion, memory, and retention can thus be leveraged if the inciting event (in the game, for instance) is paired with an analogous concept in the base curriculum. That is, when an instructor teaches a core concept that correlates with a particular moment of the game, the student will recall information regarding that concept by accessing vivid memories instead of utilizing rote memorization skills. By pairing analogous curricular concepts with dynamic memories formed by the autonomy given through a video game, a student will gain and retain knowledge more effectively (Ku 66-67).

Attitudes and Interest

In a 2011 study examining the impact of game-based-learning on one’s attitudinal interest/motivation and achievement, researchers discovered a correlation between interest and achievement (Ku 66-67). Generally, if a student was interested in the game-

based-learning component, the student's academic performance improved. Therefore, an educator who seeks to improve the academic achievement among students must find ways to make the curriculum interesting and relevant to them.

Using gamification techniques in his courses, department chair and instructor of economics at University of New Hampshire, Neil Niman, increased interest in his courses among millennial students by combining traditional learning with storytelling games, a concept similar to the use of narrative-driven video games.

[Niman] is convinced that storytelling for Millennials (his current audience for the most part) is more important than for any prior generations. [...] Their stories, he postulates, are not merely entertainment or knowledge dissemination; they are actively being used to create a sense of identity and "place within a social fabric consisting of friends, relatives and peers." He feels that co-creation, as built on the work of Prahalad and Ramasawamy (2004), provides a means of encouraging mastery as a means to a more significant (for the participants) end. He encourages the students to take on the role of the hero in their own story. As he explains, "By adopting the role of the hero in the story, the student can establish an identity within the context of a story that can take on epic proportions, thereby contributing to a sense of self-esteem." He continues, "This explains, at least in part, why games are so attractive, relative to other activities, and can form the foundation for self-reinforcing activities." He feels that a more interdisciplinary focus in the class will empower students to achieve more than simply memorizing facts or terminology. (Bell 77)

Niman's work reveals that students who are able to enter into and affect a narrative world analogous to the primary concepts of a curriculum will reinforce the learning process.

The control and embodiment of an avatar in a complex, narrative video game will enhance a student's interest level in the primary curriculum.

This concept is furthered by Christopher Scholtz, a religious educator in Britain. In his paper entitled “Fascinating Technology: Computer Games as an Issue for Religious Education” Scholtz explores the compelling nature of *The Legend of Zelda* games and the possibility for religious education through what he calls “deep play,” or the resultant critical analysis and internalization that occurs while playing an emotionally complex video game. After establishing the fascination that playing certain video games creates in a player (both for himself and for others), Scholtz ponders whether such fascination could be leveraged for religious educational purposes (Scholtz 181). He identifies two levels at which religious education could benefit from a game like *Zelda* in which religious concepts are explored robustly. First, engagement at the didactic level, wherein a teacher’s acceptance of an “apparently trivial part of youth culture [that] contains elements of religious importance,” is enhanced and “enables teachers to communicate differently in class” (Scholtz 182). That is, the perceived distance between student and teacher is lessened and the teacher condescends to the level of the students’ interests. Next, Scholtz says that employing such a resource allows for the possibility for teaching to shift “between different realities and on experiences of flow and total immersion” (Scholtz 182). Put another way, teaching would shift between the traditional didactic and use of the game as an additional, analogous text.

The University of Akron’s Martin Wainwright experimented with this in his undergraduate course, *History in Video Games*. Utilizing multiple games, from simulations like *Civilization IV* to the more narrative-based *Assassin’s Creed*, Wainwright tried to make normally uninteresting topics (world history, economics, cultural biases, historical contingency, and historic combat and brutality) more

compelling to his students (Wainwright). Qualitative data proves he largely succeeded (amidst the typical complaints of the course's non-game-centric workload).

Student written evaluations of the first course offering indicated generally positive results. Most appreciated the combination of scholarship and game analysis. For instance, one student wrote, "I personally enjoyed the scholarship aspect of the class. It was interesting to me to find sources that could be related to video games." [...] Students also highlighted their own level of engagement in the course. Comparing it to other courses, one wrote, "It is far more involved with the students. The class seemed more invested in the class." Another declared, "This course was more open-ended than most courses. It encouraged critical thinking." [...] Perhaps the most encouraging remark came from an obvious non-History major who declared that the instructor "helped make my first History class an enjoyable one." (Wainwright 602)

Such comments highlight the increase in interest and attitudes toward the course resulting from the inclusion of the game.

Educational theorist John Keller developed what he called the *Course Interest Survey* to determine motivation, or attitudinal interest, from students in various courses. The survey determines interest by coding answers according to four components of interest: attention ("capturing the interest of learners; stimulating the curiosity to learn"), relevance ("meeting the personal needs/goals of the learner to effect a positive attitude"), confidence ("helping the learners believe/feel that they will succeed and control their success"), and satisfaction ("reinforcing accomplishments with rewards (internal and external") (Keller 44, 277). Accomplishing the first three increases a student's motivation to learn, but a continued desire to learn stems from the fourth, or an overall satisfaction (Keller 46). Keller poses two questions for educators to consider as they

create curriculum: “What will you do to make the instruction valuable and stimulating for your students?” and “how will you help your students succeed and feel that they were responsible for their success?” (Keller 277). This framework will help determine participant motivation and interest in this study.

Motivation and interest will determine whether or not a student will continue to learn about a given topic. Even so, education theorist John Dewey claims that a positive attitude toward the curriculum alone is a poor goal for the educator, emphasizing the need to build on such interest with loftier aims (Mooney 16). That higher goal is an impact on a student’s moral behavior.

Behavior

The final aspect of this research concerns behaviors that result from a curriculum. While character development or behavior formation has long been the work of Christian and liberal arts institutions, Dewey asserts “moral education as the primary aim of the school” (Mannoia 39; Hansen 183). That is, for Dewey, cultivating a student’s behavior is the goal of all education—liberal arts, Christian, or otherwise.

Dewey defines this field as “moral knowledge,” saying “it builds up a social interest and confers the intelligence needed to make that interest effective in practice” (Hansen 183). Dewey argues that moral behavior results from the evolution of new knowledge to an interest rooted initially in self-betterment or preservation.

The self can grow, transform, and mature. It can be funded by experience. Memory and foresight can move richly and deeply in a self. Such a self, penultimately, embodies an interest in learning from all the contacts of life. But that means both self and interest are becoming moral. Thus, Dewey transforms the unselfish self into “the generous self.” [...] The generous self gives to the world, as do all such selves whatever their

callings or doings. Posed differently, that self generates life, in the literal sense of acting in ways that expand and widen the human domain.

(Hansen 182)

Therefore, for Dewey, a knowledge—acquired and vivified by memory and experience through gamification—combined with newfound interest in what the knowledge might accomplish for the individual can directly inform moral behavior. This is because games offer an environment where players can make choices and form lasting memories.

Prensky offers that behavioral change may be best learned through role-playing games (the type of game used in this project) as they employ imitation, feedback, coaching, and practice (Fletcher 269).

Additionally, this has implications for religious education. Saint Augustine wrote that in order for someone to be deeply moved—forming a personal connection to the material—a person must first be taught (Paffenroth 87). When a person internalizes the concepts, it leads to faithful action. Theologian Robert Mulholland affirms that such faithful (or moral) action is the result of discipleship, that such “doing flows out of our being” (Mulholland, ch. 2). Teaching, then, must seek to form a person’s being and experience rather than just transmit information.

Invoking Vygotsky, Michael Cole affirms a pedagogy that brings together three separate parts: the person, the world, and the text (Daniels 33). In the case of gamification, the “text” is the curriculum while the “world” includes the game. Bringing these three together reinforces learning and strengthens retention.

Ultimately, this is the work of contextualization. Contextualization is a concept within the realm of Christian mission suggesting that effective outreach to the world outside the church must include a utilization of the things of the world. The Church has

done this since the days of kings and prophets, like Nathan who used a parable to rebuke David. This was continued in Jesus, who used stories and parables to speak eternal truth. Continuing that legacy is the mission of the contemporary Church.

A missional church, they suggest, needs to know and exegete Oprah, Lost and Lady Gaga as well as Hillsong and James Dobson. It is important to view films like *Chocolat*, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *Lars and the Real Girl* as well as to consult Bible commentaries. We also need theological reflection on cultural obsessions—fitness and home renovations, reality TV and online dating, catering and holidays, consumerism and self-improvement, and so on. These are places where people are looking for significance and meaning. (Hammond 106)

Game-based learning is contextualization of a world that is fascinating to a subset of the population. Leveraged alongside a curriculum—for this project, an analysis of Judeo-Christian kings—there should be notable impact on the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of participants.

Research Design Literature

Determining the impact of the curriculum on a participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior is an interventionist model of research that could be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. A multi-method approach was employed. It included a questionnaire, a survey, journal prompts, and a focus group.

To measure the impact on a participant's knowledge, an open-ended response questionnaire approved by educational and religious experts was administered both before and after the four-week curriculum. Sensing says that a questionnaire like this is a “paper and pencil instrument for doing an interview” (Sensing, ch. 4). A participant's

responses from the post-study questionnaire were compared to responses from the pre-study questionnaire to determine knowledge acquisition and retention.

The impact on a participant's attitude was measured by an adapted version of educational theorist John Keller's *Course Interest Survey*. This fixed-response questionnaire quantitatively measures a participant's interest toward a course by assessing attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction (Keller 44; Sensing, ch. 4). It is designed to be administered at the conclusion of a course or lesson.

Changes in a participant's behavior were identified through journal prompts. These prompts ask participants to reflect upon their words and actions in light of the previous session's curriculum. Such journals are viewed by Sensing as a primary source's opinion related to a question asked, but must not be viewed as scholarly or authoritative (Sensing, ch. 4). Nevertheless, journals can be interpreted by a researcher though the researcher must take care to remain within the bounds and scope of the project.

Finally, a focus group interview was used to allow for participants to process and respond to the curriculum together. Sensing offers that a focus group is beneficial to the researcher as "the synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately," and individual responses may build on one another (Sensing, ch. 4). Additionally, focus groups may help the researcher identify unanticipated distinctions in the demographics, education levels, or other factors within the group (Sensing, ch. 4). The researcher must also be aware of any emotions that might emerge within the group and be prepared to maintain composure and poise (Sensing, ch. 4).

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods revealed the overall impact of the curriculum on a participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This multi-method approach garnered a fuller understanding of the total impact than the methods would have produced individually.

Summary of Literature

The knowledge that serves as the foundational curriculum of this project is based on the history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship. The history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship finds its roots in ancient near-eastern cultures. Evolving from Egypt's God-King, Pharaoh, and the Priest-Kings of Mesopotamia, Judeo-Christian kingship was an accountable system of kings and prophets. While prophets served to legitimate the king and declare God's word to the people, the king was "God's anointed," the one who would deliver order to the chaos of the world by invoking God's attributes—creativity, provision, justice, regret, wrath, and compassion.

Kings ascend the throne through an ascension story, a four-part progression that proves a king's worthiness to reign in the sight of both God and the people. The ascension story begins with trials that reveal a king's character and heart while increasing the overall notoriety of the king. These trials often include mundane tasks, tests of strength, or religious temptations. The second progression of an ascension story includes all of a king's relationships. These can be romantic relationships, dear friends, antagonists, and—most importantly—prophets. The third part of the ascension story is a king's assumption of kingly responsibility over others. This refers to a king embracing the burden of responsibility necessary to properly rule over a kingdom, having care and concern for its citizens. The final part of the ascension story is the deliverance of kingly

order and justice. It includes a king exhibiting God's attributes—creativity, provision, justice, regret, wrath, and compassion—to bring about God's intentional will in shaping the world through the king.

Kings who falter in any of these four areas endanger their claim to the throne. The prophets, citizens, and, most importantly, God rejects kings who fail to ascend through all four of these stages. The failures of Israel's earliest kings resulted in the nation fracturing in two—Israel in the north, Judah in the south. The continued downfall of the monarchs in both Israel and Judah led to both being overthrown by opposing nations, leading to a period of exile. Ultimately, the downfall of the individual kings ended the monarchy.

In the years during and following the exile, prophets offered hope by promoting the idea of a new king who would emerge to bring justice to Israel—the Messiah. Christians declare Jesus to be that Messiah, the King of Kings who enhances, repudiates, and fulfills the kingship of Israel by finishing the work unfinished by prior kings. Jesus overcame his trials through temptations in the desert. Supported by his friends, followers, and prophet, John the Baptist, Jesus maintained kingly relationships even with his enemies. From the transfiguration to Gethsemane, Jesus assumed responsibility for those he came to save. At the cross, Jesus brought order and justice by delivering God's attributes through his own self-sacrifice. Through these, and ultimately through the resurrection, Jesus proves himself as the King of Kings. This is the culmination of the entire study of Judeo-Christian kingship.

Teaching this knowledge to students effectively demands making the curriculum approachable, relevant, and interesting. Scholars building on the work of Piaget,

Vygotsky, and Dewey promote game-based learning as the solution. Their work identifies a correlation between the formation of memory while playing a narrative based video game and education. Educators in humanities, particularly those who have used video games to supplement their curriculum, report significant improvement in both knowledge acquisition and interest. Additionally, researchers cite knowledge and interest as key components that impact a person's moral education and behavior.

Therefore, the research supports that utilizing a video game to teach a curriculum would positively impact a participant's knowledge, attitude, and behavior. This project seeks to further that research by evaluating the impact of this practice for the subject of Judeo-Christian kingship.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will introduce the methods used in this project along with an explanation of how the methods were used. As an intervention-style of research, the methods follow a standard form of research related to changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of participants before and after an experience (in this case, a curriculum). A detailed explanation for how the research was performed is provided with special attention given to the context of the University of Alabama Wesley campus ministry.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The concepts of sacral kingship and ascension stories are often ignored by Christians. Because a knowledge of these concepts will illuminate Jewish Kingship and Christianity in ways that lead to stronger faith and practice, a new method of teaching is crucial.

Ultimately, this project will measure the effectiveness of teaching college students the history and theology of Jewish Kingship by using Final Fantasy XV as a primary text. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to determine the appeal and effectiveness of this method in teaching what many consider to be an uninteresting portion of scripture. Research shows that gamification of learning leads to increased performance and motivation in participants, at least in some disciplines (Wichadee, 89 Bell 181; Ku 75). Similarly, this project seeks to test whether gamification is useful for improving performance/knowledge and attitudes/motivation regarding concepts related to Judeo-

Christian kingship. Since matters of faith are also tested by practice, this research will also evaluate a participant's behavior during the study through self-assessment.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What changes in knowledge of Judeo-Christian Kingship occurred as a result of the study?

This research question addressed the knowledge aspect of the purpose statement. It examined the impact of the curriculum in teaching a general history and theology related to sacral kingship in Judeo-Christian thought. Through a test administered before the first session and after the final session, a change in participant knowledge was gauged. Questions 1-10 were uniquely designed to gauge proficiency in basic concepts outlined in the literature review. Following testing, answers were compared to determine what changes in knowledge, if any, were made.

Research Question 2: What impact did the study have on attitude toward Judeo-Christian Kingship?

This research question addressed the attitudinal aspect of the purpose statement, examining the impact of the curriculum on one's level of interest in concepts of Judeo-Christian Kingship. Using an adapted form of the *Course Interest Survey (CIS)* (Keller, 2010), changes in motivation and interest were gauged after the final session regarding the subject matter. Attitudinal interest is defined by Keller as a combination of attention, relevancy, and confidence as they affect general satisfaction.

Additionally, a focus group was held following the final session of the study. Questions regarding effectiveness of the curriculum were asked during this focus group, allowing for more open-ended answers.

Research Question 3: What changes in behavior occurred as a result of the study?

This research question addressed the behavioral aspect of the purpose statement, evaluating the behaviors that emerged as a result of the project. Behavior was determined through an open-ended weekly journal that required participants to 1) read specific passages of scripture, 2) play specific portions of Final Fantasy XV, and 3) reflect on the content before answering a prompt that inquired about behaviors resulting from the study. The prompts used were:

- Session 1: “How have the lessons on a king’s trials and relationships impacted your week?”
- Session 2: “How have the lessons on a king’s responsibility and justice impacted your week?”
- Session 3: “How have the lessons on the downfall of kingship impacted your week?”
- Session 4: “How have the lessons on a king’s redemption impacted your week?”

Ministry Context

This research took place with students at the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation campus ministry (called Bama Wesley). Bama Wesley consists of approximately one hundred students, aged 18-25 years old. Most of the students are white Americans from upper middle-class families. American minority students and international students make up less than five percent of the population.

Religiously, Bama Wesley consists of largely Protestant Christians. While Bama Wesley is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, students who participate are not exclusively United Methodist. Many streams of Christianity are represented, including

Baptist, Episcopal, nondenominational, and even Catholic students. Additionally, some students attend Wesley for chiefly social reasons and have no interest in spiritual components.

As a campus ministry at a large, research-based institution, members of the ministry are accustomed to the academic setting. Among students, there is generally a high value and emphasis on learning.

Similar to others their age, students at Wesley devote a large amount of time to playing video games—sometimes in groups, sometimes alone. Even those who are not skilled at games often play or at least watch others play. Therefore, there is a sense of familiarity and affinity toward the medium.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The study was offered to all Wesley students (and anyone else who heard about the study and showed interest) as an option within the discipleship structure of Bama Wesley. As such, students opted to be a part of this study. They were made aware of the research component of this project.

Description of Participants

Approximately twenty members of the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation campus ministry, ranging between the ages of 18-25, were invited to participate in the study. Participants were men and women of good physical and mental health. They held varying attitudes toward and knowledge of Judeo-Christian kingship. They also had varying interest in video games. While most were Christians, one identified as non-

Christian. All demographic data was collected through a Demographic Data Instrument (Appendix A). Students created aliases to maintain their anonymity.

This selection was intentional as the research hopes to determine as broad a study as possible within the confines of the campus ministry. The design of the research is to simply measure whether or not there is improvement; therefore, it is beneficial to have as many different starting points as possible for the individuals.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the nature of the study through a consent form (Appendix B).

Findings will be shared in a colloquium with Doctor of Ministry colleagues and Asbury Theological Seminary faculty at the Wilmore, Kentucky ATS Campus. All data recorded will be deleted or destroyed within six to twelve months following the conclusion of the research project, including any personally identifying documents.

Instrumentation

Curriculum (Appendix C)

The curriculum was designed to teach participants the history and theology of Judeo-Christian kingship through four sessions describing the following:

- 1) the trials and relationships of kingship, wherein participants learn about the initiatory rites involved in the ascension of Saul, David, and other Jewish kings, and the vital relationships that foster and sustain a king's ascension story and rule.
- 2) the responsibility and justice of a kingship, wherein participants learn about the burden of responsibility a king to rule and govern with justice as they

relate to ascension stories, with special attention given to Saul, David, and other Jewish kings.

- 3) the downfall of kingship, wherein participants learn about the downfall of kingship through the reversal of ascension themes, especially through the examples of Saul, David, and other Jewish kings.
- 4) the redemption of kingship, wherein participants learn about the redemption of the failures of past kings through a renewal of the ascension story themes in Jesus Christ, the so-called “King of Kings.”

While the curriculum allows for discussion, no data will be collected during these instructional sessions.

Knowledge Pretest and Posttest (Appendix D)

To measure the impact of the curriculum on knowledge/performance of the history and theology of Judeo-Christian Kingship, a pretest and posttest will be used. The test is uniquely designed to coincide with the curriculum for this study.

Journal Entries (Appendix E)

To measure the impact of the curriculum on participant behavior, open-ended journal responses to specific prompts will be used. These answers will be analyzed to determine if any particular commonalities emerge.

Course Interest Survey (Appendix F)

To measure attitude/interest regarding the history and theology of Judeo-Christian Kingship, John Keller’s *Course Interest Survey* (2010) will be used. This thirty-four question test asks participants to evaluate the teaching method according to their attention, relevance, confidence, and overall satisfaction. Because not all prompts were

pertinent to this study, changes were made as needed in compliance with Keller's allowances for amendment, and approved by expert reviewers and the Institutional Review Board. Responses will help identify whether or not the curriculum proved interesting and appealing to participants. Keller's method has been used in myriad studies.

Focus Group (Appendix G)

To further evaluate the curriculum's impact on the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of participants, a focus group will be used following the final session of the study. This will allow for more open-ended responses and invite evaluative critique.

Generally, the focus group will further evaluate a participant's interest level. However, open-ended answers may reveal helpful data for the other areas as well. Therefore, answers will be coded to 1) knowledge, 2) attitudes, or 3) behavior.

Pilot Test or Expert Review

Two Bible studies and two college-level courses utilizing some of the same subject matter and teaching methods informed this curriculum and research. Informal responses gathered from those opportunities helped identify changes in a participant's knowledge, attitude, and behavior. This research allows for a more formal exploration of those changes identified during those preliminary studies.

Keller's *Course Interest Survey* (2010) has been extensively tested and used in myriad research projects.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The Knowledge Pretest and Posttest is specifically designed as part of this curriculum and adapted from the college-level course in Judeo-Christian Kingship using

similar curriculum at the University of Alabama. Questions used in the pretest/posttest, focus group, and journal prompts have been approved through the expert review process. John Keller's *Course Interest Survey* (2010) has been extensively tested and used in myriad research projects. Adaptations to the survey were reviewed by experts.

Data Collection

The type of research in this project is referred to as intervention since it evaluates the impact of introducing a variable to participants. Sensing defines interventionist research in a ministry context as a “type of action research where the researcher becomes a co-participant with the community in the process of gathering and interpreting data to enable new and transformative modes of action” (Sensing 63). This project reviewed the effectiveness of a curriculum that uses game-based learning, and measures the impact of the curriculum on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

This project used qualitative mixed-methods research collected through an open-response Pretest/Posttest, a series of open-ended journal prompts, Keller's *Course Interest Survey*, and a focus group. These were chosen to gather information regarding changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of participants as well as any other information the participants may want to share.

During the introductory session that both obtains consent of participants and orients them to the research, participants were given the Pretest/Posttest. Participants were also instructed as to what activities they must complete for each of the subsequent teaching sessions. Those activities included completing the Biblical reading assignment, playing through the specified chapters of the game, and answering the journal prompts.

The four teaching sessions covered four topics, respectively: 1) the trials and relationships of kingship, 2) the responsibility and justice of kingship, 3) the fall of kingship, and 4) the redemption of kingship. These sessions included biblical material as well as prerecorded scenes from the video game. Discussion was allowed at certain points in the teaching sessions though no data was collected during these times.

Following the fourth teaching session, the Pretest/Posttest was re-administered. Then, the *Course Interest Survey* was administered. Finally, the session ended with a video-recorded focus group.

Data Analysis

Data collected through the Pretest/Posttest was compared upon completion of the second administering. Responses were also graded for correctness against the intended themes and educational objectives (history and theology of kingship, ascension story themes).

Responses to the *Course Interest Survey* were analyzed according to Keller's scoring system for the instrument.

Open-ended responses from the focus group and journal prompts were coded according to 1) knowledge, 2) attitudes, and 3) behaviors. I coded according to context with particular attention given to several phrases. References to specific curriculum elements (ascension story themes, kings, theological concepts, etc.) were coded as "knowledge." References to subjective opinions of the curriculum, particularly any relations between interest level and the gamification of the concepts were categorized as "attitudes." References to general actions, spiritual disciplines, morality, or personal development caused by the curriculum were coded as "behavior."

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

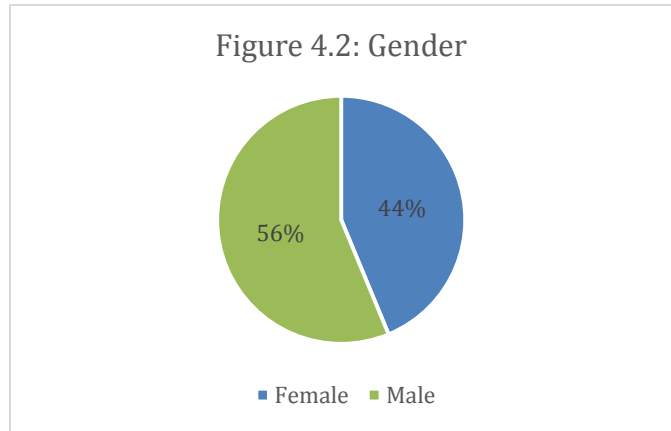
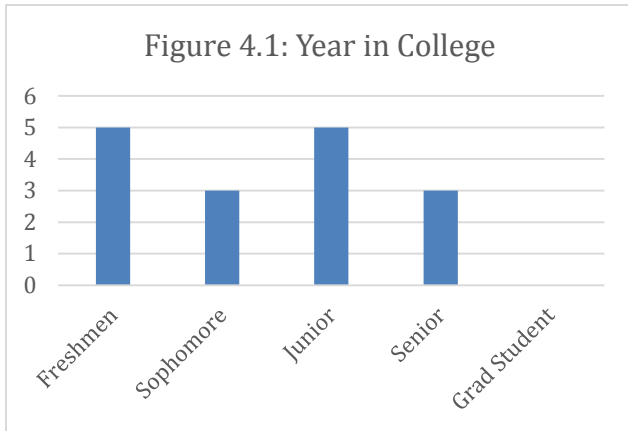
Judeo-Christian kingship is largely overlooked by adolescent Christians though the topic is vital to a full understanding of theological concepts such as messianic hope and atonement. Despite its importance, the biblical narratives detailing the triumphs and failures of kings are deemed by younger readers as irrelevant to modern life albeit necessary for history, akin to biblical genealogies. This disinterest has resulted in a general ignorance of the material.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact on a student's engagement with the field of Judeo-Christian kingship when taught through an analogous video game, *Final Fantasy XV*. This study determined changes in a participant's knowledge of and interest in Judeo-Christian kingship. It also examined any changes in a participant's moral and spiritual behavior as a result of the study.

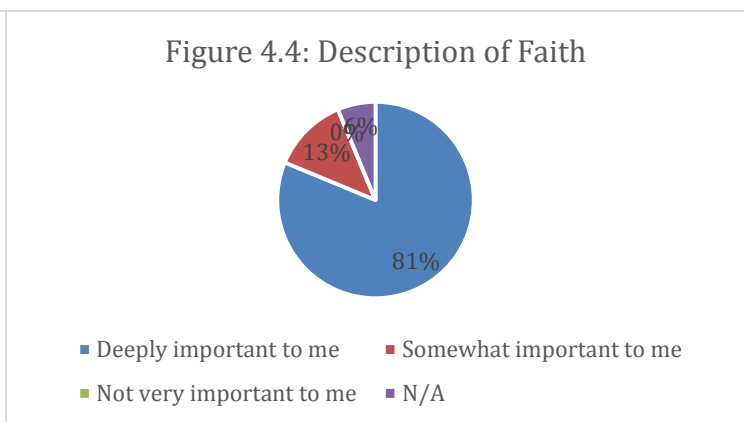
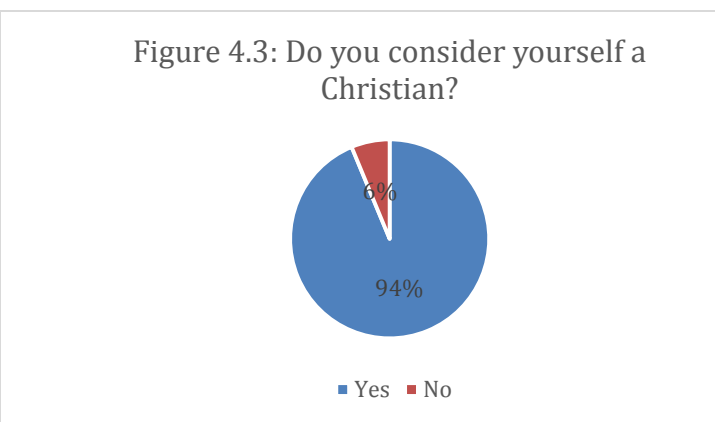
Participants

Twenty students from the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation applied to participate in the study. Only sixteen were eligible as the others had already participated in pilot versions of the curriculum. Five of those participants attended additional sessions offered for the sessions they could not attend. One of the sixteen participants did not attend two of the sessions and did not attend make-up sessions. Three participants did not submit a journal. The limited data collected from those participants is included. Thirteen participants completed the full program. Data from sixteen participants is included.

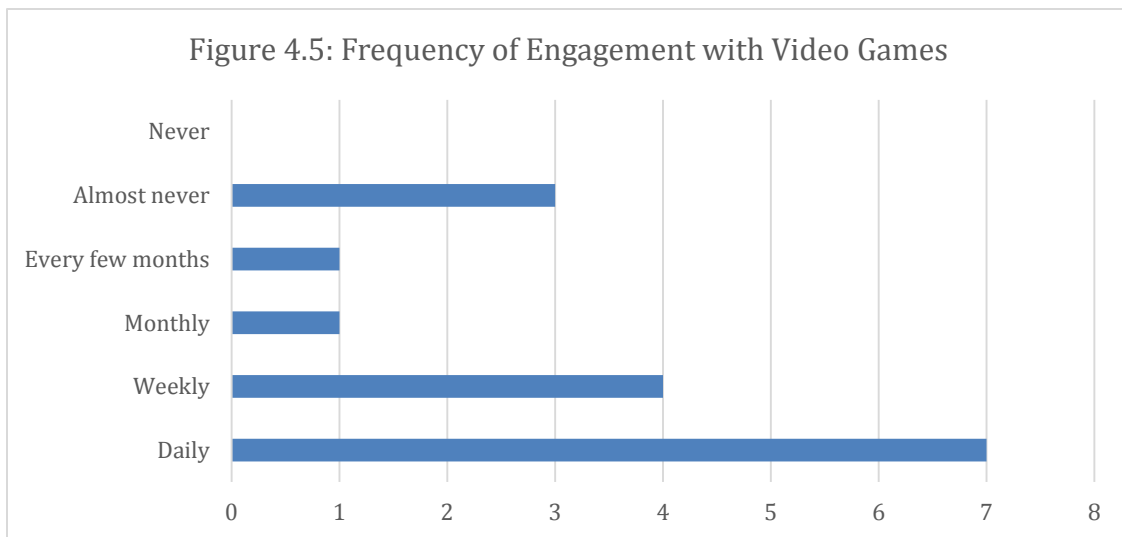
The participants included between three and five students from each class of undergraduate studies with more freshmen and juniors. (See Figure 4.1) There were no grad students. The participants included nine males and seven females. (See Figure 4.2)



Regarding the faith of the sixteen participants, only one claimed to not have faith. (See Figure 4.3) Of the fifteen others, thirteen responded that their faith was “deeply important” to them while two others responded faith was “somewhat important.” (See Figure 4.4)



Finally, every participant said they had some engagement with video games prior to the study with the majority claiming daily engagement, then weekly. Seven participants stated they play video games daily. Three participants stated they “almost never” play video games. (See Figure 4.5)



Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

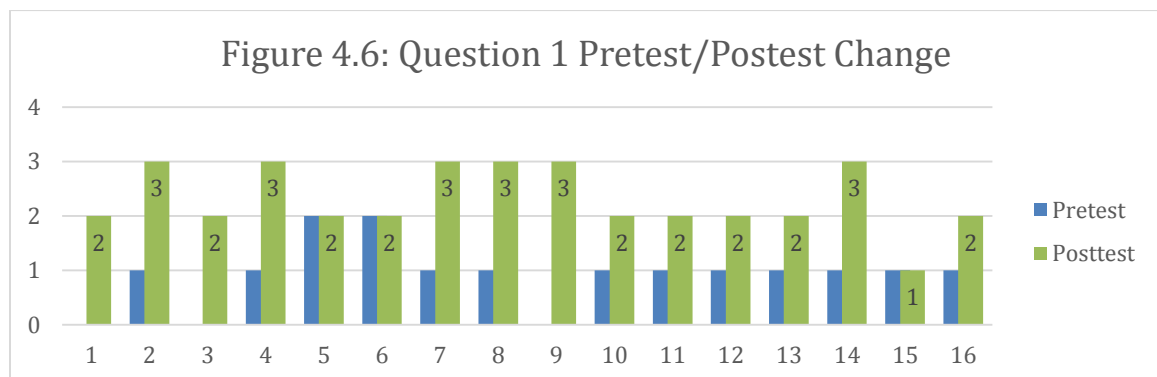
What changes in knowledge (performance, achievement) of Judeo-Christian kingship occurred as a result of the study?

The Pretest/Posttest questionnaire included six questions that allowed for open-ended responses that would reveal basic knowledge of Judeo-Christian kingship. The questions addressed six key components of kingship: trials, relationships, responsibility, justice/order, the downfall of kingship, and the redemption of kingship through Jesus. Each question offered opportunity for a definition and/or an example of the concept. Questions were graded on a three-point scale with four of six questions offering up to three points for definition and up to three points for examples. Answers that defined the specified concept were categorized as “Fully correct” (three-points), “Mostly correct”

(two-points), “Partially correct” (one-point), or “Incorrect” (zero-points) according to a specified correct answer, rooted in the literature review. Responses that only referred to part of the specified answer received partial credit. Responses that bore no resemblance to this answer received no credit. Answers that offered examples were categorized as “Biblical example” (three-points), “FFXV example” (two-points), or “Example outside of the study” (one-point), or “No example” (zero-points). Additionally, examples were assessed according to general relevance to the question and irrelevant examples were awarded zero points. Each question in the questionnaire will be addressed individually.

Question 1 asked, “What role do trials play in a king’s ascension? Describe any examples of this.” A fully correct response regarding the definition of trials stated that a trial is a test that reveals a king’s heart and character, serving to increase the king’s influence among those the king will lead.

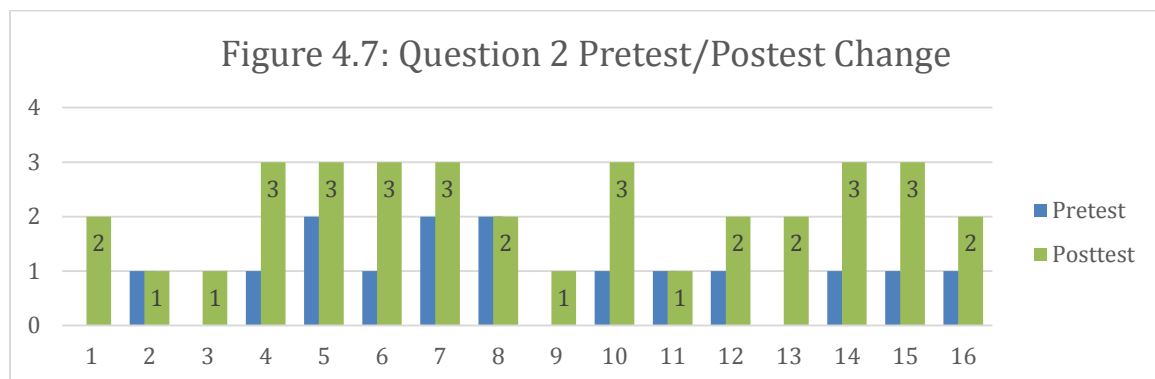
The data showed an increase for thirteen participants in knowledge of question 1, “the trials of a king,” between the Pretest and the Posttest. The average for the group was a 46.3 percent increase in knowledge with three students exhibiting zero change in knowledge and one student moving from no knowledge to full knowledge. The median percentage of change was 50 percent. (See Figure 4.6)



Additionally, the data collected from question 1 included an increase in the use of examples to describe biblical trials. This included examples from both relevant scenes from the game and biblical narrative. In the Pretest, two participants referenced biblical examples of trials while six additional participants referenced biblical narratives in the Posttest. These students most often referenced David and Goliath as the primary example of kingship.

Question 2 asked, “What is the relationship between a king and a prophet? What roles does each play? Describe any examples of this.” A fully correct response regarding the definition of the king-prophet relationship stated that a prophet serves as the king’s counsel/conscience, declares the word of the Lord, and legitimizes the king’s reign while the king delivers justice and order.

The data showed an increase in thirteen participants in question 2, “the relationships of a king,” between the Pretest and the Posttest. The average for the group was a 41.7 percent increase in knowledge with the greatest increase being two points, or 66.7 percent, achieved by seven participants. The median percentage of change was 33.3 percent. (See Figure 4.7)

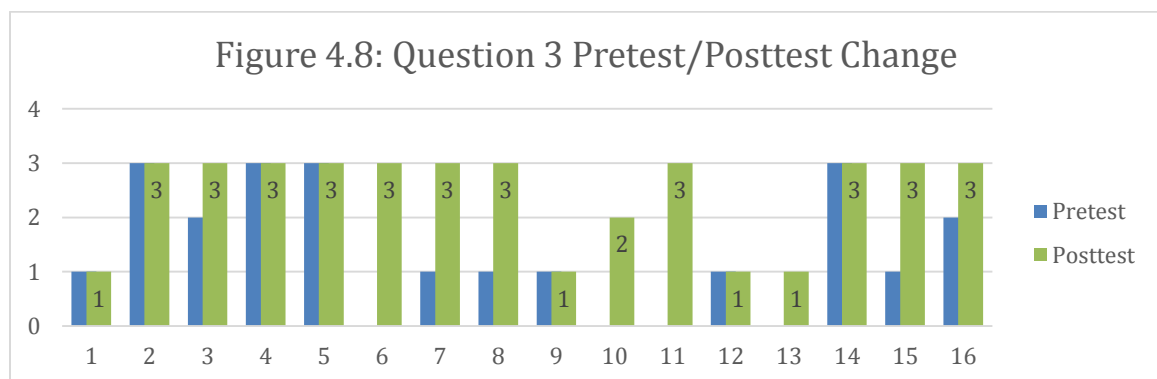


The data also showed an increase in the use of examples of relationship with the prophet. While for both the Pretest and the Posttest, the majority of students did not offer

any example, biblical examples grew from two responses in the Pretest to six responses in the Posttest. Three people referenced the game. Most of the respondents' examples referenced Samuel's relationship with David or Saul as well as the prophetic analogue between Noctis and Luna in the game.

Question 3 asked, "What burden of responsibility does a king have? Describe any examples of this." A fully correct response regarding the definition of kingly responsibility included the king's embrace of the duty of protecting, shepherding, and acting on behalf of those within the kingdom.

The data showed that ten participants exhibited an increase in knowledge regarding question 3, "kingly responsibility," and eleven participants scored perfectly in the Posttest. Generally, there was a 35.4 percent increase in knowledge though seven participants exhibited no change and two participants exhibited a 100 percent change. The median percentage of change was 33.3 percent. (See Figure 4.8)

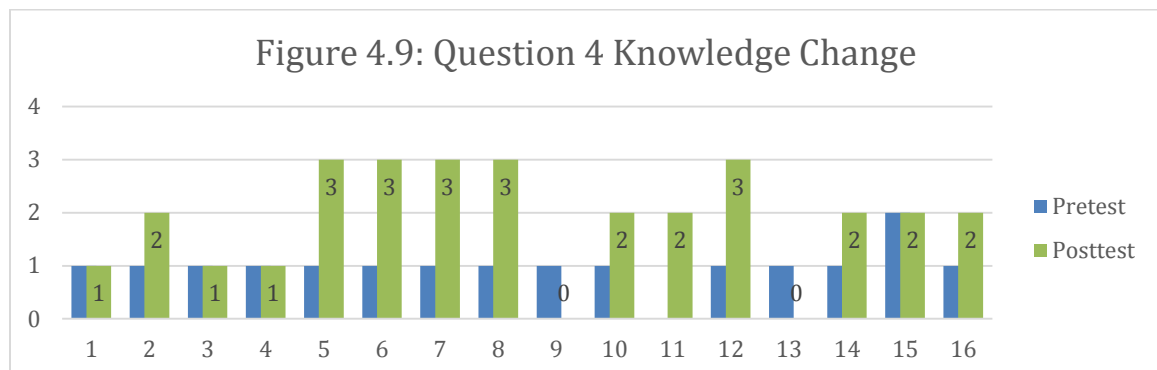


The data also showed an increase in the use of biblical examples. While only one participant included a biblical example in both the Pretest and Posttest, seven additional participants referenced narratives in the Posttest. Three of these participants referenced Jesus taking on the responsibility of the cross and five of these participants referenced the primary example of David and the priests of Nob. All but one of those that referenced

the game’s analogue described Noctis taking responsibility for Jared’s death, the primary analogue for David and the priests of Nob.

Question 4 asked, “What is the importance of a king’s ability to deliver justice? Describe any examples of this.” A fully correct response regarding the definition of kingly justice stated that the king brought order to chaos by embodying one or more of the six attributes of God—creativity, provision, regret, justice, wrath, and compassion.

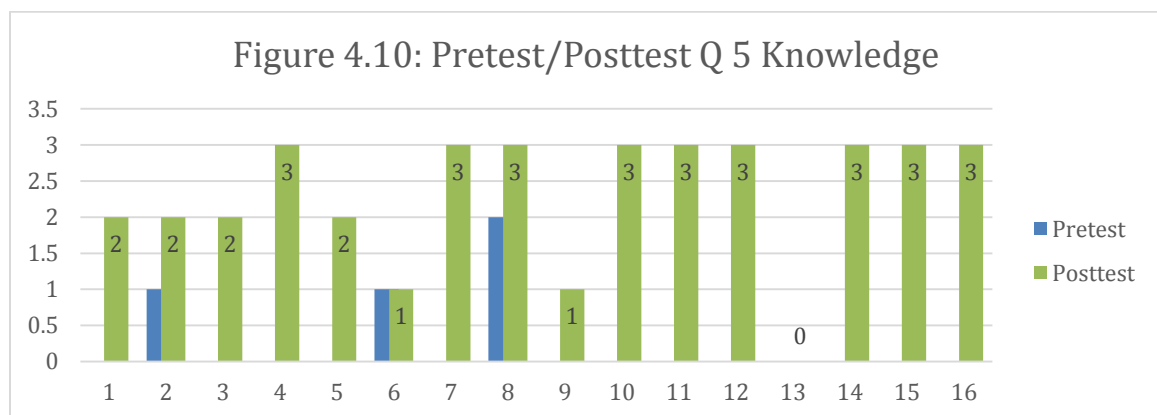
The data showed that ten participants increased in their knowledge of question 4, “delivering kingly justice.” However, four participants exhibited no change in knowledge and two participants scored less than they did on their Pretest. The overall average percentage of change was 29.2 percent. The median was 33.3 percent. (See Figure 4.9)



Data showed a slight increase in the use of biblical examples though the majority of responses excluded examples. In the Pretest, two participants referenced a biblical example of kingly justice. In the Posttest, five participants referenced scriptural examples (including those who mentioned it in the Pretest). Typical examples used referenced wrath or violence. One example referenced Jesus being punished for human sin on the cross. Another example recalled the wisdom and provision of Solomon.

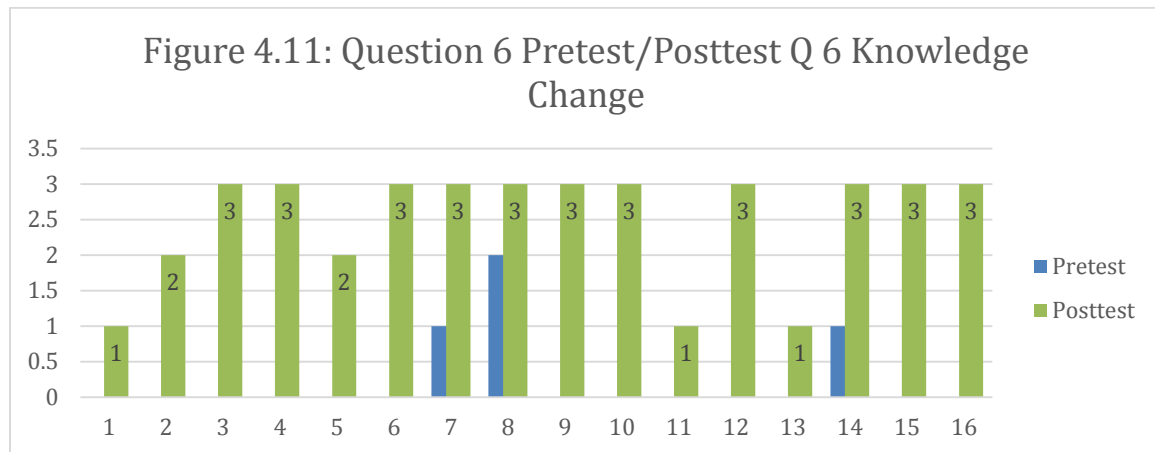
Question 5 asked, “Why was Saul rejected as king?” A fully correct response stated that Saul overstepped his bounds as king, breaching the roles designated by God for kings and prophets by performing a sacrifice. Additionally, a correct response would allude to Saul’s undoing of his own ascension story—failed trials, ruined relationships, refusal to accept responsibility, and inability to deliver order/justice.

The data reveals an increase in knowledge of question 5, “The Downfall of Kings,” for fourteen of the sixteen participants. Two participants exhibited no change in knowledge with one exhibiting no knowledge in both Pretest and Posttest. Eleven participants responded that they lacked any knowledge to answer this question. Only three participants exhibited any correct prior knowledge on this subject in the Pretest, ranging from “slightly correct” to “mostly correct.” Nine participants earned perfect scores on this topic in the Posttest. The data revealed an average 68.8 percent increase in knowledge for the group as a whole. The median was 83.3 percent. (See Figure 4.10)



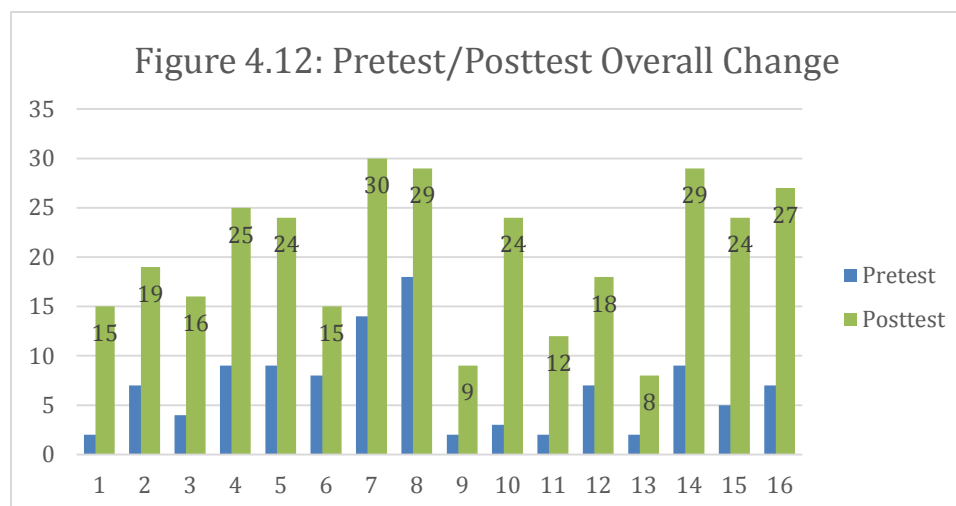
The final question, question 6, asked, “How does Jesus redeem sacral kingship?” A fully correct response stated that Jesus, the King of Kings, enhances, repudiates, and fulfills the paradigm of kingship set forth by God. Correct answers also stated that where

former kings failed trials, ruined relationships, refused to accept responsibility, and did not deliver justice/order, Jesus succeeded, thus fully revealing and satisfying all aspects of God—creativity, provision, regret, justice, wrath, and compassion. (See Figure 4.11)



The data revealed that for question 6, “The Redemption of Kingship through Jesus,” all sixteen participants exhibited some increase in knowledge. Only three participants showed any previous knowledge of the subject in the Pretest. Nine participants did not answer the question, claiming a lack of knowledge of the content or a lack of understanding the question. In the Posttest, eleven participants earned perfect scores. The average change in knowledge for the group was a 75 percent increase. The median was 83.3 percent.

Compiled data from all six questions reveal growth in the knowledge of Judeo-Christian kingship from the Pretest to the Posttest. On the Pretest, participants scored between two and eighteen points, averaging to 6.75 points, out of a possible thirty. On the Posttest, participants scored between eight and thirty points, for an average of 20.25 points, out of a possible thirty. The average percentage of change for the group was a 45 percent increase in knowledge. (See Figure 4.12)



The Pretest/Posttest revealed an increase in knowledge in every part of the curriculum's content.

Focus Group Findings: Heightened Knowledge of Biblical Stories

In the focus group, participants confirmed that their knowledge of kingship had drastically increased. Over half the participants claimed that their knowledge of kingship prior to the study was negligible. Following this study, the participants claimed to have a much deeper understanding of both the history and theology surrounding kingship.

This was reinforced by the focus group's conversations as participants regularly referred to the following specific concepts and narratives from the course.

- The overarching ascension story
- The king's relationships with protectors, advisors, best friends, and prophets
- The role of the prophet and prophetic speech in 1 Samuel 12
- The personification of the six attributes of God
- The dynamic between Old Testament kingship and New Testament theology

The increased use of specific examples and particular details—particularly given the Pretest scores—revealed an acquisition of knowledge.

A New Appreciation for Old Stories

In addition to acquiring new knowledge, some participants explained in the focus group that, though they had previously learned many of the kingship stories, this study made them revisit and appreciate the knowledge in a new and relevant way. Several mentioned how their understanding of David's fight with Goliath changed as a result of the study. Similarly, several discussed how this study helped them understand Jesus differently, redefining his title, "King of Kings." New knowledge resulted in deeper insight and theological considerations.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

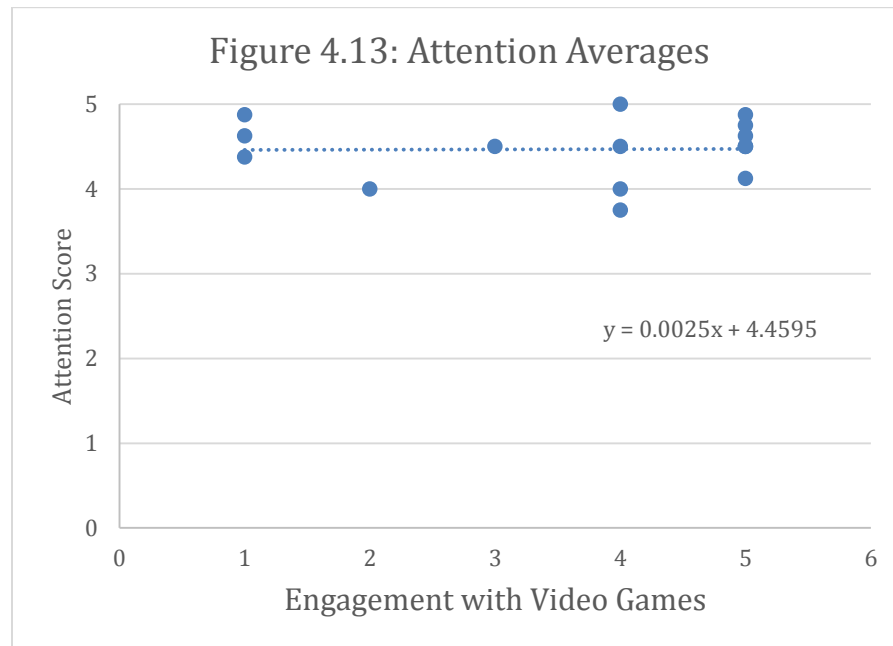
What impact did the study have on attitude (interest) toward Judeo-Christian Kingship?

The *Course Interest Survey* revealed the general attitude of the participants toward the course following the study, compiling data from four areas: attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. This is presented with respect to one's engagement with video games, as recorded in the demographic research.

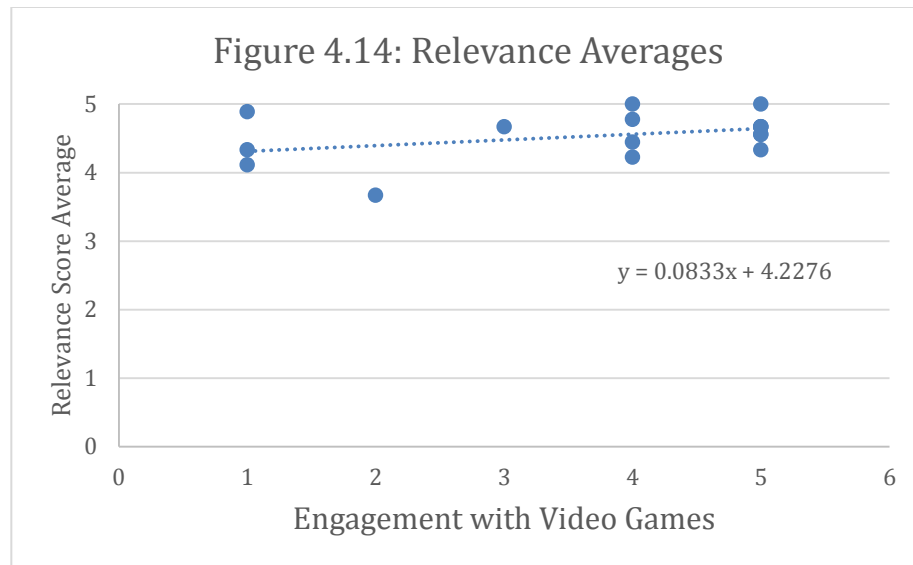
Levels of Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction

The first results reveal the study held a significant level of the participants' attention. Data from the survey revealed an average group attention score of 4.47 out of five, with 3.75 as the lowest score recorded and five as the highest. The average percentage level for interest was 89.38 percent. Results showed an insignificant increase

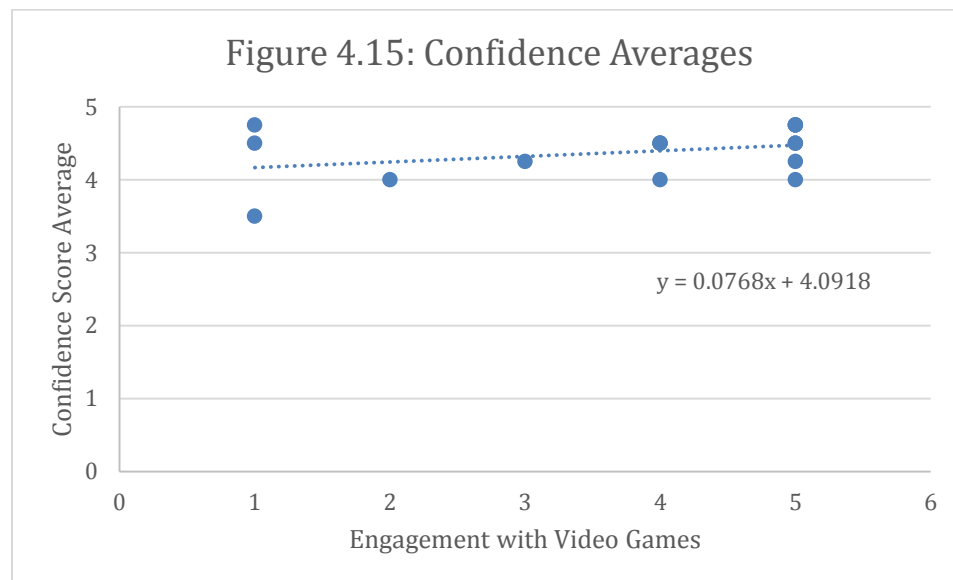
of .2 percent in one's attention score for participants who have higher levels of engagement with video games. (See Figure 4.13)



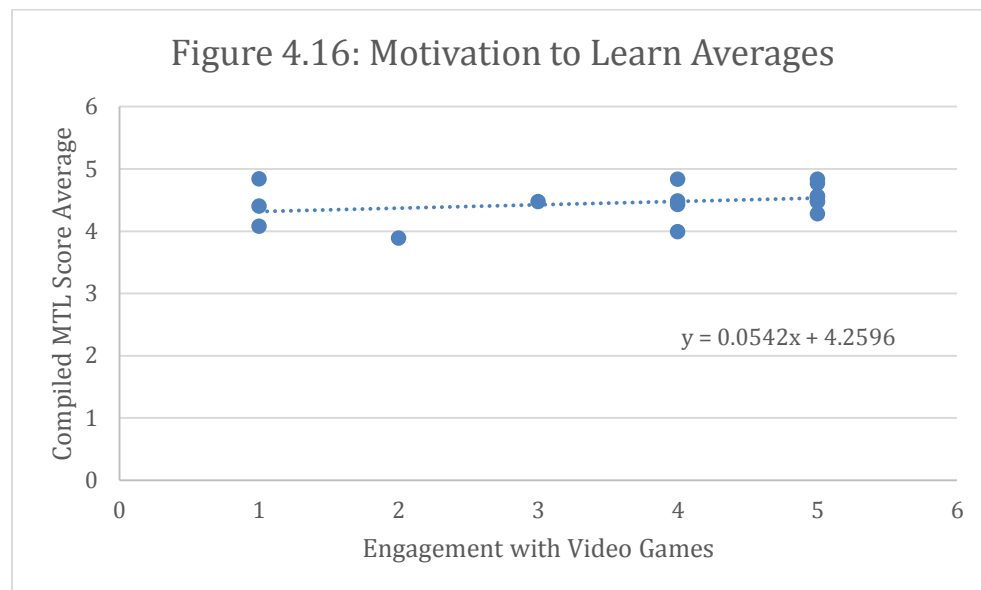
Next, results revealed that participants considered the curriculum highly relevant. Data from the survey revealed an average group score of 4.53 out of five, with 3.67 as the lowest score recorded and five as the highest. The average percentage level for relevance was 90.69 percent. Results showed a significant increase of 8.3 percent in the relevance scores for participants who have higher levels of engagement with video games. (See Figure 4.14)



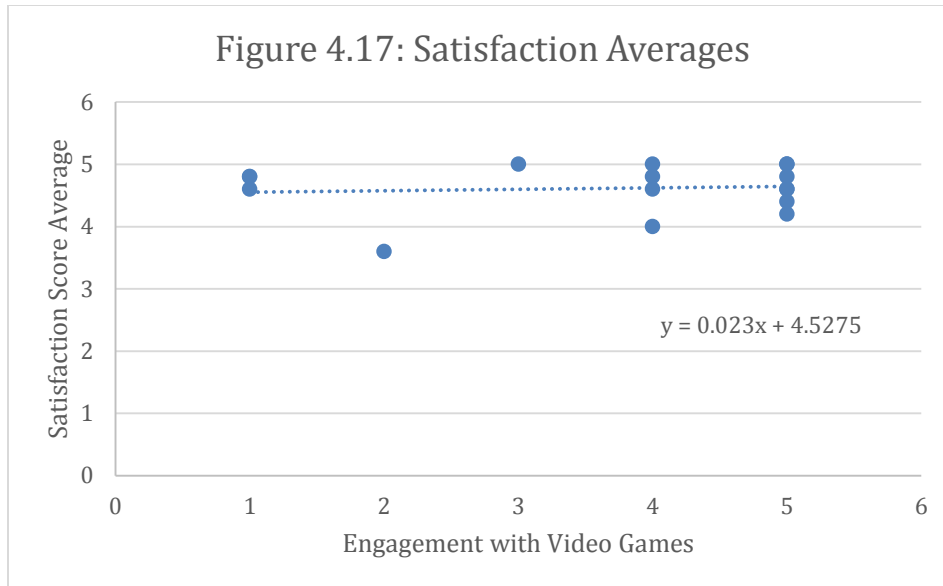
Thirdly, results revealed that participants felt mostly confident in their abilities to complete the study. Data from the survey revealed an average group score of 4.38 out of five, with 3.5 as the lowest score recorded and 4.75 as the highest. The average percentage level for confidence was 87.5 percent. Results showed a significant increase of 7.7 percent in the confidence scores for participants who have higher levels of engagement with video games. (See Figure 4.15)



Results combining the average scores of attention, relevance, and confidence revealed an average motivation to learn score of 4.46 out of five, with 3.88 as the lowest score and 4.84 as the highest. A significant increase in motivation of 5.4 percent was found for participants who claimed to engage in video games with more frequency prior to the study. (See Figure 4.16)



Finally, results revealed that participants were highly satisfied in the study. Data from the survey revealed an average group score of 4.61 out of five, with 3.6 as the lowest score recorded and five as the highest. The average percentage level for satisfaction was 92.3 percent. Results showed an insignificant increase of 2.3 percent in the satisfaction scores for participants who have higher levels of engagement with video games. (See Figure 4.17)



Focus Group Findings: Curriculum Generated Interest

In the focus group, participants expressed a prior disinterest in biblical kingship. Many recalled bewilderment over pastors and teachers who found the topic interesting because the participants found it dull, similar to the genealogies of the Bible. A few participants relegated the topic to stories of “fighting and gore” (Wanda Maximov) and found them unappealing. One referred to the kingship narratives merely as a bridge between the beginning of the Bible and the New Testament (Jackson).

However, participants described a significant change in their interest as a result of the study. Relevance of the curriculum’s concepts was brought up several times. One person attributed her change in interest to being able to see the kings as more relatable, human figures rather than static, faceless figures (Zelda Reynolds). Terrance Cobb, another participant, mentioned that the study “highlighted the humanity of Jesus, which I feel like often we kind of look over, because we think of him as the son of God, but we also forget that was also human and struggled the same things as us, and had to take on

the sin of us, and it just puts a new perspective.” The relatability of the curriculum seemed to be a significant source of interest for the participants.

A few participants expressed a motivation to continue studying Jewish kings after the study. Andrew Williams said, “It made me more interested in that, I don’t want to stop here necessarily. I want to keep looking at the other kings and see how they fit into the story of ascension and how the prophets fit the guidelines we set out. And seeing, again, how they failed and how like Jesus was different from them. And doing a cool compare and contrast between the different kings.”

Focus Group Findings: Interest Generated by Meaningful Moments and “First-Hand” Experience

These statistics were reinforced by comments in the Focus Group following the study. Key findings tied interest level to meaningful and impactful moments from the game, resulting in greater knowledge acquisition. When asked about meaningful moments in the study that heightened their interest, participants remembered a comparison in the study between a significant event in the game and 1 Samuel 12’s prophetic speech.

[What was most meaningful to me was] Luna’s prayer. Breaking that down and really showing how passionate the prophets are, and their connection the people, really displayed it in a way I hadn’t seen it before. I always think of Elijah being in the cave and just really far removed. But that’s really an isolated incident. Whereas they’re more passionate in trying to convey the message God has given them, and trying to give hope to the people overall. (Terrance Cobb)

[H]earing the prophet’s words read for the second time in the study with more of a call to action mindset and music in the background— power

move of the month— really kinda put into frame like, you have more of a reference of what it was like to people in the Bible and in the Bible times. Like the first time you read the passage it was like, “Oh, another Bible passage,” but the second time felt much more real, much more relatable and emotionally charged. (Zelda Reynolds)

Other participants referenced analogues between the game and God’s attributes.

I think what was most meaningful to me was seeing the personification of the attributes of God. Just because you know, you can say, these 7 attributes, or 6 attributes, but then if you actually sit there and think about it, you may picture an instance or a situation, but seeing those personified makes you have a whole other understanding. I mean Wrath was absolutely terrifying. Just on fire everywhere. And then you have compassion being ice, which is not always associated with being compassionate and being something that’s welcoming. It gave you, for me, it gave a whole new realm of being able to personify emotions and situations that I’m in, and understand it on a deeper level. (Daisy Davis)

At one point, the participants delved into a conversation about the immersive nature of *Final Fantasy XV*. They discussed the power of the game’s story, graphics, and music to draw them into the game’s world. Holly Jones, a non-gamer, was struck by how the game gives freedom and autonomy to the player. This led to other participants recounting their experiences and emotions as they played through specific episodes in the game. Instead of speaking as detached observers of the game, however, participants used first-person language to describe their engagement with the game. They recalled the events of the game as though they had experienced them first-hand. Holly summarized their conversation by saying about the game’s primary analogue to the David and Goliath story, “I am both a visual learner and I have to do it. I can’t be there to fight Titan [or

Goliath], but to be able to see it, that helps.” As a result, the participants expressed investment in the game and the study.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What changes in behavior occurred as a result of the study?

From the Participant Journals, qualitative data regarding behavior was collected. Open-ended responses resulted largely in participants making connections between the ascension story paradigm and their own behaviors, rooted in life experience and theology. The data is organized first according to the ascension story stages—trials, relationships, responsibility, and justice. Typically, participants who play video games with higher frequency were impacted more than those who play less frequently.

Trials

Several participants responded that the study forced them to reflect upon their own trials. These trials included a variety of situations. One participant lamented not receiving a summer job she was expecting. Another discussed her stress level after her “boyfriend in Florida broke his leg.” Another participant spoke of his struggle with a quick temper.

Viewing College Education as a Trial. From their journals, the primary trial for this collection of college students seems to be their school work. For example, in three of her four journals, Holly Jones considered her education her most current test.

I realized after my tests how sucky the week really was and I simply came back to my dorm, took a shower, cried, and then wiped my tears. [...]
 Many things have tested me lately, similar to the tests faced by Noctis.
 [...] In order to do my best in school, I must work through everything and stay focused.

This sentiment was shared by several other participants to varying degrees.

Going through Trials. Regardless of the trial, several participants mourned their failures in them, seeing in themselves the downfall of their own kingship. They expressed an ongoing struggle in overcoming their trials. For example, Zelda Reynolds, who is “still enduring” her trials of self-doubt and depression, stated that she has been working to overcome with proper resources and help from others. “I certainly hope I haven’t ascended,” she says, inferring that her current situation is far from ideal.

Similarly, many of the students claimed to have grown through their failed trials. They posited that incredibly difficult failures often led to an unveiling of a more godly or righteous nature. Daisy Davis described a series of trials that she claimed revealed her heart and character.

The first [trial] came when I was a jr. in high school and I found out my Ma-Ma had died. I was distraught to say the very least and it put a strain on a lot of aspects of my life. I found myself looking for a boyfriend in order to distract myself from my life. The one I found was a dream come true [...] In real life, it was abusive [...].

Daisy refers to this relationship as a hasty, unhealthy distraction for her as a result of the stress of losing her grandmother. This realization was a sobering moment for her. When another trial came, she responded differently.

Not unironically [sic], in my junior year of college I was having severe & terrifying déjà vu when my grandmother died, but this new me of college had built myself a support system that didn’t allow me to follow the same path. This support system had one member who would eventually become more than a friend. This second round of overwhelming trial led me to the person who I have been dating almost a year now and couldn’t be happier.

Similar to Daisy, most of the students ended their comments on their trials with a message of hope, often imbuing their trials with meaning. For them, such trials were necessary in order to fulfill God's plan for both themselves and others.

For better or worse, my struggles and failures will shape who I become one day as King of my own life. (Zelda Reynolds)

I also came to the realization that a king's trials last their entire lives. They are not something to check off before being crowned but rather hardships throughout life that define them. This impacted my week by revealing to me that my trials in life are not an obstacle to overcome in order to reach the end of a race but rather a ladder to climb [sic] for a better self.

God will put me through trials that will test me, even break me, but he will do this for a purpose and I will be stronger for it.

There have been several different trials I have faced to shape me into who I am. Though not all of them seem fair or just, coming out on the other side of them, I know I am a more complete person who can help others because of them.

This sense of purpose for trials was prevalent throughout the journals, particularly in the journals written following the final two sessions of the study.

Relationships

Far and away the most common theme that emerged in the journals concerned relationships. This theme appeared in several different ways.

A Reconsideration of Close Relationships. A majority of participants reconsidered their relationships in the examples set forth by the study, identifying (and often celebrating) their own protectors, advisors, and best friends.

A lot of my friends serve as protectors whereas my parents play the advisory role. Thinking about all of the important people in my life and all they do for me has definitely. Led me to appreciate them more.

I'd say my Gladio is my honorary big brother X. He's my protector in every sense and has my back no matter what. [...] Throughout the last few years or so I've had anxiety attacks and it wasn't until the people I previously mentioned came into my life that I was able to even think about addressing the problems that I was dealing with. X has talked me through many an anxiety attack and [...] encouraged me to go to the counseling center so that after he was gone I would have support or people to create a support system. I guess now that I think about it it's like he was training me to be able to handle the trial of an anxiety attack which is pretty dope. He really is like Gladio. (Andrew Williams)

In some ways giving definitions to these relationships it makes it easier to recognize when I rely on them and fully appreciate them. I even began to see my boyfriend as my moral support or "my Prompto" and understand more about what I rely on him for. (Zelda Reynolds)

In nearly every participant's journal, there was some kind of reclassification of their existing friends into these archetypes.

A few participants, however, journaled that their view of themselves in their friendships changed. While most participants placed themselves in the role of the main character who needed protectors, advisors, and best friends, these participants considered how they might fulfill those roles for others in their lives.

It's been interesting going throughout my week specifically looking for the people in my life that are analogues for those in Noctis' life. What has been more interesting has been seeing what roles I play in others' lives,

and, depending on those, how I might need to adjust my relationships with people so that we may better one another more effectively.

(Eugene Long)

This section has inspired me to be as willing to help and defend my friends as Ignis, Prompto and Gladio are to Noctis. We all deserve, maybe even need, friends of that caliber. Those who will walk with us and protect us, but also be brave enough to confront us when we step out of line. (Dusty)

These responses represent a significant reconsideration of the roles of friendship among participants.

A Desire for Making Close Friendships. Similarly, participants lamented their lack of such friendships.

I generally had a wide net of friends yet lacked the close brotherly friendships in the game. It made me realize I am leaving myself unprepared for my trials. I don't think I will look at friendships in the same way from now on. (Ben Hamlin)

After the session however, I began to consider who in my life filled the different roles of Ignis, Prompto, and Gladio. As I thought more about it, I realized that of my friends in high school, only the role of Prompto was filled. [...] Since coming to college, I haven't made any relationships that I feel like I could quantify them as filling any of these roles just yet, but I hope to build them into these roles. It made me realise [sic] that don't just need friends, but that I need Best Friends. (Jason)

Ben Hamlin and Jason's words reflect those of the larger group. The participants all claim to have relationships but many claim to lack close friendships since arriving at college. Regarding the impact of this study on his behavior, Terrance Cobb said, "This realization has pushed me to try to have more people fill this need."

Addressing Failures in Friendships. Following the third session, several participants journaled about relational conflicts. As if speaking for the group, Eugene Long said, “This week specifically, I recognized an aspect of my personality that was keeping me from forming relationships that are reciprocally helpful.” Some described their self-centeredness, stubbornness, or resentment in their relationships. Others regretted how they had lost touch with former friends since moving to college. Some reflected on how they try to avoid conflict in their relationships even to their own detriment. Another shared a story about how she lashed out at important people in her life, choosing instead to isolate herself from her loved ones. For each of these situations, the participants processed their actions and considered ways they might act differently in the future.

Responsibility

Not all participants addressed responsibility in their comments, but those participants that did reflected on how they might take on responsibility in their lives. Some participants considered their responsibility for their personal actions, while others considered their responsibility to the world around them. Some, however, considered what it meant to take on responsibility as an adult after college.

Taking Responsibility for One’s Actions. Two younger participants, a freshman and a sophomore, looked at their basic actions and resolved to change certain behaviors. One participant referenced his overindulgence of Twitter and YouTube, and he deleted the apps off his phone (Marcus Matthews). Another resolved to be more helpful in completing group projects in his class.

Another, Ben Hamlin, summarized a prevailing theme that taking responsibility for overcoming personal trials demands perseverance as the struggle never truly ends.

It was a bit of a slap in the face, that life goes on and your troubles only get worse in your pain and failure. You just have to pick yourself up and trudge on, or nothing will get done and what you still have will be lost. [...] [This course] showed that failing a trial wasn't permanent but created a new trial of overcoming and persevering. That you are redeemable because you kept going in the darkest hour.

Preparing to Take Responsibility for the World. Other participants discussed that the study caused them to consider the trajectory of their lives and how they might help the world around them in the future.

If I'm ever in a position of power, I want to be like Noctis in these regards. I will learn more about the people who work under me and what they do, so I can make decisions for them better. [...] I might not be the king of a country, but I will fulfill what God wants me to do and do it the best I can to help as many people as I can in the future. (Wanda Maximov)

Similarly, other participants weighed the lessons on embracing responsibility with their chosen majors and future professions. One self-assessed as he mused his future.

I've also thought on the responsibility of my own life. What goal am I working towards and how I am to achieve that. [sic] I've also thought on what motivates me along the path that I have chosen, and what that means to the people around me, and what stake they might have in my ventures. (Dusty)

In the focus group, Dusty mentioned that this study caused him to think differently about his current college courses. By taking responsibility over these introductory courses, he was preparing for his future vocation.

Another participant, a senior, summarized the importance of reframing his perspectives in this way.

If you can't identify your goals and responsibilities, how can you ever appropriately align your actions and their consequences towards those goals? For me, this idea caused me to approach my week with a questioning mindset, which allowed me to better identify my goals socially, spiritually, and vocationally. Having these goals set more clearly in my mind has allowed me to act in ways that position myself to better reach those goals. (Eugene Long)

The Refusal to take Responsibility. In subtle ways, several participants revealed a reluctance to take responsibility in their lives. The sources of such reluctance are summarized by Terrence Cobb's reflection following the third session.

I've considered my own failures, particularly my failure to accept responsibility. Much like Noctis, I can be very childlike in my interactions, sure, I can put on a mask of maturity if I need to be serious, but by and large, I can shrink back to being a kid in order to dodge the weight of my actions but also the actions of the broken world. As a result, I fail to take initiative in many of my relationships once again waiting for the time to come where I'm ready. But maybe I'll never be ready, maybe that's just part of accepting leadership and your purpose, you're never ready, but you need to take that big step anyways because things can't stay the same they are, things need to stop getting worse and maybe you can't change anything but you won't know unless you give your best shot.

Justice

Several participants admitted confusion over how they might be able to deliver order and justice. They cited their lack of power and authority, wondering how they might affect anything. A few responded with instances of carrying out discipline for

those over whom they held authority or finding ways of bringing order to their relationships. One participant admitted that delivering justice was a weak point of hers.

Embodying God's Attributes. A few students reflected on their deliverance of justice by discussing a desire to embody the characteristics of God described in the course. For them, this is linked to a sense of purpose and a full life, as reflected in the following response.

I've also thought about the six aspects of God represented in the game and in Jesus's words on the cross, and how these aspects appear in my life and how I can balance them within myself. [...] The difficulty most of us encounter is how we adequately balance these aspects of ourselves to be the best we can be. I focus a lot on achieving this balance in my life, and I don't always do my best to maintain it. But, I believe that if I do my best, and keep in mind those that I strive for that, my life will be successful and worthwhile. (Dusty)

One of these students journaled that this sense of purpose was changing the way she lived her daily life.

I have also found myself searching these concepts, and the characteristics of God for answers to how I should proceed. When I am struggling to get out of bed in the morning and find purpose for living the day I have found myself wondering if I am failing to be a Provider or to love or simply failing to take responsibility and how I need to work on that. (Zelda Reynolds)

Failing to Deliver Justice. Of note, one participant, Marcus Matthews, processed his failure to deliver justice when he was in fifth grade and he did not defend the reputation of a girl in his school's choir. He describes the affect it had on him.

I felt bad since I thought she sang well, but ultimately I did nothing. During the second concert was when it fully hit me that I really needed to

[have intervened]. That singer, who performed a solo, seemed much more nervous and let the words that fifth grader said get to her. That was when I knew I had failed.

This response was a fuller example of more nuanced references participants made about failing to deliver justice.

To conclude, every participant wrestled with their successes and failures regarding their current trials and relationships. Some participants exhibited a sense of responsibility over their lives, some even resolving to live differently as a result. Most participants could not articulate how they might deliver justice though a few participants considered that their delivery of order and justice was linked to their current trajectory and potentially future career.

Focus Group Findings: Ascension Story-Specific Behavioral Changes

In the focus group, participants discussed confirmed behavioral changes according to an internalization of their own ascension stories.

[I]t's kind of helped me figure out and think about my time here in college. It's been a huge trial. Because at the end, i'm not sure what I really want to do. But i'm like here I am in this trial. [...] That's really helped me figure out my time here. (Jackson)

I'm a lot more aware of the consequences my actions have on my relationships. (Eugene Long)

[T]he whole downfall of kings has made me think a lot about areas of my life where I feel like I'm failing or not measuring up, and then I've kinda started thinking like, "Well, am I not personifying the characteristics of God? Should I be more like a provider? What am I not doing right?"

Specifically in what we've talked about with downfalls of kingship and how that can apply to my life. (Zelda Reynolds)

Additionally, some discussed an increase in their attending to spiritual disciplines and an internalization of the material—themes that were not found in the journals. They attributed this new attention to spiritual disciplines to a desire to “ascend,” like the kings before them. Several mentioned positive changes in bible study, prayer, and devotional practices. One even mentioned that he had become so excited about the study, he found it easier to share his faith with others (a form of doing God's work and justice in the world).

[I]t's something that excites me, and with this excitement, I find it really easy to talk to other people about it, which is something that's new for me because that's not something I'm comfortable with. But just because I'm super excited about it and learning about all these things, it's been a time when, it's like a fruit of the spirit, it just grows and it's easy to give to others. (Terrence Cobb)

Every participant, in some way, resolved to address some behavior in their life as a result of this study.

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings were revealed by the study, listed below in numbered form. They will be fully discussed in the next chapter.

1. The curriculum proved to generate a high level of interest and motivation among participants, particularly those who play video games with more frequency.
2. Participants exhibited a significant increase in knowledge of Judeo-Christian Kingship as a result of the curriculum.

3. The curriculum caused all students, but especially those who play video games with more frequency, to align their experiences with ascension story themes—especially trials, relationships—and consider changes they might make behaviorally.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This research was designed to evaluate the effects of using a video game, *Final Fantasy XV*, to teach college students the history and theology of Judeo-Christian Kingship, a field of study often overlooked by the group. The study measured the curriculum's impact on participant knowledge of and attitude toward the topic, as well as any impacts the curriculum made on a participant's moral and spiritual behaviors. The data revealed in the study suggest the following findings.

Major Findings

High Level of Interest and Motivation

The primary purpose of creating this curriculum was to remedy the overwhelming lack of knowledge and interest in Judeo-Christian Kingship among college students. Because the topic is deemed irrelevant and boring by college students, this curriculum needed to be immediately appealing beyond its primary educational content. Once interest was piqued, participants would hypothetically be more open to learning the concepts.

This is precisely what was observed during the course sessions. At the outset of the first session, participants were offered around twenty minutes of commentary on the biblical elements that would be discussed during the course. These elements were ascension story themes, biblical passages, and theological concepts, often including stories of various kings. Within moments, participants' faces appeared dull and their eyes glazed. They were uninterested in the kingship concepts, regardless of how it was presented. However, when the video game component of the study was introduced, faces lit up again. Excitement filled the group as they began to draw comparisons between the video game—referenced in session through online videos—and the Bible. By the end of the first meeting, the participants were engaged. From the conclusion of that first meeting until the end of the study, most students seemed interested in making comparative connections between the game and biblical concepts.

While all participants exhibited high levels of interest, some students became more invested than others. Those that experienced the material solely through online videos showed less interest than those that played the game. Those that played the game shared that the ability to control the main character gave them a sense of ownership and authority to experience the game's story for themselves, even discussing the game from a first-person perspective as though they had personally visited the game's locales and overcome the game's challenges.

This furthers the work of game-based education theorists like Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky who connect play with personal autonomy. Interest level increases when one feels as though they have freedom to make decisions and contribute to a situation. This

study reinforces that notion with data supporting that engagement and motivation are linked to a sense of autonomy.

The inclusion of a video game is a way for students to express that in a new, modern way. Using *Final Fantasy XV* specifically, the student is able to live out situations similar to the Jewish kings in a kingdom facing similar struggles as Israel. While students were not immediately interested in David and Saul, they were quite interested in Noctis and Ardyn (analogous characters from the game) so much so that the college-aged participants unanimously selected Saturday nights to meet for this project—a Bible study. This, perhaps more than any of the tests or surveys, proved their level of interest in the study as a result of the game.

Another aspect that heightened interest was the inclusion of lessons regarding personal trials and relationships into the curriculum, subjects that the college students seemed to find particularly applicable to their lives. This could explain the heightened scores related to relevance on the *Course Interest Survey*. The general framework of the ascension story was easily translatable—though it was primarily created to understand kingship—into the lives of the students, as seen in the participant journals.

Whether using a video game or addressing current issues, contemporary contextualization is the task of the Church for every generation. This practice is properly founded in the prophets and Jesus, who used stories to teach. The Apostle Paul, who spoke to the Athenians through their own poetry and literature (Acts 17), practiced contextualization routinely, saying, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). By choosing to speak through

modern resources and analogues, the Church will continue to remain relevant in a world that increasingly finds it uninteresting.

Significant Increase in Knowledge

The primary purpose for creating this curriculum was to increase knowledge among college students. Having addressed the deficit in interest, it is unsurprising that knowledge dramatically increased for all participants. Because they found the course compelling, they were able to acquire knowledge more easily.

Interestingly, this knowledge acquisition was enhanced by using a video game. As stated previously, video games offer a level of autonomy which is a key component for creating interest. However, video games, more so than other forms of entertainment, offer a way of experiencing worlds and situations in such a way that they actually create memories. When those memories are connected to knowledge through supplemental teaching of analogous information, neurological pathways for accessing that information are created through memories. In the case of this study, biblical narratives and concepts were joined to specific instances in the game, and, as a result, were more readily recalled by participants. This upholds the research of Scholtz, Bell, Fletcher, and others who added video games to game-based learning theories proposed by Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky.

The importance of lived experience and memory is rooted in scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites are told to remember specific instances in order to recall spiritual truths. Most significantly, they were told to remember God's power to save through a Passover feast. In the New Testament, Jesus adapted that Passover feast by introducing new information of his own sacrifice. Even today,

churches remember Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through that same meal. The Israelites, Jesus, and biblical authors knew what has been revealed by modern research: knowledge acquisition (and retention, for that matter) is linked to significant memory formation.

Aligned Experiences and Behavioral Changes

Dewey asserted that “moral education is the primary aim of the school” (Hansen 183). The underlying hope of this curriculum, and any curriculum, is that it might have an enduring effect on a student's life. Knowledge equips a person for action and this study was no different. The ultimate measure of this curriculum's success is that the acquisition of knowledge would lead to behavioral change that might affect society in positive ways.

The participants in this study considered their lives and behavior according to topics that were most relevant. Trials and relationships were the topics most referenced in the journals and focus groups. When asked about their trials, the students told tales of heartbreak and failure. When asked about their relationships, they shared their joys and sorrows in finding new “family” since coming to college. Yet each story was met with a resolution rooted in the stories of the kings from the class. They wanted to act like the good biblical kings. They wanted to avoid the pitfalls of the bad ones. They even wanted to be like Noctis from the game. As one participant put it, the stories of the kings served as a guidebook for facing their own ascension story (Andrew Williams).

Some participants, typically older students, considered responsibility and justice. Curiously, the students failed to understand the concepts and examples of behavior intended for their emulation. When asked about responsibility, instead of answering with

a newfound obligation to serve others in the world, they responded with a careful examination of their majors and future careers. They tied responsibility to a sense of purpose, or calling, in life. Most of them expressed they were not ready to take on that responsibility yet but they hoped to move toward it. Similarly, when asked about delivering justice, most responded with failures to do so. Only a few older students answered that they were ready to embody the characteristics of God's nature to serve the world, bringing justice and order to injustice and chaos.

Additionally, students who played the game and had prior interest in video games seemed to exhibit stronger behavioral changes than those who did not. This again aligns with the fact that video games offer a world in which the player acts out behaviors. *Final Fantasy XV*, in which the player directs Noctis on a journey of ascension, served as a sort of testing ground for moral behavior, affirming Dewey and Vygotsky's research on educational play.

This aspect of the study revealed useful data for teaching college students. First, as seen through those who played, video games can be useful in teaching moral, ethical, and responsible behavior. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, college students follow a linear progression of ascension much like the kings. If the percentages revealed in the study hold true, most college students are still working to overcome personal trials and find significant relationships. Only after fulfilling those aspects of their ascension can students fully consider their own responsibility (or calling, major, vocation) and how they might deliver justice and order in the future. Educators and pastors alike would benefit from including teachings on trials and relationships in their curricula.

This study confirms and continues the work of a number of researchers. These findings combine the work of educators like Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky and game-based learning researchers like Fletcher and Bell with the work done by behavioral researchers such as Hansen, Mannoia, Prensky, and Daniels. Their combined work asserts that behavioral change can be achieved through new knowledge acquired through significant experiences cemented by memory. This research shows that such behavioral change (or at least the resolution to change) was possible to attain through a video game-based curriculum.

Theologically, Jesus employed these same techniques of autonomy and relevance to promote behavior. Following the parable of the Good Samaritan, a near-universally familiar story with multiple models of moral behavior, Jesus asked hearers to select which one was in the right. When hearers responded, Jesus urged them to “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). Jesus used an interactive opportunity to promote a moral imperative. In the same way, this study placed students in an interactive parable that prompted consideration of their own behaviors, like Jesus.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This research had at least two major implications for educators and ministry professionals. First, this study could be used to continue educational research regarding the impact of using video games in teaching the humanities, including religion. It makes an introductory case that the humanities might benefit from video game-based learnings, especially among students who are not immediately drawn to the material.

For ministry professionals, this study suggests a new realm of contextualization that the Church has not yet adopted. The findings in this study show that the utilization

of video games in teaching religious concepts and themes may prove beneficial, particularly in promoting moral or ethical behavior.

Secondly, this study reveals that for educators or ministry professionals working with college students, curricula that attends to trials and relationships might assist students in their journey toward graduation and adulthood. While the curriculum used in this study was primarily designed to teach information, it caused significant reflection to be given by the participants to their personal lives and afforded opportunities for guidance and mentoring. Guiding college students toward relational and emotional wholeness, self-actualization, and maturity is a privilege given to educators and ministry professionals. This study suggests significant benefit to the student by creating curricula that addresses the current needs of students.

Limitations of the Study

This research was designed with a specific context in mind—the University of Alabama Wesley Foundation. Because the students were known by the researcher, the researcher created a curriculum that would be appealing for their personal tastes. While many of the themes may translate to other college ministries, some adaptations may be needed to cater to the needs of other organizations.

Additionally, this research was limited in that participants were all white college students. Some accommodations might need to be made if there were more ethnic or economic diversity.

Finally, those who wish to generalize this study will need to take into account that this curriculum was uniquely designed and taught by the researcher. It emphasized the particular strengths of the researcher as an educator and ministry professional. Another

educator with other teaching styles and strengths may find that results differ from the findings here.

Unexpected Observations

The Effect on a nonChristian Participant.

In the group, there was one participant who claimed no religious belief or affiliation. Even though such curiosity was beyond the scope of this research, this participant's data was followed closely. His interest was high from the beginning of the study, but only because of the inclusion of *Final Fantasy XV*. However, his overall knowledge change percentage was 66.6 percent, increasing his Pretest score of 7 to a Posttest score of 27. This is impressive because this was the first time he had ever engaged the Bible seriously. Finally, his journals were among the most profound reflections in the entire group. Each week, he carefully considered the concepts he was learning and tried to assimilate lessons into his daily life. Based on his focus group interactions, it appeared that his spiritual life and religious belief had grown because of the study. The research design had not anticipated any of the participants to be non-religious since they were selected from a religious organization. However, his data was incredibly fascinating and begs for future studies to be performed.

The interest and investment of non-gamer students.

Another finding was the level of interest displayed by those who had no prior interest in video games. Though more popular than a decade ago, video games still have certain stigmas among non-gamers. It was assumed that they might enjoy the study for its relevant themes and content while merely tolerating the video game component. The research discovered that they drew a great deal from the game and became incredibly

invested in the game's narrative. This was backed by the research as well. Since it was beyond the scope of this project, more research would be needed to explore the full impact of the curriculum on non-gamers.

Recommendations

This research was developed to measure the curriculum's impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. However, future iterations of the research might consider the following:

1. Rename the third ascension theme. Students exhibited confusion over how they were supposed to take responsibility in their lives. This was a flaw in communication. Instead of "responsibility," referring to the third ascension theme in terms of "calling" or "civic duty" may help a student think differently.
2. Rename the fourth ascension theme to "Delivering Order to Chaos" rather than "Justice." Using the name of one of the six attributes of God—justice—proved confusing to the participants. A simple renaming could remedy this and it could help students consider their own ascension story more thoughtfully.
3. Evaluate the impact of the curriculum on non-religious students. A researcher might want to measure a variety of areas beyond knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. These could include measuring a participant according to Fowler's stages of faith or creating opportunities for participants to share more spiritual insights.

Postscript

When I first began the Doctor of Ministry program, I was in a different place in life and ministry, working on a drastically different dissertation. I was struggling to find my place in the local church as an ordained minister and was filled with self-doubt and regret over my vocational choices. The Doctor of Ministry was an effort to rejuvenate my calling. During that time, I had recently been given an additional appointment to serve as the pastor at the University of Alabama's Wesley Foundation. It served as a sort of secondary project for me. I had no interest in being a campus minister for the rest of my life but I considered it a welcome addition.

Three years later as I complete this degree, I am no longer pastoring local churches. Instead, my entire life is devoted to university life. I currently have the honor of serving as both pastor and professor at the University of Alabama. Serving the Church on the college campus and helping all students discover their God-given identities as they fulfill their God-ordained purposes has become the highest calling of my life.

This dissertation began as a passion project designed to help college students become who God created them to be. I developed the ascension story paradigm with specific students in mind. As I began to lead Bible studies using this curriculum, and eventually college courses, it became apparent that this study had broader meaning than I had realized. Therefore, in the third year of my Doctor of Ministry program, I threw away my former dissertation and began to transition this passion project into a dissertation.

Through the process of writing this dissertation and teaching its content, I have "ascended" into a unique calling as both a pastor and an academic. Like my students, I worked through my own ascension story. My vocational trial of three years ago has been

overcome. Through this program and project, I have discovered strong relationships that support me. Finally, I have accepted the responsibility for preparing and shepherding the next generation and I will continue to work to bring order to chaos through both teaching and pastoring. I find myself commiserating with my students in the study.

To conclude, I would like to refer to the end of *Final Fantasy XV*. In the final moments of the game, the main character, Noctis, finally takes his rightful place on the throne after years of struggle and hardship. As he does, he offers a sentiment that I share as I complete this project:

I walked tall... and though it took me a while, I'm ready now.

The time we had together, I cherish. (Final Fantasy XV)

APPENDIX A: Demographic Data Instrument

ID: _____

Please complete the survey writing legibly, filling in the blank for your answer to each question.

1. Year in College Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student

2. Gender Female Male

3. Ethnicity Asian Black or African-American Hispanic

Other _____ White Decline to answer

4. Do you consider yourself a Christian? Yes No Decline to answer

5. How would you describe your faith?

Deeply important to me Somewhat important to me Not very important to me N/A

6. How often do you play video games?

Daily Weekly Monthly Every few months Almost never Never

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Letter

Teaching Judeo-Christian Kingship through Final Fantasy XV

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Wade Langer from the Asbury Theological Seminary. The research is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of using video games in teaching biblical concepts to college students. You are invited because *you are between the ages of 18-25, participate in Bama Wesley, and attend the University of Alabama.*

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to

- attend *four* 90-minute Bible study sessions facilitated by Wade Langer (There will be a meal provided at each session of the study.)
- Complete a pretest and a posttest regarding the curriculum (answers will remain confidential)
- Complete any necessary homework outside the sessions and reflect on the curriculum through journal entries (responses will remain confidential)
- Participate in a focus group evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum. The session will be recorded, transcribed, and coded. Although confidentiality will be encouraged it cannot be guaranteed.

Your participation in the study will only be known to fellow participants. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name.

Due to the addictive nature of video games, it is advised that you ought to play the game for no longer than 2-3 hours at a time. Since *Final Fantasy XV* is divided into chapters, consider using the end of chapters to take a break or end your play session for the day. If you feel any sense of compulsion to play that seems excessive or abnormal, please discontinue playing and contact Wade Langer. If something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please contact **Wade Langer**. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. You can ask **Wade Langer** questions any time about anything in this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

Contact Information for Wade Langer, Researcher

E: wade.langer@asburyseminary.edu

C: (205)222-4064

APPENDIX C: Curriculum

The curriculum for each of the four sessions of the study follows a standard outline. Each session will begin with an introduction of a concept, and then illustrate the concept through its manifestation in *Final Fantasy XV*, leading into a discussion of how the concept is revealed in Scripture (particularly the texts assigned for the day). This can be repeated as many times as needed to cover all topics.

Following are four lesson plans, complete with 1) key concepts (as related in literature review), 2) materials that will be used in session (which students are encouraged to have reviewed beforehand) and 3) a guideline for instruction.

Session 1: The Ascension of Kings

- *Key Concepts:* Sacral Kingship, Ascension Stories of Saul and David, Trials of a King, Relationships of a King
- *Materials Used:* Chapters 1-4 of *Final Fantasy XV*;
 - Ch.1- Psalm 21; Joshua 1:1-9;
 - Ch. 2- Psalm 138; 1 Samuel 16; 2 Chronicles 20:1-30;
 - Ch. 3- Psalm 35; Proverbs 27:17; Proverbs 17:17; 1 Samuel 16
 - Ch. 4- Psalm 24; 1 Samuel 17; 1 Kings 17

Teaching Guide:

Time (In Minutes)	Teaching Objective
0:00-5:00	Pretest Administered
5:00-10:00	Introduction of Ascension Story
10:00-30:00	Trials of a King - <i>FFXV</i>
30:00-50:00	Trials of a King – Scripture
50:00-70:00	Relationships of a King - <i>FFXV</i>
70:00-85:00	Relationships of a King – Scripture
85:00-90:00	Closing Comments

Session 2: The Power of Kings

- Key Concepts: Ascension Stories of Saul and David, Prophets, The Burden of Responsibility, The Power to Deliver Justice
- *Materials Used:* Chapters 5-8 of *Final Fantasy XV*
- *Materials Used:* Chapters 5-8 of *Final Fantasy XV*;
 - Ch.5- Psalm 144; 1 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 19; 1 Samuel 21-22
 - Ch. 6- Psalm 18; 1 Samuel 23
 - Ch. 7- Psalm 27; 1 Samuel 18;
 - Ch. 8- Psalm 16; 1 Samuel 20

Teaching Guide:

<u>Time (In Minutes)</u>	<u>Teaching Objective</u>
0:00-5:00	Review of previous session
5:00-20:00	Prophets and Kings- FFXV
20:00-30:00	Prophets and Kings- Scripture
30:00-45:00	Responsibility of a King - <i>FFXV</i>
45:00-60:00	Responsibility of a King – Scripture
60:00-70:00	Justice of a King - <i>FFXV</i>
70:00-85:00	Justice of a King – Scripture
85:00-90:00	Closing Comments

Session 3: The Downfall of Kings

- Key Concepts: The Failure of Kings (Saul, David, other lesser-known kings) Leading to Babylonian Exile, Messianic Hope
- *Materials Used:* Chapters 9-13 of *Final Fantasy XV*
 - Ch.9- Psalm 69; 1 Samuel 24; Matthew 14:1-12; John 1:19-34; 1 John 3:1-24; 2 Kings 25:1-26; 2 Chronicles 36
 - Ch. 10- Psalm 38; Matthew 12:22-28; Isaiah 8; Isaiah 42; Jeremiah 29-30; 1 Samuel 25-27
 - Ch. 11- Psalm 41; 1 Samuel 28-29; Mark 13; Isaiah 7:13-18
 - Ch. 12- Psalm 140; 1 Samuel 30; Jeremiah 6; Micah 7

- Ch. 13- Psalm 139; 1 Samuel 5-6; 1 Samuel 15; Matthew 13:1-11

Teaching Guide:

<u>Time (In Minutes)</u>	<u>Teaching Objective</u>
0:00-5:00	Review of previous session
5:00-40:00	Threats to Noctis' Kingship - FFXV
40:00-65:00	Saul's Rejection as King- Scripture
65:00-80:00	Ardyn's Rejection - <i>FFXV</i>
80:00-90:00	Messianic Hope, Closing Comments

Session 4: The King of Kings

- Key Concepts: Messianic Hope, Redemption, Jesus' Ascension Story
- *Materials Used:* Chapters 14 of *Final Fantasy XV*
 - Ch. 14- Psalm 25; 1 Samuel 31; Isaiah 9:1-7; Revelation 20-22; Psalm 72; John 13:1-38; John 1:1-18
 - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John narrative accounts of Jesus

Teaching Guide:

<u>Time (In Minutes)</u>	<u>Teaching Objective</u>
0:00-5:00	Review of previous session
5:00-30:00	Noctis' Redemption – FFXV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trials- Battle with Past Kings ○ Relationships- Tested and Proven ○ Responsibility- Restored ○ Justice-- over Ardyn
30:00-60:00	Jesus' Ascension Story- Scripture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trials of Kings Past - Temptations ○ Relationships Tested and Proven - Disciples

- Responsibility Restored -Anointed by the people

- Justice – Cross, resurrection

70:00-90:00

Posttest/*CIS*/Focus Group

APPENDIX D: Knowledge Pretest/Posttest

ID: _____

Please complete the survey by writing legibly your answer to each question.

The following questions were used in the Knowledge Pretest/Posttest.

1. What role do trials play in a king's ascension? Name any examples of this.
2. What is the relationship between a king and a prophet? What roles does each play? Name any examples of this.
3. What burden of responsibility does a king have?
4. What is the importance of a king's ability to deliver justice?
5. How was Saul rejected as king?
6. How does Jesus redeem sacral kingship?

APPENDIX E: Journal Prompts

The following prompts were used in weekly journal reflections.

- Session 1: “How have the lessons on a king’s trials and relationships impacted your week?”
- Session 2: “How have the lessons on a king’s responsibility and justice impacted your week?”
- Session 3: “How have the lessons on the downfall of kingship impacted your week?”
- Session 4: “How have the lessons on a king’s redemption impacted your week?”

APPENDIX F: Keller's Course Interest Survey (CIS)

ID: _____

John Keller's Course Interest Survey Instrument

There are 26 statements in this questionnaire. Please think about each statement in relation to the class you have just taken and indicate how true it is. Give the answer that truly applies to you, and not what you would like to be true, or what you think others want to hear.

Think about each statement by itself and indicate how true it is. Do not be influenced by your answers to other statements. Record your responses on the answer sheet that is provided and follow any additional instructions that may be provided in regard to the answer sheet that is being used with this survey.

Use the following values to indicate your response to each item.

- 1 (or A) = Not true
- 2 (or B) = Slightly true
- 3 (or C) = Moderately true
- 4 (or D) = Mostly true
- 5 (or E) = Very true

1. The instructor knows how to make us feel enthusiastic about the subject matter of this course.
2. The things I am learning in this course will be useful to me.
3. This class has very little in it that captures my attention.
4. The instructor makes the subject matter of this course seem important.
5. I have to work too hard to learn in this course. (Adapted from 7)
6. I do NOT see how the content of this course relates to anything I already know.
7. Whether or not I learn in this course is up to me (Adapted from 9)
8. The instructor creates suspense when building up to a point.
9. The subject matter of this course is just too difficult for me.
10. I feel that this course gives me a lot of satisfaction.
11. In this class, I try to complete all the assignments. (Adapted from 13)
12. The students in this class seem curious about the subject matter.
13. I enjoy working for this course.
14. I feel satisfied with what I am getting from this course.
15. The content of this course relates to my expectations and goals.
16. The instructor does unusual or surprising things that are interesting.
17. The students actively participate in this class.
18. To accomplish my goals, it is important that I participate fully in this course. (Adapted from 23)
19. The instructor uses an interesting variety of teaching techniques.
20. I do NOT think I will benefit much from this course.
21. I often daydream while in this class.
22. As I am taking this class, I believe I can learn the content if I try hard enough. (Adapted from 27).
23. The personal benefits of this course are clear to me.
24. My curiosity is often stimulated by the questions asked or the problems given on the subject matter in this class.
25. I find the challenge level in this course to be about right: neither too easy nor too hard.
26. I feel rather disappointed with this course.

(Adapted from: Keller, John M. *Motivational Design for Learning and Performance: The ARCS Model*

Approach (p. 279). Springer US. Kindle Edition. OMITTED Original questions: 3, 6, 14, 17, 18, 32, 33, 34.

ADAPTED original questions: 7, 9, 13, 23, 27)

APPENDIX G: Focus Group Questions

1. How did you experience the game? Did you play, watch online, or view segments provided in class?
2. Has your level of interest in Judeo-Christian Kingship changed as a result of this study? How?
3. Think back over the study. In your opinion, what went particularly well and why? Were there any particularly meaningful or impactful moments?
4. Think back over the study. In your opinion, what did not go well and why? Were there any particularly confusing moments?
5. Has this study made any impact on your knowledge of kingship, and how so?
6. Has this study made any impact on your attitudes or interest toward Judeo-Christian kingship, and how so?
7. Has this study made any impact on your behavior, and how so?

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