

THE CONTENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF  
THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL:  
THEIR PLACE AND PURPOSE WITHIN  
THE FORMER PROPHETS

WILLIAM J. DUMBRELL\*

We are not concerned in this paper to assess the relative worth of the many studies made in recent years into the tradition history underlying the final form of 1 and 2 Samuel. We acknowledge the worth of such enterprises and are grateful in many cases for the interpretative insights they have either made themselves or made possible. Our interest, however, lies in the theological contribution finally expressed in the two canonical books as we now have them.<sup>1</sup> We ask such questions as these: "What is the point being made by this material?" "What is the contribution to the salvation history of Israel that is being advanced by the content of the two books?" In asking questions of this character or reaching decisions about them we are required to read 1 and 2 Samuel in the context of the former prophets in which they occur. The book of Judges had spoken of the apostasy of the Israel of the period of early settlement and yet of Israel's remarkable preservation. 1 and 2 Kings, which follow Samuel, bring us from the high point of Israel's political history, the reign of Solomon, to the extinction of political monarchy that resulted in 586 B.C. The books of Samuel outline the rise of Israelite monarchy but, more than that, point to the underlying theological assumptions within which such a political concept as monarchy in Israel could gain point.

The books of Samuel on the one hand provide a natural continuance of the book of Judges. We therefore begin the two books of Samuel with action located at the corrupt shrine of Shiloh, staffed by a degenerate priesthood. The quiet piety of Hannah (1 Samuel 1) provides a fitting contrast to the censured conduct of Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. We conclude the second book of Samuel on the other hand with the choice and purchase of the temple site by David from Araunah the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24), and we thus end 2 Samuel with the prospect of the building of a permanent shrine in Jerusalem. The total vision that these

\* William Dumbrell is dean of graduate studies and lecturer in Biblical studies at Moore College in Newtown, Australia.

<sup>1</sup> An important point is being made by the Hebrew canon's division of 1-2 Samuel (as opposed to the LXX 4 Reigns). The division between Samuel and Kings is neither arbitrary nor accidental but intentional.

two books provide seems therefore to be concerned with a movement of the central sanctuary from Shiloh to Jerusalem, a movement that in itself provides for the reversal of apostate yet formal worship that we see prevailing in 1 Samuel 1-3. Since worship is the official response in the cult to Yahweh's kingship,<sup>2</sup> such a movement from Shiloh to Jerusalem really involves a progressive development within the books of Samuel of a proper attitude to divine authority. These two books will thus operate as a theological endorsement of the kingship of Yahweh rejected so frequently by Israel during the period of the judges. In the course of these books the offices of Israelite prophecy and kingship will also emerge, making it plain that the function of these two offices will be to contribute to a growing and correct understanding of Yahweh's relationship to Israel.

#### I. 1 SAMUEL 1-3: SAMUEL'S ROLES

In chaps. 1-3 the later ministry of Samuel as prophet, priest and judge of Israel is anticipated. As priest we see him apprenticed to Eli at Shiloh, while as the replacement for Eli he will be found to be (as Eli was, 4:18) Israel's judge. As the last of the judges (cf. Samuel's role in chap. 7) he will usher in the period of the monarchy and draw the era of the judges to a close. But it is upon the note of prophecy that the first three chapters that introduce Samuel end, and this note is in itself a clear evidence of a reversal of a situation in which there had been "no open vision" (3:1). Since these first three chapters move from despair to hope (a movement reflected, as has been noted, by the parallels constructed between the barrenness of Hannah, chap. 1, and the prophetic word given to Samuel) we conclude that this reversal will be effected by the word of Yahweh in prophetic pronouncement.<sup>3</sup>

Eli and Hannah thus represent in these opening chapters two stances, two directions of an Israelite reaction to the divine word. Eli and his family represent the continuation of the anarchy of the period of the judges, an anarchy that had affected even the sanctuary itself. This disobedience to Yahweh which is being exemplified through the presentation of the Elide line will be removed by the obliteration of the line in the shape of the death of Eli and his sons. The encounter with the Philistines (chap. 4), which virtually eliminates the Elides, will thus properly bring the age of the judges and its enormities to an end. On the other hand Hannah and her line represent the solution to the problem. With Samuel the time of open vision will arrive. Eli and his family represent in Israel the reason for the coming destruction of the sanctuary. Samuel and Hannah represent how the process of rebuilding the faith of Israel will

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Nashville: Nelson, 1986) 104.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Janzen, "Samuel Opened the Door of the House of Yahweh (1 Samuel 3:15)," *JSOT* 26 (1983) 89-96, draws our attention to these connections. J. T. Willis, "An Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition from a Prophetic Circle at the Ramah Sanctuary," *JBL* 90 (1971) 288-308, has pointed to the prominent note of reversal running through chaps. 1-3. On the note of the contrast motif cf. also R. P. Contesse, "La Structure de 1 Samuel 1-3," *BT* 27 (1976) 312-314.

take its course. The exodus themes of how God responds to the oppressed and the downtrodden are also demonstrated here and will be responded to more formally by the Song of Hannah in 2:1-10. While the Lord blesses the righteous with fertility, the wicked will be cut off. God again will intervene in Israel's history, this time to save Israel from herself.

The hymn of 2:1-10 preserves the clichés and the content of older Israelite poetry. It is a song of victory that anticipates the reversal by Yahweh of the directions now set by Israel. In doing so the song in substance presents the program to which the books of Samuel will be devoted. The past history of Israel points to God as the great reverser of human values acting in the exodus and indeed in creation itself (v. 8). The hymn begins with the horn of the oppressed singer having been exalted by Yahweh, and we gather by the inclusive reference of the final v. 10 that this will come about by the appointment and victory of Yahweh's Messiah. Thus the whole hymn is a statement of the new direction to be struck in Israel's fortunes as a result of the erection of messianic kingship, which finally demonstrates Yahweh's kingship.<sup>4</sup> Of course the mooted reversal is demonstrated in the rise of Samuel himself, again like patterns of Israel's past from a barren mother. Curiously this scheme of reversal repeats itself in Samuel's own lifetime in the shape of his deviant sons and of course in the differing fates of Saul and David in the rise of the monarchy.<sup>5</sup> The details of the song, however, provide in this way a theological introduction to the two books of Samuel, just as the poetry by which 2 Samuel virtually concludes (2 Sam 22:1-23:7) sums up the contribution of the books.<sup>6</sup>

## II. 1 SAMUEL 4-6: THE ARK

In chaps. 4-6, in which Samuel is absent, the fortunes of the ark—and thus another facet of divine leadership—are in view. It is clear that the successive defeats of Israel by the Philistines have been brought about by the exodus "hand" of Yahweh (cf. 4:3, 8; 5:4, 6), which is now turned against Israel. Yahweh's intervention results in the expected death of Eli and his house (in terms of the Zadok prophecy of 2:36) and the "exile" of the ark (4:22). Yahweh thus virtually withdraws himself from the promised land in what is interpreted by the writer as a reverse exodus (cf. the heavy appeals to exodus events and language in these chapters: 4:8; 5:6, 11; etc.): Yahweh has gone into exile (4:22) leaving Israel in the promised

<sup>4</sup> On the Song of Hannah as an exemplification of Yahweh's kingship cf. J. T. Willis, "The Song of Hannah and Psalm 113," *CBQ* 34 (1973) 139-154.

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Willis, "Cultic Elements in the Story of Samuel's Birth and Dedication," *ST* 26 (1972) 33-61, traces the influence of this pattern of reversal through 1 Samuel 1-3 from the later career of Samuel to the rise of the monarchy.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1964) 45-46, 227. Carlson sees 2 Samuel 22 as a retrospective survey of David's career, 23:1-7 as preparatory for the building of the temple.

land. Again we are left wondering whether there will now be a future for the people of God.<sup>7</sup>

Our doubts are temporarily removed by the return of the ark at the conclusion of chap. 6. But the penalty inflicted upon the hapless inhabitants of Beth Shemesh who gaze into the ark (6:19) indicates that there is the element of mystery about Yahweh that will always rebuke Israelite presumption or attempts at manipulation (6:20). The ark then remains at Kiriath Jearim for the next twenty years, on what was at that time the virtual border of Israelite-occupied territory within Canaan. Its return under David (2 Samuel 6) will inaugurate a new theological era just as its voluntary exile had concluded the period of the judges.

Fundamental to the ark narrative of chaps. 4-6 is the issue of the freedom of divine power acting within the history of Israel.<sup>8</sup> The unthinking, almost mechanical association of Yahweh with the ark by Israel and the incongruity of its being borne into battle by the two sons of the rejected Eli alerts the perceptive reader to what is likely to ensue. The question of 6:20—"Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?" (cf. 4:8)—is the key question of the entire episode. The direction and tenor of Yahweh's activity in history gives expression to his holiness by which in its turn all unrighteousness will be judged.

### III. 1 SAMUEL 7-12: KINGSHIP

Chapters 7-12 now introduce the important subject of Israelite monarchy, critical for the two books. In chap. 7 we see Samuel operating as the last judge of Israel (v. 7), saving Israel from external aggression as the architect of victory and protecting Israel internally by wise administration (vv. 14-15). In view of these details the request for a king in chap. 8 is baffling. Paradoxically, however, Samuel's family has gone the way of the house of Eli (8:1-3). The request for a king is put by the elders of Israel in terms that provoke the tensions of the next few chapters. "Appoint for us a king to govern (= judge) us like all the nations," they say (8:5). It is true that this request echoes the anticipation of Deut 17:14 but, granting that, the difficulties the request provoked were not lessened by that anticipation (cf. the repetition of the request treated as an act of rebellion, 1 Sam 8:19-20).

The request is granted by Yahweh (8:22) but there is an inbuilt incompatibility in it that the events and dialogues of the next few chapters are given to resolving. The basic difficulty resident in the request of the elders is the nature of the kingship they have in view. If it is to be kingship "like the other nations," then it will be dynastic kingship, bureaucratic, tightly regulated, and thus quite antithetical to the concept of judgeship (cf. 8:5)

<sup>7</sup> A. F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative* (Missoula: Scholar's, 1975) 193-210, has clearly noted the theological function of the ark in the early chapters of Samuel.

<sup>8</sup> As P. D. Miller, Jr., and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977), have pointed out.

with which the request was linked. Dynastic kingship would eliminate from Israel the spontaneity and direction by Yahweh that judgeship had provided, thus cutting the cord of Yahweh's spiritual guidance of Israel by providing for a doctrine of ordered succession. Moreover the demand to "be like the other nations" carries with it a virtual unilateral withdrawal from the Sinai covenant and, in effect, reverses Exod 19:5b-6. To be sure it echoed (as indicated) Deut 17:14, but even in that passage Israel's demand for kingship is only presented, a demand that is then responded to correctively by Moses (17:14-20).

The Sinai covenant (Exod 19:3b-6) had foreshadowed a separated Israel who would witness to her world by her distinctiveness. Clearly what was required was the adjustment of the 1 Samuel 8 demand for kingship to a compatibility with covenant. We shall see that this is achieved by the time we reach chap. 12. The matter is resolved in two ways within these chapters, after Samuel has first outlined the implications of Israel's request (chap. 8).

1. *Prophecy*. In the first place the office of prophecy as an ongoing institution is brought into being in chap. 9. Prophecy was by definition a Mosaic office (cf. Deut 18:15 ff.) exercising a covenant protective role. To this point in the book of Samuel, Samuel's own role has been clearly that of judge in virtual continuity with the great figures of the judges period. He is the crucial figure in the transition from the tribal league to the monarchy, and we surmise therefore that the institution of the public office of prophet that occurs in 9:9 will have in mind the manner in which the traditions of the tribal league and particularly the matter of Yahweh's direction of Israel's affairs could be preserved. We judge therefore that, in the light of Israel's request for a king, prophecy will have to do with the interpretation to Israel of the basic and more fundamental theological premise of Yahweh's kingship over Israel (cf. Exod 15:18). 1 Samuel 9:9 designates Samuel's role from that point onward as that of prophet and seems to presuppose a change of function. The responsibility for all Israel that Samuel exercised in chap. 7 as judge seems from this point onward to be exercised by king and prophet jointly. We are left in no doubt, however, by the course of the narratives of 1 Samuel as to the claim of prophecy over against kingship. Samuel in these episodes functions as kingmaker and kingbreaker. Kingship appears to develop in Israel as a largely secular office, while the sacral traditions relating to Israel's leadership from the judges period are passed over to the emerging office of prophecy.

Prophecy depicted most typically in messenger guise in the OT bore the authority of the sender. Most familiarly the later-developed prophetic office viewed the prophet as Yahweh's plenipotentiary<sup>9</sup> who, as the official envoy of the divine court, carried the court deliberations in which he had

<sup>9</sup> For the comparison of the office of prophet to ancient Near Eastern political figures cf. K. Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *HTR* 61 (1968) 567-581.

participated. It was no accident, therefore, that prophecy and kingship arose at the same time. Protecting as it did the notion of Yahweh's direct rule over Israel, prophecy had received the mandate to channel emerging Israelite kingship in a direction that properly recognized the scope and fact of Yahweh's suzerainty exercised over Israel. In short, important for our understanding of its role overall but significant for the purposes of 1 and 2 Samuel the role of prophecy was to implement the politics of the kingdom of God, to testify in Israel to the reality of Yahweh's kingship.

The call of Samuel to exercise a prophetic function is thus a direct rejoinder to the request for kingship and seems designed to ward off any threat to Israel's covenant base that kingship may present. Samuel's prophetic role in relation to the emerging kingship of Saul is clearly designed to provide a system of checks and balances whereby kingship with all its dangers of independent action would not put the covenant at risk. The struggle of prophecy and kingship, of spiritual goals versus political aims, is—as we well know—characteristic of the subsequent history of Israel until the exile of the north (722 B.C.) and south (587/6 B.C.).

2. *Kingship and covenant.* The second movement in chaps. 9–12 comes by the gradual integration of kingship itself as a covenant office. This movement happens in two ways. First, there is the development of a theology of kingship that separates it from the surrounding models that had so heavily influenced the elders of Israel. Since kingship is raised up as an office in the OT amid all the problems that have surrounded its appearance, we might be led to expect that these problems would have been resolved by some theological adjustment. We might expect then that the narratives of Saul and David would show us the operation of such a theology and provide also its logic and content. And so indeed they do. Here the sequences in both the choices of Saul and David need carefully to be noted. Since what happens in their cases is not repeated elsewhere in the OT, it is probable that an ideal framework of kingship is being erected by their calls.<sup>10</sup> Saul is first divinely selected (9:16), is brought to the prophet by whom he will be anointed (10:1), and then is endowed for his office with the Spirit (10:6–13). Finally Saul is publicly attested by his victory over the Ammonites (chap. 11). Similarly David is selected (16:1), is anointed by Samuel in the midst of his brethren (16:13), receives the Spirit for rule (16:13—the Spirit then leaves Saul, 16:14, indicating the transfer of authority and thereby making it clear that the gift of the Spirit is bound up with leadership in Israel) and then, like Saul, is attested before all Israel (chap. 17).

It is to be noted that anointing is attested in the ancient Near East for Egyptian officials and vassals but not for the Egyptian king himself.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> R. Knierim, "The Messianic Concept in the First Book of Samuel," in *Jesus and the Historian: Written in Honor of E. C. Colwell* (ed. F. T. Trotter; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 20–51, argues for a theology of messianism having been erected by the calls of Saul and David.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Z. Weisman, "Anointing as a Motif in the Making of the Charismatic King," *Bib* 57 (1976) 378–398.

Kings of the Hittites were anointed by Hittite nobles, though Mesopotamian kings were not. So far as the Biblical details are concerned the rite was a sacral and not a secular one. Thus in the case of the institution of the monarchy anointing was a private and not a public rite. In the case of both Saul and David it was performed by Yahweh's prophet Samuel, the bearer of a special divine commission. Yahweh is thus himself the anointer, and the act brings about a special relationship between Yahweh and the recipients, Saul and David. Here the use of the term *māšiah* is impressive since it is almost invariably used with a suffix or in a construct relationship to YHWH.<sup>12</sup> It thus brings about a special relationship between Yahweh and the Israelite king, becoming a sign to the king of Yahweh's election and thus in ancient Near Eastern terms of his authorization to act. The anointing that is practiced in the case of Saul and David constructs a relationship therefore between the king and Yahweh, not between the king and people. Though it is spasmodically referred to until the exile (especially, as has been noted, where succession is contested; cf. 2 Kgs 23:30)<sup>13</sup> and seems thus to have been practiced, no northern king after Saul is ever called Messiah as indicative of the precise relationship set up. Setting up the close personal relationship that it does, anointing may have involved a contractual obligation.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter the king is Yahweh's representative (the continued use of "Messiah" by David in relationship to Saul, 24:6 etc., indicates that Yahweh must abrogate the relationship as he had begun it)—that is, the king was Yahweh's Messiah.

Thus with the erection of the office of kingship a theology of ideal kingship to undergird it has been supplied. We have come to expect office and theology to develop together as OT institutions are formed (cf. the priesthood). In keeping with this, the office of Messiah is not one that grows out of disappointment with the empirical monarchy—a psychological improbability in any case—but is one that arises with the advent of kingship itself. It is noteworthy that the four elements (choice, anointing, gift of Spirit, mighty acts) are not again seen associated with kingship beyond Saul and David until we arrive at ideal kingship demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>15</sup>

The second way in which emerging kingship is integrated into the covenant structure is seen in the narrative structure of chaps. 11–12. After Saul's victory over the Ammonites, Israel assembles at Gilgal (11:14–15) to "renew the kingdom." Saul's kingship is not being referred to, since this has so far not suffered a threat and the verb "renew" elsewhere in this specific usage (as here in 11:15) means to repair something already in a state of deterioration (cf. Isa 61:4; 2 Chr 15:8; 24:4, 12; Ps 104:30; 51:12; Job 10:17; Lam 5:21). The context suggests that it is in fact Yahweh's endangered kingship over Israel that stands in need of "renewal." The

<sup>12</sup> T. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah* (Gleerup: CWK, 1976) 210–211, suggests this.

<sup>13</sup> A. Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem," *IEJ* 18 (1968) 140.

<sup>14</sup> Mettinger, *King and Messiah* 224–232.

<sup>15</sup> Knierim, *Messianic Concept* 32 ff.

problem stems from the fact that the understanding of Yahweh's kingship over Israel must be preserved in a situation in which, in the euphoria that surrounded the newly erected kingship of Saul, it might have been lost sight of. Samuel had argued that the erection of kingship in Israel would conflict with the kingship of Yahweh over Israel (8:7). This call to renewal of the recognition of Yahweh's kingship over Israel took place, again, at the highly appropriate site of Gilgal, the site of the first Israelite sanctuary after the entry into the promised land (Josh 5:2-8). Saul is indeed made king in this context (1 Sam 11:15), but only after Yahweh's kingship over Israel had been "renewed" (11:14).<sup>16</sup>

1 Samuel 12 seems also to occur at Gilgal (no change in site is indicated) and is thoroughly covenant renewal in its character. Samuel gives an account of his own ministry but then puts Israel on trial, pointing to the breach of covenant that their choice of a king had constituted. Far from being his farewell speech, chap. 12 outlines (vv. 23-25) Samuel's continued and important role as Israel's intercessor, and thus as the ultimate guide of the new order. With chap. 12, kingship of this modified character has now been engrafted into the Sinai arrangement. It is clear, however, from chaps. 13-15 that the experiment with Saul had proved a failure. While the breach with Samuel in chap. 13 appears to be minor, Saul had defied Samuel's order to wait until Samuel had come to Mizpah. In chap. 14 Saul is now cultically very circumspect but, even as such, alienates mobilized Israel in the matter of the proposed death of Jonathan. In chap. 15 in the issue of the destruction of the Amalekites we are led by the artful construction of the narrative to see that it is Saul's crime and not Amalek's that is the subject of the chapter's rhetorical focus. We are brought to see that Samuel's action in sundering the kingdom from Saul was justified.<sup>17</sup> But what clearly divides the two personalities is the matter of relative authority. That kingship must submit to prophecy is the first point that emerges, while the second that follows is that the contemplated office of kingship is beyond the powers of a human appointee to reach. We should not thus be surprised to see the necessity of a further theological movement of the type that 2 Samuel 7 will embody.

#### IV. 1 SAMUEL 16-2 SAMUEL 5: DAVID'S RISE TO POWER

The second half of the first book of Samuel and 2 Samuel 1-5 deal with the issue of why Saul, Yahweh's firstly anointed, proved to be such a tragic figure and his kingship so short-lived and how on the basis of broad support David's kingship was established over all Israel. The disintegrating forces within Saul's own personality had become clear within chaps. 9-15. By that time it is plain that David is to replace Saul.

<sup>16</sup> Note the careful exposition of 1 Samuel 11-12 by J. R. Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of 1 Sam 11:14-12:25* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1978) 61-91.

<sup>17</sup> M. Sternberg, "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall," *HUCA* 54 (1983) 45-82.



Unlike Saul, David is king by divine choice alone and not by popular demand. The ease with which David moves into his role as king-elect suggests to us that his passage to the throne will prove in fact to be untroubled. As had been pointed out, Jonathan in chaps. 16-23 is the key figure in the progressive transfer of the throne to David. The Spirit is withdrawn from Saul (16:14) and thus his charisma for rule. It has come powerfully upon David (16:13), indicating that David is from that point onward Israel's Messiah. The narratives in chaps. 16-23 are often difficult to unravel, but the difficulties of some sections—notoriously chaps. 17-18—may, as proposed, be alleviated if we regard 16:14-23<sup>18</sup> as anticipatory. In all these narratives the divine favor rests on David in a remarkable way. By 18:1-5 Jonathan is closely identified with David, exercising a mediating role between David and Saul. But 18:1-5 is Jonathan's virtual abdication of his expectations.<sup>19</sup> Saul's opposition to David is intensified, however, from this point onward, though every attempt on David's life by Saul consolidates David's position further, while the wedge between Saul and Jonathan is more firmly driven. By 23:15b-18 (the final scene between Jonathan and David), David's recognition as king by Jonathan is complete.

Though operating entirely from the south, David never received an invitation to lead Judah itself, which remained loyal to Saul. We note thus that sons of Jesse served at the royal court (chap. 17) while the men of Keilah sought to hand David over to Saul (chap. 23). David was eventually forced to flee to the Philistines (27:1-4). The early monarchical solidarity of all Israel thus seems indicated. Though it is thus clear that Saul had the southern tribes firmly in his grip,<sup>20</sup> by shrewd marriage alliances (chap. 25) and by the sheer force of personality together with his mercenary strength David was able to establish a very respectable power base. Growing support for David is indicated by the fact that, while Saul was forced to make successive campaigns in the south against him, the elders of Judah and others accepted presents from him (30:26-31). Eventually even Saul is compelled to acknowledge David's kingship (26:19). David by virtue of having played an astute double game in the south was able to stave off involvement in Saul's end. After the death of Saul he capitalized on his detachment<sup>21</sup> from the event. He dramatically distanced himself from the death of Saul in 2 Sam 1:1-16 while he movingly grieved for the dead, Saul and Jonathan, in the lament of 1:19-27. Abner, the single stay bolstering Saul's tottering empire committed to Saul's son

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. T. Willis, "The Function of Comprehensive Anticipatory Redactional Joins in 1 Samuel 16-18," *ZAW* 85 (1973) 294-314, who sees 1 Sam 16:14-23 as anticipatory of content in the later chapters.

<sup>19</sup> D. Jobling, "Jonathan: A Structural Study in 1 Samuel," *SBL Seminar Papers* (1976) 15-32, notes the importance of Jonathan as a mediating personality between Saul and David.

<sup>20</sup> T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977) 63-71.

<sup>21</sup> P. K. McCarter, "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1980) 489-504, argues that a major point in the narratives of David's rise to power is the demonstration that David was not implicated in the deaths or replacements of the Saulides.

Eshbaal, was removed in 2 Samuel 3 after Abner had brought the north to David. It was predictable that the northern groups would seek to remove Eshbaal and seek some accommodation with David. After the deaths of Eshbaal and Abner the northern kingdom quickly moved over to David (2 Sam 5:1-3). Later it seems that there is some ground for believing that David was complicit in the deaths of Eshbaal and Abner (cf. Shimei's charge in 16:10-12). 2 Samuel 2-4 describes David's time at Hebron.

#### V. 2 SAMUEL 7: THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

The return of the ark after a virtual self-enforced exile for twenty years on the perimeters of the Israelite-controlled territory meant that Yahweh was now prepared once again to place himself at the center of Israelite life.<sup>22</sup> The theological interlude in the history of the nation that the absence of the ark had suggested (cf. 1 Sam 7:1 with 2 Sam 6:1) was now over. A new era in the history of Israel had begun. Yahweh had been responsible for the capture of the ark, and only the will of Yahweh had caused it to return. By the ark's return Yahweh had marked out Jerusalem as divine space, and thus 2 Samuel 6 provides the imprimatur for the later location of the temple in Jerusalem and begins as such the development of the associated Zion theology. 2 Samuel 6 also accords with the ancient Near Eastern conceptual world of ideas whereby the temple site in the city-state was carefully marked out by the presiding deity as a precursor to the actual building of the temple from which the deity concerned would have been understood to rule. Thus the choice of the temple site was no incidental matter but was thought to have been preceded by some epiphany or other divine manifestation.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between chaps. 6 and 7 should now be clear. In chap. 6 Yahweh, the divine King, has indicated that he will thereafter take up residence in Jerusalem, the new Davidic capital. In short the destination of the movement from Shiloh, which the loss of the ark to the Philistines had initiated in 1 Samuel 4-6, had now been described. The return of the ark heralded a new beginning in the fortunes of David and his house and thus prepared the way for the fresh dynastic movement to be contained in 2 Samuel 7 (for which the banishment of the house of Saul in the shape of Michal, Saul's daughter, had paved the way, 2 Samuel 6). Thus the tenuous kingship of the house of Saul, with which the ark had not been associated, was now brought to an end.

2 Samuel 7 then proceeds to give expression to the nature of David's kingship and to take up the question of the perpetuation of David's line. The chapter operates as a charter for the Davidic dynasty, for by the promises of the chapter an eternal throne for David and his house was established. By the previous provision for the temple site, however, in

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Campbell, *Ark Narrative* 193-210.

<sup>23</sup> A. Kapelrud, "Temple Building: A Task for Gods and Kings," *Or* 32 (1963) 56-62, presents the evidence.

chap. 6 the nature of these promises given to David could be rightly understood. Davidic kingship was witness to the further fact of divine kingship, and the function of the Davidic king was to implement in Israel the policy and the directions of Yahweh, the divine King. Thus, capitalizing on the return of the ark David asks the question in 7:1 whether a temple should now be built. In 7:1 the two key words that control the first half of the chapter occur—namely, “dwell” (of the presence of the deity) and “house” (as to be related to David’s line by the chapter).<sup>24</sup> The theme of the first half of the chapter is the perpetuation of the Davidic throne in Jerusalem as it will be backed by an assurance of the divine presence.

The impulse to build has resulted from the “rest” from all enemies round about given to David. The Hebrew verb *hēniāh* (“give rest”) recalls for us vividly the great blessing of “rest” associated with the prosperous life in the promised land (Deut 12:10).<sup>25</sup> 2 Samuel 7:1 leads us to suppose that the initiative for this further movement has stemmed from the divinely orchestrated (5:19) defeat of the Philistines by which the whole of the promised land virtually fell into Davidic hands. By the movement of the ark to Jerusalem, a place had been selected from which this blessing of rest would emanate.

David is first refused permission to build the temple with ambiguous reasons advanced in 7:5. But it is not an absolute refusal and thus not a prophetic victory over the more centralizing priestly forces. The real parallel to 7:5 is not 7:11 (in which verse “house” is the prominent item) but 7:13, where the emphasis is on the pronoun (cf. v. 13, “he”; v. 5, “thou”) and on the verb “to build” as in 7:5.<sup>26</sup> David cannot build for reasons that must be assumed, but Solomon will build later.

2 Samuel 7 really concerns the basic role of David as the architect of conquest rest. As the chapter progresses it is clear that the “rest” of which v. 1 speaks from enemies “round about” is inconclusive, since the complete occupancy of the promised land has not yet been realized. Under David and the conquests that lead to empire (detailed conveniently in chaps. 8–10), control over Palestine will finally have been achieved. Thus the conquest begun by Joshua will have been ended (with David completing what the judges could not do, v. 11). 2 Samuel 7:8–9a reviews David’s career to that point in time, leaving us in no doubt of the exalted station to which he has been elevated (note the language of vv. 5–7: David as Yahweh’s “servant” is Israel’s shepherd).

In vv. 9b–11 the prospects of David are then considered. Yahweh will (1) make a “great name” for David (v. 9b, clearly reminiscent of Gen 12:2 and the Abrahamic promises), (2) appoint a “place” for Israel (“place” is the distinctive term in Deuteronomy for the promised land, particularly as outlined in promise to Abraham; cf. Deut 11:24 with Gen 15:18), and (3) give David “rest from all his enemies round about” (v. 11).<sup>27</sup> In short,

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967) 250–259, for a discussion of these key concepts in 2 Samuel 7.

<sup>25</sup> Carlson, *David* 100–102.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 114–115.

David's greatness must be established, Israel's living space determined, and the conquest completed before Yahweh will undertake to erect his sanctuary. But Yahweh himself will build it, since he will provide the circumstances in which the temple may be built. The refusal of v. 5 thus defers temple building until Yahweh has acted further. It also operates as a mild rebuke, for this temple is not a static dwelling that Yahweh will inhabit (cf. "dwell" of v. 5). Yahweh will not be confined in houses built with hands, nor can man build such a "house" (cf. v. 5 also: "Would you build me a house?").

The eternal character of Davidic kingship is established in absolute terms (v. 13b). Thus the further necessary steps beyond the interim kingship of Saul's have now been taken. The remainder of 2 Samuel—which is largely given over to more somber presentations of David, involved in court intrigue, family difficulties, and so forth—will remind us that what is established by such a promise of continuity is the office and not David the man and his physical line. The OT thus oscillates between a description of the Davidic covenant as eternal (the word "covenant" is not mentioned in 2 Samuel 7 but is found in 23:5; Ps 89:33-37, where the compact of 2 Samuel 7 is being referred to) and of the Davidic covenant as conditional (1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5; Ps 89:29, 32; 132:12). Such an oscillation is designed to draw a distinction for us between the line of David (which would not fail), the promises delivered in 2 Samuel 7 (which would not be revoked), and the posture, punishment and fate of specific individuals within the line of promise. In physical terms the line of David foundered in 587/6 B.C. with the fall of Jerusalem, but in spiritual terms we cannot read such a promise as 2 Sam 7:13 conveys without being directed for ultimate fulfillment to the Christology of the NT.

The tenor of the prayer of David in 7:18-29 indicates the degree to which David understood the nature of the divine commitment made in the first half of the chapter. Particularly puzzling, however, is David's summation of what has preceded, by the use of the phrase "this is the law for man" (v. 19b). In view, however, of the extra-Biblical parallels for this phrase, the phrase is best taken as "this (i.e. the detail of the first half of the chapter) is the manner in which human destiny is to unfold."<sup>28</sup> The thrust of the Abrahamic promises operative through Israel had now been revealed as henceforth bound up with Davidic kingship.

#### VI. 2 SAMUEL 8-20: EMPIRE AND DIVISION

As we have indicated, by chaps. 8-10 the limits of the Davidic empire were established. David is thus presented as the architect of conquest. Being thus preoccupied he could not be the temple builder (1 Kgs 5:3; cf. 1 Chr 22:8; 28:3). Solomon, as the man of rest (1 Kgs 5:4), will be the

<sup>28</sup> W. C. Kaiser, "The Blessing of David: Humanity's Charter," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. J. H. Skilton; Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 311, has pointed this out.

temple builder. He is an index of the conquest completed and the Abrahamic promises fulfilled, at least in terms of Israel's political history (cf. the Abrahamic tenor of 1 Kgs 4:20; 5:4, in which the Solomonic age is seen by the writer as the great age of fulfillment). Yet the fact that the ideal borders of the promised land were never secured by David (Tyre and Sidon were never included in the Davidic empire) might suggest to us that the scheme of 2 Samuel 7, whereby temple building is to follow conquest, is an idealization never translated into Biblical reality.

Indeed we recognize that chaps. 11-20 are given over to the depiction of David's fall from grace and his essential and ugly humanness. Discord is sown among members of David's family and between north and south by David's actions. The Bathsheba/Uriah crime is presented in all its starkness and its force brought out in the juridical parable of 12:1-15. The effect of all this on the family of David then follows with rape, fratricide and the flight of Absalom, the heir, then an uneasy reconciliation (chap. 14) that finally leads to rebellion and civil war (chaps. 15-19). The thrust of these chapters is to deflate the character of David, just as the force of 1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 5 had been to idealize it. We observe in passing that 2 Samuel 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2 have commonly been termed the "succession narrative" and have been viewed as dealing with the problems of dynasty. But this is to overlook the point that it is the person of David who is at the center of 2 Samuel 9-20 and that the books of Samuel are more concerned with divine kingship than they are with kingship in Israel.

#### VII. 2 SAMUEL 24: THE TEMPLE SITE

The final, carefully constructed chapters of 2 Samuel indicate that the fulfillment of the Davidic promises would not be a matter of sound political management but would require the intervention of Yahweh through the history of salvation to accomplish. 2 Samuel 21:1-14 and chap. 24 speak of a divine threat to the people and the land for which Saul and David are respectively culpable. Both of these narratives in their own way speak for the fragility of the Israelite monarchy. Both narratives deal with an expression of divine anger, prayer directed by David to Yahweh, the answer to the prayer that is a revelation of the significance of the particular sin concerned, with the measures then taken to expiate the sin. Similar conclusions to both episodes occur (21:14; 24:25), reporting divine forbearance extended to the land.<sup>29</sup>

The remainder of chaps. 21-23 glances over David's career retrospectively. 21:15-22 and 23:8-39 bracket the poetic sections by hero narratives and tales related to the Philistine wars and military lists—that is, by reference to the sagas by which David's fame and the unification of Israel had been achieved. Of the inner poetry (22:1-23:7), chap. 22 is a more

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Carlson, *David* 226-228, 246-248. We are indebted to Carlson for his very perceptive analysis of these chapters.

generalized thanksgiving for deliverance extended to David throughout his career. The passage then to 23:1-7, to David as the ideal ruler, the bringer of messianic blessing, meets the expectation raised in 1 Sam 2:1-10 (with a similarity of terminology; cf. God as "Rock" in 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 23:3).

Both these concluding psalms throw Davidic kingship into proper relief. In the last resort David reigns only because Yahweh has persevered with him (chap. 22), while the covenant made with his house is only firm because it was imposed by Yahweh and maintained by him. Chapter 24, David's ill-advised census of Israel followed by the purchase of the temple site, concludes the books. The mention of Uriah the Hittite at the close of chap. 23 provides the reason for the outburst of divine anger (chap. 24) against David, while the political realities of kingship within Israel's experience lead to numbering (a standing army and taxation as well?) an Israel that "cannot be numbered." David, Israel's shepherd, is then smitten through his flock (a sevenfold restitution is taken against the shepherd, cf. 24:17 with 18:3). The climactic purchase of the temple site is a response to Yahweh's direction. The books thus close by underscoring the sovereignty of Yahweh in the conduct of Israel's affairs and in the unfolding of her history.

1 and 2 Samuel thus concern the clear conduct by Yahweh of Israel's affairs and inform us of how difficult and indeed impossible it proved to be for Israel to understand this. The movement between the two books has been one from sovereignty ignored (1 Samuel 1-3) to sovereignty expressed (2 Samuel 24), from the indifferent response to divine kingship at the debased shrine (1 Samuel 1-3) to the required response to divine kingship that the Jerusalem sanctuary will express (2 Samuel 24). Again, they place Israel before the prospect of a future for her as the people of God. It will be the function of the books of Kings to offer a comment upon how the opportunities afforded to Israel were transferred into historical reality.