

Who Will Intercede? The Book of Samuel as Reversal as the Book of Genesis and Cautionary Tale About Politics, Institutions, and Control

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: December 17, 2018

Submitted to: Dr. Eugen Pentiu, *Old Testament Exegesis: The Prophets*, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary, Fall 2018

Prophetic Literature

Thomas Leclerc groups the Book of Samuel into the “Deuteronomist History,” which he also refers to as the “Former Prophets” who narrate “prophecy and fulfillment.”¹ That consists of Joshua, Judges, 1 – 2 Samuel, and 1 – 2 Kings. The main character in these literary histories is the Word of God. The central plot dynamic is theological: to show how Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant results in God blessing Israel with prosperity; Israel’s idolatry, by contrast, results in curse and disaster.

Leclerc believes that this literature was probably composed at intervals, at specific times in Israel’s history when Israelite leaders and the people generally had the motivation to compile historical records to explain their plight. He offers two such times: First, King Josiah (c.640 – 690 BC) and his advisors wanted to reform the country. Second, the exiled Jews (post-586 BC) were reflecting on why God exiled them to Babylon, and how and when God might restore them. Leclerc recognizes that the act of composing the Deuteronomist History used source material: “official records from the royal court, traditions and legends, liturgical and legal texts, land lists and tribal lists, miracle stories, books of wars, songs and hymns, shrine stories, and so on.”²

Prophets as Characters

Leclerc treats the “Deuteronomist History” as a literary repository for characters who are prophets, where the prophet is an archetype, and in Samuel and Kings, an antithesis to the king. The prophet is not necessarily an opponent of the king at every moment. And when God makes the covenant with David, a “royal theology” begins whereby the prophets recognize the kingship as an institution. Nevertheless, this “royal theology” still enabled prophets to criticize and challenge and chastise particular kings. The prophet serves as an antithesis to the king in the sense that the prophet embodies and personalizes the freedom of God to act and speak on behalf of His own kingship as God of Israel.

I appreciate Leclerc’s insight tying together king and prophet as a constructive polarity in Israel. I would advance Leclerc’s thesis to include Abraham and Moses retrospectively. Leclerc treats the emergence of prophecy in relation to the kingship of Saul and then David. However, Moses is the prophet par excellence, and he stood against Pharaoh; the polarity between king and prophet could not be more direct and severe. Abraham, too, is first identified as a prophet when in dialogue with Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen.20:7). Abraham and Moses depict a dynamic outside where “Israel” as a whole speaks with a prophetic voice to those outside Israel, especially kings. The prophets within Israel simply continue that dynamic.

Prophets in the Book of Samuel

The Book of Samuel dresses the prophet Samuel in the mantle of prophets before him, namely Deborah, Joshua, and Moses. This was characteristic of the biblical narrator, largely in part due to Moses’ prediction that there will be a “prophet like Moses” (Dt.18:18) who would come after him. Hence, Moses’ immediate successor Joshua,³ as well as the prophet-judge Deborah,⁴ bears certain affinities to Moses. Samuel, as a great prophet, stands in a line of continuity with them, and bears resemblances to all of them in a literary sense.

¹ Leclerc, Thomas L. *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings, and Scrolls*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. 2014. ch.4

² Ibid, 70 – 71

³ “The Lord spoke with Joshua” (Josh.1:1), like He did with Moses. God promised “to be with” Joshua (Josh.1:5; 3:7) like He was with Moses. As God parted the Red Sea using Moses as the human agent (Ex.14:21 – 29), so God parted the Jordan River using Joshua as the human agent (Josh.3:7 – 17). As God won victories over the Egyptians and Amalekites using Moses (Ex.7 – 15; 17), so He also won victories over the Canaanites using Joshua (Josh.6ff.). Joshua gave a lengthy farewell speech (Josh.24) beginning with the standard introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord” (24:2), and using first person (24:3), like Moses did (Dt.1 – 33). Joshua warned Israel that they will fail: “You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God” (Josh.24:19). Moses did this as well (Dt.27 – 29).

⁴ Deborah was a prophetess and judge (Jdg.4 – 5) in military, political, and judicial matters, like Moses. To Barak, her general, she delivered a message from YHWH by speaking in the first person (Jdg.4:6 – 7). She praised God in song after victory (Jdg.5),

I would add to Leclerc's discussion of Samuel by suggesting that the Samuel is being connected by literary motifs to Deborah. Deborah was the only judge who was also a prophet in Judges; Samuel was also judge and prophet, and the final judge before the monarchy was established (1 Sam.3:19 – 21; 7:15 – 17). Also, Samuel ministered from a circuit through four locations: Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and Ramah; Deborah was stationed in one place in Ephraim between Bethel and Ramah (Judg.4:5). 'In 1 Samuel, Samuel was obviously presented as a 'judge' after the order of Deborah.' Furthermore, Samuel commissioned Saul into battle and held him accountable (1 Sam.10 – 15); as Deborah did Barak (Judg.4 – 5). And of course, Samuel embodied the presence of God, like Deborah did. Daniel Block notes, 'Like Samuel in 1 Sam.7:10 – 11, Deborah clearly functioned as the alter ego of Yahweh. Her presence alone was enough to guarantee victory over the enemy.'⁵

Samuel uniquely straddled the time period of the judges and the kings. The tribes started to not respond to the judges' calls to defend Israel. Those who wanted a stronger military called for a king. God interpreted this as a rejection of Himself (1 Sam.8:3), and the intrusion of a pagan mindset where Israel became more "like other nations" (1 Sam.8:5).⁶ Samuel seems to lead other prophets, as Leclerc says, "Once Saul is anointed king, there appear groups of prophets called variously a "band of prophets" (1 Sam.10:5 – 12) or a "company of the prophets" (1 Sam.19:20). The report of such groups of prophets helps to create the impression that there is an almost organic connection between kingship and prophecy. As we will see, the death of kingship and of prophecy are almost simultaneous – both fade away after the exile."⁷

Samuel also serves as model prophet: (1) He appoints and rejects kings; he anointed Saul (1 Sam.10:1, 17 – 27; 11:12 – 15) and then deposed Saul (1 Sam.13:13 – 14) for not obeying the Mosaic Law, therefore incurring the curse, and for not obeying the Samuel's prophetic word (1 Sam.15:3). (2) Samuel authorizes or prohibits war. Samuel authorized Saul to conduct war against the Amalekites with the "herem" or "ban unto total destruction" (1 Sam.15:2 – 3). (3) Samuel interprets the Mosaic tradition for new circumstances. He says the king must follow the Lord's commandments (1 Sam.12:13 – 15), effectively placing the king under God. Additionally, Samuel is the son born extraordinarily from a woman (his mother Hannah), like Sarah (Gen.11:30), Rebekah (Gen.25:21), Rachel (Gen.29:31), and Manoah's wife the mother of Samson (Jdg.13:2). Hannah bears a curious resemblance to Rachel, the beloved but barren second wife. Samuel's last prophecy (1 Samuel 28) contains four Deuteronomistic themes: (1) prophecy/fulfillment; (2) Samuel therefore is a prophet like Moses; (3) the most important virtue is to obey the Law; and (4) disobedience is punished.

Nathan serves as the continuation to Samuel. Nathan is the spokesperson for the Davidic "royal theology." "Royal theology" entails: (1) The kingship is forever; (2) the king is the "Son of God" (Ps.2:6; 89:20, 26 – 28); (3) God's promise to the house of David is unconditional; (4) God has made Jerusalem His dwelling place (Ps.48:2; 132:14). From now on, kings must come from David's line, and the king names his successor. When Nathan confronts David over his sin, he uses (1) standardized speech patterns, namely the messenger formula and first-person speech (2 Sam.12:7 – 8); (2) declaration of sin (12:9) and judgment for it (12:10 – 12); (3) "royal theology" is maintained and David's line does not lose the kingship. Finally, Nathan guides David's selection of Solomon as heir (1 Kgs.1).

The Author-Redactor as Prophet, Diagnosing the Paganization of Israel

I would like to complement Leclerc's analysis by arguing that prophets are not only characters in the narrative, but that the author-redactor(s) (henceforth "author") of the Book of Samuel as a whole should be considered prophetic. This author is concerned about the paganization of Israel. The kingship institution is part of that process, and is emblematic. But it is not the only problem. The author demonstrates a skeptical attitude towards the temple

which in Leclerc's mind makes her like Miriam (Ex.15:20 – 21), though in mine, like Moses (Ex.15:1 – 19). Jewish commentators noted that Deborah is being described as a leader like *Moses*, not Miriam, starting in the 1st century AD with Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*. See Brown, Cheryl Anne. *No Longer Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women, Gender, and the Biblical Tradition*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1992. 40.

⁵ Block, Daniel "Deborah Among the Judges: The Perspective of the Hebrew Historian." Edited by Millard, A.R. James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker. *Faith, Tradition and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns. 1994. 249.

⁶ Indeed, as Leclerc says, among Israel's neighbors, there was a role of prophet who seemed to advise and support the kings. On the Mesha inscription, King Mesha of Moab rebelled against Israel (2 Ki.3:4 – 5). Around 830 BC, he inscribed a stela describing how his god Chemosh had spoken to him. On the Zakkur inscription, King Zakkur defeated a coalition of kings led by Syria in the early eighth century. He says seers and messengers who spoke like prophets encouraged him.

⁷ Leclerc. 73

sanctuary and other aspects of Israel's life. The author conveys the paganization of Israel by deploying literary motifs from Genesis, but in reverse. This matches the author's interest in portraying Israel as regressing spiritually. This chart provides a high level glance at major themes in both Genesis and Samuel:

Genesis	Samuel
<p><i>Ultimately, Fathers Bless Sons, Sons Bless Fathers</i></p> <p>God blesses a barren wife:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abraham cares that his wife Sarah has a son Isaac prays for Rebekah to conceive Jacob cares that his two wives have sons, especially Rachel since he loved her more, and she was barren for a while. <p>Sons eventually honor their fathers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaac married Rebekah, who reminds us of Abraham. He redug Abraham's wells. He eventually blesses Jacob. Jacob blessed, as the firstborn, Judah, the first spiritually qualified son of his first wife, Leah. He relinquished his new favorite, Benjamin (Rachel's second son), and sacrifices for Simeon, treating him fairly. Judah and Joseph both learn to bless their future families. 	<p><i>Fathers Curse Sons, Sons Curse Fathers</i>⁸</p> <p>God blesses a barren wife:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elkanah has two wives (Peninnah, Hannah), but does not care that Hannah is childless. He says, 'Am I not better to you than ten sons?' (1 Sam.1:8) <p>Sons dishonor their fathers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eli's sons were unfit priests (1 Sam.2:12-17). Samuel's sons were unworthy of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam.8:3). Kish's son Saul failed as king, and failed his son Jonathan, despite Kish being a mighty man of valor (1 Sam.9:1). David's sons rebelled against him; Absalom carries off a <i>coup d'etat</i> and then dies a tragic-comic death.
<p><i>Pilgrims and Sojourners in the Land</i></p> <p>Succession: of blessing</p> <p>City builders: Cain in Enoch (Gen.4:16 – 24), Nimrod in Babel and other cities (Gen.10:8 – 14)</p> <p>Sanctuary: God's encounters with people serve to confirm His promise of the land to Israel. People build memorials, altars, wells, etc.</p>	<p><i>City-Building and Centralization of Power in the Land</i></p> <p>Succession: of office holders</p> <p>City builders: David in Jerusalem keeps Moabite chariots and multiplies wives contrary to Dt.17:16 – 17</p> <p>Sanctuary: God's presence moves from a roaming Tabernacle to David's offer to build God a fixed Temple-house. But God corrected both David and Nathan (2 Sam.7:4 – 7) and countered with a human dynastic house.</p>
<p><i>Reconciliation of the Family</i></p> <p>Joseph receives a 'coat of many colors' (<i>ketonet passim</i> in Gen.37:3) from his father Jacob, which is dipped in blood and presented to Jacob who says, 'Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!' (Gen.37:33)</p> <p>Tamar, a Canaanite woman, is betrayed within her family, but vindicated, and enters the family of Judah (Gen.38).</p> <p>Joseph resists Potiphar's wife, who says, 'Lie with me' (Gen.39:12). She accused Joseph of rape.</p>	<p><i>Disintegration of the Family</i>⁹</p> <p>Tamar, a Jewish woman and daughter of David, of the tribe of Judah, is betrayed and only avenged later.</p> <p>Amnon says, 'Have everyone go out from me,' (2 Sam.13:9) to clear his bedroom of all but Tamar.</p> <p>Amnon then says, 'Come, lie with me, my sister' (2 Sam.13:11). Tamar is portrayed similarly to Joseph in terms of the type of words and proportion of words she speaks while trying to extricate herself from this terrible situation. Unlike Joseph, Tamar was unable to escape.</p>

⁸ Rosenberg, Joel. "1 and 2 Samuel." Edited by Alter, Robert and Frank Kermode. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. 1990.

⁹ Alter, Robert. *The World of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books. 1992. 114 – 117.

<p>Joseph says, ‘Have everyone go out from me’ (Gen.45:1) to disclose himself to his brothers, to reconcile with them.</p> <p>God’s effort to secure a people who will follow him together and welcome outsiders appropriately results in a Canaanite woman (Tamar) entering the tribe of Judah and an Egyptian woman (Asenath) entering the tribe of Joseph.</p> <p>The narrative of Genesis 37 – 50 reversed elements of the fall from Genesis 2 – 4. Jacob relinquished his favoritism and control over his favored sons, which undid Cain’s control over his son Enoch, and the polygamy which emerged in Cain’s line. The reconciliation of the twelve brothers undid the fratricidal sin in the brothers Cain and Abel.</p>	<p>After the brutal rape, Tamar takes her ‘coat of many colors’ (<i>ketonet passim</i> in 2 Sam.13:18) and tears it in shame and grief.</p> <p>David’s effort to secure a political dynasty (a <i>city</i> in the language of Genesis) by marrying various politically important women backfires and results in bloodshed in his own family, civil war, and a sword on his house.</p> <p>The narrative of 2 Samuel 13 compactly retells elements of the Joseph-Judah story of Genesis 37 – 50, but in reverse order. It is part of the narrative storytelling which underscores that the spiritual achievements in Genesis are being <i>undone</i> in Samuel. The consequences of the fall and human sin are reasserting themselves and lodging themselves into Israel.</p>
<p><i>Genesis Ending (Gen.49 – 50)</i></p> <p>Jacob:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had prophetic insight into each of his twelve sons and named God’s future for them • Blessed his sons and Israel’s future • Deaths of both Jacob and Joseph; God faithful to bring good out of evil (Gen.50:20) 	<p><i>Samuel Ending (2 Sam.24)</i></p> <p>David:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacked spiritual insight and took an inventory of Israel as if he owned God’s people, worrying about Judah being outnumbered • Incurred God’s wrath and jeopardized Israel • Death of David impending, his mediation will end, God’s angel looms

I will continue to develop the argument that book of Samuel as a whole is a thematic inversion of the book of Genesis.¹⁰ Genesis is the record of God calling the chosen family out of paganism. Samuel is the record of paganism creeping back into the chosen people, which largely has to do with using political means to control life in Israel. Five major points of reference may be established.

First, the book of Samuel portrays Elkanah as the inversion of Jacob, and probably Abraham as well. Elkanah, like Jacob and Abraham, was involved with two women (Abraham with Sarah and Hagar; Jacob with Leah and Rachel). Like them, he eventually fathered a supernaturally born son, Samuel (Abraham fathered Isaac with Sarah; Jacob fathered Joseph with Rachel). But Jacob and Abraham cared about their respective future seed, an interest they shared with their wives, which at the very least reflected a desire that God bless Rachel and Sarah, respectively, with a child or children. By contrast, Elkanah said to his wife Hannah, ‘Am I not better to you than ten sons?’, which in the narrative is seen as the height of insensitivity, vanity, and selfishness. Understandably, Hannah remained unconsolated. But unlike Sarah, who laughed at God’s promise of a supernaturally born son, Hannah continued to pray faithfully. The opening of the narrative with an Abrahamic family would, for Jewish readers familiar with their sacred texts, no doubt recall the Genesis patriarchal narratives.

Second, the book of Samuel inverts the relationship between fathers and sons portrayed in Genesis. In the patriarchal narratives, fathers bless sons. They may wrestle and struggle with one another, but remarkably, with God’s providential help, fathers eventually bless their sons. In the narrative of Samuel, fathers curse their sons and vice versa. This is because the narrative of Samuel records Israel’s quest for stable political institutions, a quest that made Israel more and more like the Gentiles surrounding it. The political norm in early Israel was to rely on God, which took the form of letting YHWH call forward judge-prophets as they were needed regardless of their tribal or familial associations. There was a succession of blessing, but no succession in office holding. In Samuel, we find the inversion: a preoccupation with dynastic office holding, and a succession of generational cursing, not blessing.

¹⁰ See also Rosenberg, Joel “1 and 2 Samuel.” Edited by Alter, Robert and Frank Kermode. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. 1990.

Eli's sons were unworthy successors to Eli and so were unfit priests (1 Sam.2:12-17). Samuel's sons were unworthy of their father the prophet (1 Sam.8:3). Succession over the kingship caused all manner of problems. Kish's son Saul was the only character to have come from a prominent family, yet even though Kish was a mighty man of valor (1 Sam.9:1), Saul is the biggest tragedy of the book, even dragging down to death his own son Jonathan, the only worthy son of an officeholder in the narrative. Heroically, Jonathan had enough spiritual discernment with God and friendship with David that he was willing to abandon the dynastic project. Tragically, Saul refused to learn from his son. David also began his public career as being a less favored son from an honorable family. But David had his own failings, and David's sons showed many spiritual defects, not least due to those failings. Absalom carries off a *coup d'etat* but then dies a tragic-comic death with his hair entangled in a tree, inadvertently invoking the law of the cursed son in Deuteronomy 21:22 – 23.

Third, in Samuel, Israel establishes a city within the fundamental fabric of its existence; this is in contrast to the Genesis narrative, where the only cities are built by Cain and Nimrod, whereas the patriarchs wander as pilgrims and sojourners in the land of promise. God's theophany appearances to them also have the character of only being geographically focused by God's own promise to give them the land as an inheritance. Hence, in Genesis, Abraham builds an altar on a mountain near Bethel (Gen.12:8), God spoke to Abraham there, prompting Abraham to move to Hebron (Gen.13:14 – 18); God spoke to Abraham in Hebron in a night vision (Gen.15:1, 12), again when Abraham was ninety-nine years old (Gen.17:1), again in Hebron by the oaks of Mamre (Gen.18:1), again after the weaning of Isaac (Gen.21:12), again when Isaac was a young man (Gen.22:1), and again on Mount Moriah (Gen.22:11). The theophanies had a similar geographic focus for Hagar, Isaac, and Jacob. This can plausibly be interpreted not merely as God appearing to the chosen family wherever they were circumstantially located, but God's marking of the new garden land with signposts of His appearances.

In Samuel, God's theophanic appearances begin this way, but the centralization of worship at Jerusalem changes the dynamic. God encountered Hannah in Ramah (1 Sam.2:21), prophetically through a "man of God" to Eli at Shiloh (1 Sam.2:27), and directly to Samuel in Shiloh (1 Sam.3:1 – 21). When the ark of the covenant – the only object to that point to which God had tied His presence – was taken by the Philistines, ironically the Israelites were unnerved that the glory of the Lord had departed (1 Sam.4:21 – 22), but God Himself brought the ark back to Israel (1 Sam.5 – 7).

However, when at long last David became king and offered to build God a physical house in Jerusalem and Nathan blanketed David with blessing, God responded by *correcting* both Nathan and David. The narrative gives us a contrast between Nathan's disposition and God's in 2 Samuel 7:4, 'But it came about in the same night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan.' God then sent Nathan to David, saying, 'Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I bought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a Tabernacle.' (2 Sam.7:5-6). God made it clear that He had not initiated the selection of Jerusalem or the building of Jerusalem's Temple. One might argue that God's words sound like a proud compliment to David for his originality and initiative in proposing the idea. This notion dovetails with the view that Samuel's main thrust was to legitimate the Davidic monarchy and the Jerusalem Temple. The cumulative data within Samuel, however, throws that interpretation into question. Immediately afterwards, God asks, 'Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'' (2 Sam.7:7) which in common parlance, would sound like this: 'Did I say that? Where did you get that idea? Not from Me.' God did not comment any further on David's intent. Instead, He promised to build His own house through David's eventual descendant without validating David's notion of what God's house would be. The statement suggests at the very least that God preferred His wandering Tabernacle to a fixed house.

In his literary analysis of the Pentateuch, John Sailhamer has proposed that God chose to dwell in the Tabernacle as a way of signifying that He had to come veiled to Israel because of their initial failure to come up onto the mountain in Exodus 19. God wanted to relate to Israel as a whole 'face to face' as He did with Moses, but because they refused, He chose to come 'veiled' just as Moses then 'veiled' his own face.¹¹ It was, in effect, an act of divine condescension and *synkatabasis*. On God's part, the act of dwelling in the Tabernacle was both an act of faithfulness to His promise to be in the midst of His people, but was also as an act of judgment on the people.

¹¹ Sailhamer, John. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 1992. Also very pertinent to this discussion is N.T. Wright's study of Moses veiling his face in 2 Corinthians 3 in Wright, N.T. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 1991. Chapter 9.

David's action can be seen as even more ironic if I am correct in discerning the episode of the Tabernacle and Moses' veil as a criticism of Israel. This subject appears to be the center of a chiasm running through the entire Pentateuch:

1. God's Spirit 'hovers' as God creates heaven and earth; God places humanity in a garden land, but they leave in exile and with a corruption in human nature (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21); origin of all nations: Gen.1:1 – 11:26
2. Covenant inaugurated with Abraham – blessings and curses: Gen.11:27 – 12:8
3. God's faithfulness to the chosen family: Gen.12:9 – 50:26
4. Deliverance of Israelites (first generation) from Egypt, arrival at Sinai: Ex.1:1 – 18:27
 5. Covenant Inaugurated, Broken, Re-Asserted: Ex.19:1 – 24:11
 - a. *God calls Israel to meet Him on the mountain on the third day: Ex.19:1 – 15*
 - b. *Israel's failure – to come up the mountain: Ex.19:16 – 23*
 - c. *God resumes with Moses and Aaron: Ex.19:24 – 25*
 - d. *God gives Israel the Ten Commandments: Ex.20:1 – 17*
 - e. *Israel's failure – Israel afraid of God's voice: Ex.20:18 – 20*
 - f. *God gives all Israel 49 laws (7x7): Ex.20:21 – 23:19*
 - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant, and Moses, Aaron, and 70 elders see God, and eat and drink in His presence: Ex.23:20 – 24:11*
 6. Tabernacle instructions given to house the **veiled** presence of God: Ex.24:12 – 31:11
 7. God commands Israel to observe the Sabbath to imitate God's original creation Sabbath, and writes the covenant on stone tablets: Ex.31:12 – 18
 8. Covenant broken; Israel worships Aaron's golden calves: Ex.32:1 – 29
 9. Moses mediates for Israel, sees God's glory, restores the covenant: Ex.32:30 – 33:23
 - 8'. Covenant affirmed: Ex.34:1 – 17
 - 7'. God commands Israel to observe three annual feasts and writes the covenant on stone tablets again; Moses is partially purified and transfigured but **veils** his face as a sign of judgment, hiding God's glory from the nation: Ex.34:18 – 35
 - 6'. Tabernacle built to instructions; presence of God comes **veiled**: Ex.35:1 – 40:38
 - 5'. Covenant Mediation Inaugurated, Covenant Broken, Re-Asserted: Lev.1:1 – 27:34
 - a. *God calls Israel to approach Him, gives priests a Code for sacrifices: Lev.1:1 – 9:24*
 - b. *Priests' failure – two of Aaron's sons offer strange fire, are consumed: Lev.10:1 – 7*
 - c. *God resumes with Aaron's two others sons: Lev.10:8 – 20*
 - d. *God gives Israel's priests a Priestly Code for the community: Lev.11:1 – 16:34*
 - e. *Israel's failure – God addresses worship of goat idols: Lev.17:1 – 9 (cf. Acts 7:42 – 43)*
 - f. *God gives all Israel a Holiness Code: Lev.17:10 – 25:55*
 - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant: Lev.26:1 – 27:34*
 - 4'. Departure from Sinai, deliverance of Israelites (second generation) from sins (of the first generation): Num.1:1 – 36:13
 - 3'. God's faithfulness forms the basis for Moses' exhortation: Dt.1:1 – 26:19
 2. Covenant offered to Israel – blessings and curses: Dt.27:1 – 29:29
 - 1'. God must circumcise human hearts after Israel's exile (30:6); 'heaven' and 'earth' (32:1) witness destiny of Israel and nations; God's Spirit 'hovers' (32:11) over Israel as they enter garden land: Dt.30:1 – 34:12

My point here does not hang on the validity of the chiasmic structure, though the chiasm is helpful to visualize; Sailhamer makes the same points without it simply by following the narration. What is significant here is the fact that the covenant at Sinai was stabilized only by creating a hierarchy of priests who would mediate the covenant on behalf of all for Israel after Moses' departure. As a result, Israel as a whole remained outside the Tabernacle, and at a remove from the presence of God. Only the high priest of Israel was allowed to enter through the 'veil' of the Holy of Holies, and only in great peril at that, once a year on the Day of Atonement when the sins of the nation were addressed for that year. David's move from Tabernacle to Temple was therefore an ironic move to make the veiling of God more permanent. It made 'Plan B' look like it was 'Plan A' by firming it up. David more firmly institutionalized God's veiling of Himself, even though the veiling was a temporary measure that would become obsolete in and through Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant. Significantly, both the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Hebrews both describe Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat sacrifice appropriate to that event, the tearing of the veil, and the new covenant that God always wanted to enjoy with His people, where He would relate to all His people 'face to face,' not through a hierarchy of priestly mediators, exactly Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 3 when he discusses Moses and his veil, the glory of the new covenant, and the equality of all believers rather than additional status and prestige given to exceptional leaders.

The ironic move concerning Jerusalem and the Temple is contextualized into a portrayal of David that makes him out to be a Cain or a Nimrod, a city-builder, precisely the opposite attitude of the pilgrim patriarchs. David uttered a beautiful prayer in response to God's word regarding this Temple, but then went out to capture the chief city of Moab. He retained their chariot horses, something the king of Israel had been warned against doing in Dt.17:16. His dalliance in Jerusalem entangled him with Bathsheba and Uriah. David's inverted the divine intent for the kingship of Israel by not leading the army out to holy war, and he made a poor contrast with the scrupulous Uriah, who was a foreign mercenary and yet upheld the sexual purity requirements of YHWH's holy war in Lev.15:16 – 18. God then cursed David's family with the sword, and David himself with betrayal from within his own family (12:10 – 11), all of which did not overturn God's earlier promise of blessing on David's line, but significantly undercut it. The Davidic dynasty would be firmly established, but stripped of peace, the inversion of Israel's expectations. This was followed by his family tragedy with Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom, and the loss of Amnon, David's first born son.

Yet another inversion of the Genesis narrative occurs in the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Sam.13).¹² The story alludes to the story of Joseph in a number of ways. To clear his bedroom of all but Tamar, Amnon says, 'Have everyone go out from me,' the same words Joseph used in Gen.45:1 when he began to disclose himself to his brothers to reconcile with them. Amnon then says, 'Come, lie with me, my sister,' which echoes the lusty words of Potiphar's wife to Joseph in Gen.39:12, 'Lie with me.' Tamar is portrayed similarly to Joseph in terms of the type of words and proportion of words she speaks while trying to extricate herself from this terrible situation. Unlike Joseph, Tamar was unable to escape. After the brutal rape, Tamar tears her 'coat of many colors' (*ketonet passim* in 13:18); Joseph was, and is, the only other biblical character who wore such a coat. The significance of these allusions is seen in the convergence of literary techniques and concerns. Alter notes that the sequence of allusion proceeds in the reverse direction as in the Joseph story. In Joseph's narrative, the coat is mentioned first, then the temptation by Potiphar's wife, and then the reconciliation with his brothers in a tearful but joyous family reunion in Egypt when he says 'Have everyone go out from me.' In the Samuel narrative, the order of the allusions reinforces the sense that David's family is falling apart; this is the beginning of the state of profound unreconciliation within David's family. The reversal of the Joseph story is a microcosm of what is happening more broadly, the reversal of the Genesis story. David's effort to secure a political dynasty (a *city* in the language of Genesis) by marrying various politically important women backfires and results in bloodshed in his own house.

Sadly, bloodshed seems to be the major theme of the last portion of the book, as if to portray the seriousness of the curse of bloodshed God placed on the line of David. David's administration was undercut by Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam.15 – 18). During his retreat from Jerusalem, David was cursed for being a man of blood (16:5 – 8). Absalom was caught in the ridiculous situation of having his head caught between two branches of an oak tree and was killed by Joab and the ten young men with him (18:9 – 15). Absalom, having had no sons, was memorialized by a pillar called Absalom's monument, which is perhaps a minor play on the concepts of sons and city-like monuments. David's return led to a crisis of unity between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes of Israel, this time led by Sheba the son of Bichri, of Benjamin (19:40 – 20:26). While in pursuit of Sheba, Joab slew Absalom's former captain Amasa, who 'lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the highway' (20:12). Sheba's rebellion was put down when the inhabitants of Abel Beth-maacah cut off Sheba's head and tossed it to Joab. David then intervened for the famine God had inflicted on the land for the bloodshed of Saul against the Gibeonites by hanging seven sons of Saul (21:1 – 14). 'After that God was moved by entreaty for the land.'

After describing the deeds of the mighty men and two of David's psalms (21:15 – 23:39), the book of Samuel comes to a peculiar end which deserves careful attention. Without any immediate explanation, God's ire was aroused against Israel, which incited David to number the people. This refers to a census taken for military purposes. It must be determined through analysis of the narrative what caused God's anger in the first place, and one certainly gets the impression that all the bloodshed, internal tension, and lack of reconciliation in the previous chapters had something to do with it. Regardless, the result was that David became aware that Israel's fighting force outnumbered Judah's by three hundred thousand. David apparently felt insecure about his position as king over the entire nation and was possibly seeking reassurance through the military strength of his own tribe. When he discovered that Judah was outnumbered, David repented, but not in time to ward off God's plague of pestilence which killed seventy thousand men indiscriminately from all twelve tribes. David encountered God's angel of death at Jerusalem, God's 'anointed,' at which point he offered himself and his house in place of the entire nation.

¹² Alter, Robert. *The World of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books. 1992. 114-117.

This brings us to the dominant theme running through Samuel, that of intercession and intervention before God. Throughout the narrative of Samuel are incredible moments where people intercede or intervene for others, or fail to do so; unfortunately this list is far too long to discuss here. This self-sacrificial intercession was the attitude God wanted in David, and indeed in all the characters of the Samuel narrative. This search began when God declared at the start of the narrative, 'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always' (1 Sam.2:35). But throughout the twists and turns in the story of Israel, there is a sense in which God's search for a priest falls imperfectly on David, the king. And there is a sense in which the 'anointed' figure before whom the 'priest' would walk is revealed ultimately not as the anointed prophet or the anointed king of Israel, but the angel of death. The narrative reveals that God desired not the attitude of Saul who used the kingship to guard against his own personal fears and insecurities, but that of the substitutionary priest who prays on behalf of the people and gives himself for them. This David finally seems to understand at the end of the narrative. He bought the threshing floor from Araunah the Jebusite and built an altar. He interceded for all the people and appealed for God's great mercy. 'Thus the Lord was moved by entreaty for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel' (2 Sam.24:25). And there the narrative ends.

What is the prophetic meaning of the Book of Samuel as a whole, and how does it help us understand the political work Israel engaged in? We can say with confidence that David was not the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy of a faithful priest because he was about to die and his family was cursed. He was not the great intercessor between God and the people that the prophecy expected. This question, that of succession, of fathers and sons, as to who will intercede between God and the people, arose with every major character and is not resolved in the narrative of Samuel. The open-ended nature of the close presses a searching question: Who will be the person who is both from David yet greater than him? This very uncomfortable ending may be the reason why Jewish literary scholar Robert Alter, in his commentary of Samuel, extends his commentary beyond the boundaries of the narrative of Samuel and into 1 Kings 1 – 2.¹³ This gives Alter's treatment of Samuel the appearance that the narrative really climaxes in the building of the Temple, as if the Temple became the permanent institution of which Eli, Samuel, and David were the human precursors. However, it manifestly does not. If a literary scholar designed a commentary of the Torah, which ends with a prophecy of Israel's future failure and Moses' death, but included the first few chapters of Joshua's conquest of the land out of an uneasy sense that the Torah should not end negatively, such a move would negate the main point of both the Torah and Joshua! Furthermore, the narrative of Kings contains a very similar message to that of Samuel, in particular a negative one regarding the Davidic house, the Temple, and Jerusalem, so Alter's attempt to make the introduction of Kings serve as the final appendage of Samuel is dissatisfying from literary and theological points of view.

We should therefore consider the role of Samuel and the historical place it had within Israel. If we suspend for a moment the hasty conclusion that the book of Samuel was composed and circulated during the Babylonian Exile to reinforce Israel's monarchy-Temple traditions, then we might place the book where it more naturally belongs: after David's kingship, during the first Temple period, when the kings of Israel increasingly behaved like ordinary pagan kings and the stationary priestly center was firmly established at Jerusalem. If this is the correct setting, then the book is an extraordinary literary critique of those historical events. At the least, it is a relativization of those institutions, and a reminder of the original meaning of the Torah: God wants a temple-people, not a people-with-a-temple.

If Samuel the prophet had already been warned against the king and his actions, if prophetic attention was turning to study the effect of the centralization of the worship of YHWH as early as the days of Saul, David, and Solomon, then we should not be surprised if the book of Samuel seems to be a subtle critique of the priests, the kingship, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem: the key institutions of Israel. The Jerusalem priests incurred criticism in this narrative via the stationary priesthood exemplified by the fat and perpetually sitting Eli. The sedentary, stationary figure of Eli was perhaps a negative foreshadowing of the Jerusalem Temple; once the spiritual leadership became stationary, it too became fat and slow. The Temple, too, was implicitly criticized by the book's treatment of the ark of the covenant. This was confirmed later by Jeremiah, when Jeremiah upbraided the people for their naïve notion that Jerusalem would not fall to Babylon simply because the Temple was there (Jer.7:1 – 14), he referred back to Israel's error during the days of Samuel in turning to the ark at Shiloh as if it were a magical talisman (1 Sam.4 – 7). Hence, the mistaken interpretation of the ark reflected the very live issue of the first Temple, and Jeremiah is our

¹³ Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation and Commentary*. New York, NY: Norton. 1999.

witness that the ark narrative (and probably all of Samuel) was known and understood well before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, suggesting a dating for the composition of Samuel well within the first Temple period, not the exilic period. Jeremiah's parallel was especially devastating because it indicated that Israel's belief in a semi-pagan superstition during Samuel's days would have the same disastrous results as their belief in another semi-pagan superstition, even one centered on the great Temple. If the book of Samuel was meant to legitimate the Temple, we might expect the narrative to end fittingly with the Temple being built, but instead, it has a different focus altogether: God did not want an object, a talisman, a locale, or an institution. He wanted a *person or a people*.

The city of Jerusalem proper received its due criticism also. David's inauguration of the city of Jerusalem was not vitally integral to his role as a faithful intercessor. In fact, Jerusalem was the setting of David's major tragedies: David's concubines and wives came from Jerusalem, David shed Uzzah's blood on the way to establishing Jerusalem, David sinned with Bathsheba in Jerusalem, God cursed David's family in Jerusalem, Amnon's incestual rape of Tamar occurred in Jerusalem, David's problems with Absalom began in Jerusalem, David had to overcome personal inertia in Jerusalem to bring Absalom back safely, Absalom rebelled and then went into David's concubines in Jerusalem, and David and Joab took a census of the nation at Jerusalem. Special attention should be paid to the event of David's undoing. A deliberate contrast between tent and city is made when Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in booths' (2 Sam.11:11). Not only is this a subtle rebuke of the immoral David by the scrupulous foreigner Uriah, and not only is it a direct comparison of the nation laboring at war and the king (who should have been leading the troops) taking his ease in the city, it condemns David's temple idea by displaying how David's tendencies were in direct opposition to the ark of God and the whole nation. The very idea by which David achieved permanence in Israel, not only dynastically but also geographically, also became David's undoing and the cause of the curse that fell on his future sons. It appears that the book of Samuel plays out in a microcosm the tragic relations between father and son in the city, complete with the motif of bloodshed. Not only did Absalom murder Amnon, David's first born, he refused to dwell with the family, he rebelled against his father, he violated his father's concubines, and he was slain while being stuck in an oak tree, a fate which would have been comical were it not simultaneously terrible due to the Deuteronomic proviso, 'Cursed is he who hangs on a tree' (Deut.21:22 – 23). The inauguration of a permanent city in God's name resulted in the cursing of sons, even to the point of David's entire future house – every son! – being cursed. David was the man who established Jerusalem as a permanent fixture in Israel, and every son of his entered into a curse.

Herein lies the tragedy that reinforces the pattern of cities and sons, and it is here, in Samuel. As we place ourselves under the bittersweet story as it would have been understood then, one of the questions we must ask is: If priest, prophet, and king did not have worthy spiritual sons, who then will stand between God and the nation Israel after David? In fact, the question posed to Israel is: What dynasty or institutional role can last beyond one generation? When the divine norm had been the spontaneous calling of judge-prophets to stand between God and the people, what did it mean that Israel inverted that pattern to establish well-defined national institutional roles? Who then will fulfill the prophecy of the faithful priest? Only someone that Eli the priest, Samuel the prophet, and David the king together foreshadowed: the Messiah, the true mediator who will be a faithful priest, prophet, and king, who will do according to what is in God's heart and soul, who will have an enduring house, and who will walk before God always (1 Sam.2:35). But it would come at a terrible price: Jesus the true son of David had to hang, cursed, on a tree (Gal.3:13), and bear in full the fury of God towards David's house. In fact, it was almost certainly an awareness of this which stimulated David to look forward to a Messianic descendant embodying Melchizedek's combination of king and priest (Ps.110). If these themes – *criticism* of Jerusalem and hope in Messiah – are the thrust of the narrative, then commentators who have long viewed the book of Samuel in the opposite direction, simply as the genesis document of the monarchy-Jerusalem-Temple tradition,¹⁴ are overdue for a major adjustment.

If the book of Samuel is the inversion of Genesis because it portrays how fathers and sons fail to bless – and even curse – each other, how should we then think of the political activity and occupational work that is, in effect, an attempt to achieve permanence on this earth? It is difficult to regard such activity in a positive light. In fact, it is important not to take Old Testaments books that discuss Jerusalem positively – like Ezra-Nehemiah or the Chronicles or the Psalms – as a legitimation of Gentile city-building in general, precisely because Jerusalem was absolutely unique in its role in Israel. God was acting to honor His commitment to David so He could resolve it in and through Jesus. Jesus needed to march into Jerusalem to proclaim his reign beginning there, but from that point, his lordship was not localized and the actual city of Jerusalem did not need to be defended against the Romans, said Jesus. Jesus needed to stand in the Temple to proclaim its end, because from that point, God's indwelling presence

¹⁴ Many commentaries I have consulted assume this, from liberal (e.g. Gerhard Von Rad) to conservative. Rosenberg and to a lesser extent, Alter, are the exceptions.

was not located in a building, but in the disciples of Jesus by the Spirit of Jesus. It therefore becomes more understandable why the New Testament takes up with renewed force the language and ethics of pilgrimage, with considerable significance for a Christian theological understanding of work in its social, economic, and political aspects.