

What's Up with Saul?
A King from Benjamin and the Will of God

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I

Why was the Lord reluctant to appoint a king over the First Commonwealth? When he did set up a king why was it Saul of the tribe of Benjamin? These two questions raise interrelated difficulties. The first question relates to theocratic rule versus human monarchy as the ideal of God's will. The second question lurks behind this concern, whether one sees a human king for Israel as Plan A or Plan B, namely, why a king from the tribe of Benjamin? Christian interpreters did not invent these troublesome questions.

The Primary Narrative (Gen-2 Kgs) presents Saul's rule in a somewhat complicated, if not conflicted, manner. The Deuteronomistic narration (Josh-Judg-Sam-Kgs), for its part, leaves readers to puzzle over God's will with respect to a human king and even Saul's basic orientation toward God.¹ That Saul suffered deep mental, family, and political troubles is evident even if interpreters haggle over the specific nature of each.

The Chronicler faced significant challenges when he retold the old story for a new day. He narrated the monarchy of the First Commonwealth within a broad framework to speak into the lingering sense of loss and disillusionment of the postexilic situation. The Chronicler recycled and repurposed materials from across the Primary Narrative, especially from the books of Samuel and Kings. The Chronicler re-presented the Davidic dynasty as the monarchy of all Israel. The Chronicler ignored creation and the primeval stories, made passing reference to the Abrahamic covenant and the redemption from Egypt, skipped the conquest and the delivering judges, ignored and/or suppressed the northern kingdom, and explained the Babylonian captivity in a mere two verses. Yet, the Chronicler did not begin narration with David. First comes Saul.

¹ The Primary Narrative refers to the serial narrative comprised of the Torah (Gen—Deut) and the Deuteronomistic Narrative (Josh-Judg-Sam-Kgs). I am using these terms to refer to these serial narratives with respect to their narrative unity and coherence. My concerns are not with detecting sources or dating layers of the received texts. The residual elements of previous stages of the narratives, however, stand as invitations for inquiry within the received scriptures. For a discussion of these complementary contexts see my "The Trouble with Jephthah: Interpreting Scriptural Narrative according to Its Contexts and Functions," Evangelical Theological Society paper, 2009 (www.ScriptureWorkshop.com/studies).

But why? Other ancient writings presented the rise of the Davidic kingdom without reference to Saul, like Psalm 78 (esp. 78:56-72) and Sirach 44-49 (esp. 46:13-47:12).²

If the Chronicler chose to exclude attention from many of the authoritative and central traditional narratives, why include Saul? The reasons are not obvious yet they are important. The next two sections will approach the questions of monarchy and tribal election from the perspective of the Chronicler's reading of the Primary Narrative. A brief conclusion will spell out selected implications of these findings.

Two matters of the Chronicler's sources should be spelled out before proceeding. First, I find convincing the idea that the Chronicler had access to and was faithful to his sources, written and/or oral, which he considered historically reliable, for most of the "new materials" in the narrative. Julius Wellhausen's thesis that the Chronicler's sources were only the biblical materials and his own inventions seems increasingly unlikely.³ The work of Sara Japhet, amongst others, demonstrates in many ways by close reading across the Chronicler's entire work that he is careful, possibly rigid, and faithful to his sources.⁴

Second, the Chronicler's version of the books of Samuel and Kings may not be identical to Masoretic recension. Many witnesses, especially the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls, point to the ongoing editorial work on the books of Samuel and Kings in antiquity. At one time many saw in every deviation between the parallel materials of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles testimony to the latter's intentions. However, in some cases the Chronicler faithfully copied his source and the Masoretic version displays later "tweaking." In the main, I am working with the idea that the Chronicler's version of Samuel and Kings is closely akin to the Masoretic version and that he often is the reason for deviations. Still, each case must be dealt with individually, and differences need to be used with qualification and caution.⁵

² See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Harper & Row, 1962), 1: 327. For a discussion of the Chronicler's historiographical limitations and how these bear on elements not included in his narrative, see Ehud Ben Zvi, "Shifting the Gaze: Historiographical Constraints in Chronicles and Their Implications," in J. Andrew Dearman and M. Patrick Graham, eds., *The Land that I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 343 (Sheffield, 2001), 38-60.

³ See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 222-27.

⁴ See Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Westminster John Knox, 1993), 18-19; idem., *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, trans. Anna Barber (1989; reprint, Eisenbrauns, 2009), 6-8.

⁵ The Dead Sea Scrolls have affirmed another version of the book of Samuel (4QSam^a), one which might be more like the text before some of the Septuagintal translators. Since the ancestor of the books of Samuel and Kings in the Masoretic Text are not the only versions (or text types), each case needs to be weighed carefully, with the results used tentatively. Considering the Chronicler's broader emphases is important for corroborating differences. See

II

Did God oppose a human king for ancient Israel? This question remains much contested. Moshe Weinfeld contends that ancient Israelite covenant theology espouses the idea of “God as king” rather than “earthly kingship.” Gideon’s reply to his fans and Samuel’s denunciation of requests for a king are cited in favor of this viewpoint.⁶ The standard explanation of the rise of Saul in First Samuel breaks down the story into its alternating pro-monarchical (A) and anti-monarchical (B) sources.⁷

8:1-22	9:1-10:16	10:17-27	11:1-15	12:1-25
B	A	B	A	B

If First Samuel 8-12 displays intertwined pro- and anti-monarchic sources, are the latter dominant? Does this mean the anti-monarchic tendencies are Deuteronomistic? Or are the Deuteronomistic tendencies pro-monarchic? Are both accounts pro-theocratic?, and so on.⁸ The

Steven L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler’s Use of the Deuteronomistic History*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 63 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1984), 33-81, esp. 72; Werner E. Lemke, “The Synoptic Problem in the Chronicler’s History,” *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (1965): 349-63. For an example of detailed interaction with text critical issues and literary interpretation, see Robert Rezetko, *Source and Revision in the Narratives of David’s Transfer of the Ark: Text, Language and Story in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15-16* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). For an alternate view, Chronicler and Deuteronomistic Historian using an historical work from Hezekiah’s court, see Baruch Halpern, “Sacred History and Ideology: Chronicles’ Thematic Structure—Indications of an Earlier Source,” 35-54, in Richard Elliot Friedman, ed., *The Creation of Sacred Literature: Composition and Redaction of the Biblical Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁶ See Judg 8; 1 Sam 8; 10; 12; and see Moshe Weinfeld, “בְּרִית *berith*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Eerdmans, 1975), 2: 275, 278-79. Weinfeld attributes his reading to Walther Eichrodt’s work on covenant, on which see his *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Westminster Press, 1961), 1: 194-205. For description of the covenant as vassal treaty as opposed to law code, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (reprint, Eisenbrauns, 1992 [Oxford, 1972]), 146-57, esp. 156-57. For explanation of God not referred to as “king” in Deut, see 84, n. 4. Also see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 1980), 160-62.

⁷ See Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1872), IX, 67, 77 (Thank you to Samuel Matlack for tracking down and translating numerous passages from Wellhausen’s discussion of this.) The diagram is adapted from Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Fortress, 1979), 277.

⁸ For the anti-monarchical tendencies as dominant in 1 Sam 8-12, see Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 278; on the Deuteronomist as anti-monarchical, see Steve McKenzie in Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, fourth rev. ed. (Oxford, 2010), 410; on the Deuteronomist viewpoint as pro-monarchic see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 168-71; on both accounts as pro-theocracy, see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1: 326. For a discussion of some of the historical-political implications of two strands redacted together along with related texts, see J. Maxwell Miller, “Saul’s Rise to Power: Some Observations Concerning 1 Sam 9:1-10:16; 10:26-11:15 and 13:2-14:46,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 157-74; Diana Edelman, “Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?,” in *The Land that I Will Show You*, 69-91. For a different interpretation which raises significant insights (even if it does not convince), see Baruch Halpern, “The Uneasy Compromise: Israel between League and Monarchy,” in Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson, eds., *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (Eisenbrauns, 1981), 59-96, esp. 85-90.

longstanding impasse betrays hosts of complications and variables, along with diverse approaches to the question.

The rise of synchronic approaches to biblical narration provides some help. V. Philips Long argues for integrity and coherence as well as the artistic and theological subtlety of the rise of Saul narrative.⁹ The larger tendency toward narration by juxtaposition in the book of Samuel strengthens the viability of Long's several studies.¹⁰ For my own reading of the rise of Saul within the Primary Narrative, sharing many of Long's interpretive sensibilities, the problem is not *that* the Israelites want a human king but *why* they demand a king. Within the Primary Narrative I am inclined to see God's gift of a king in line with the expectations for a Judah king in Genesis and the laws regarding a king in Deuteronomy.¹¹ For my present purposes I need only establish the typical diversity of interpretation.

How did the Chronicler approach the question of a human king of Israel? Did the Chronicler sense tension in his biblical source material between the so-called pro- and anti-monarchical tendencies? Was this amongst the set of gaps and incongruities within the

⁹ See V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), esp. useful is the discussion of "royal propaganda" as a neutral term with respect to historicity (see 240-41); idem., *The Art of Biblical History* (Zondervan, 1994), 201-23; idem., "How Did Saul Become King?: Literary Reading and Historical Reconstruction," in A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, David W. Baker, eds., *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (Eisenbrauns, 1994), 271-84. Also see Eric Alan Mitchell, *A Literary Examination of the Function of Satire in the Mišpaṭ Hammeleḳ of I Samuel 8* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (Oxford, 2008), 18-22; Peter S. Hawkins, Review of *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* by Paul Borgman, *Review of Biblical Literature* 9 (2010) (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6985_8125.pdf [accessed 10.22.10]); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, vol. IV, *Vow and Desire (I Sam. 1—12)* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993), 319-549, see esp. 532-49; W. Lee Humphreys, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9—31," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (1978): 18-27. For a recent assessment of evangelicals and synchronic approaches, see J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 3-18.

¹⁰ While Long's shift from anti-monarchic/pro-monarchic to anti-Saul/pro-David has merit, it does not set aside Samuel's initial concerns voiced before Saul came into the picture. See Long, *Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, 241.

¹¹ See Gary E. Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Zondervan, 2006), 502-4. Mitchell's detailed literary study of 1 Sam 8 and context presents it as satirical. "[T]his satiric dialectic ... builds a subtle case against the Saulide kingship but not against kingship. It builds up Samuel yet puts down an untimely request for kingship as idolatrous" (*Literary Examination of the Function of Satire*, 289). Recognizing the complexity of the presentation of Samuel holds much promise. While Samuel is a prophet of God, offering God's will to the people, his own character is distinguished from God by showing that while God does not change his mind Samuel does (see 1 Sam 15:26, 29, 31). Also, the Deuteronomist does not condemn Samuel's routine of sacrificing at several places along a circuit. Yet, the Deuteronomistic concern for the central sanctuary makes one wonder about the silence (Deut 12). I cannot here pursue these questions about the narrative function of Samuel's relative moral character. On another note, if the period of the judges is considered within the framework of the Deuteronomistic Narrative the people's demand of a king may be the "climactic sin" of the era (Judg 2—1 Sam 12), see Dennis J. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 134-35. McCarthy says even more strongly, "I Sam 12 actually sees Saul's monarchy as the culminating sin of the period of the judges" (138).

authoritative traditions of Israel which were bothering the Chronicler?¹² Perhaps, but this seems merely attendant to the cluster of his primary concerns. In the course of reworking the Deuteronomistic material to represent the Davidic dynasty and its temple, the Chronicler depicted Solomon as the ruler over the kingdom of God. David said, “He [Yahweh] has chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel” (1 Chron 28:5).¹³ “[T]he kingship is not ‘before’ YHWH; it is YHWH’s.” That is, the Chronicler “equates monarchy with theocracy—the Israelite monarchy is YHWH’s kingship over Israel.”¹⁴

The Chronicler is not alone in seeing Yahweh’s kingdom as ruling in, through, and by Israel’s human rule. One of the psalmists says, “For Yahweh the Most High is fear-inspiring, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet” (Ps 47:3, 4).¹⁵ The Chronicler takes the next step and tells of David explicitly presenting the rule of Solomon as the kingdom of God over Israel. It could be argued that this represents a synthesis between competing views of the kingdom—an innovation of the Chronicler.¹⁶ Yet, such an explanation does not adequately deal with the Chronicler’s biblical source material, especially the Davidic covenant.

David’s view of election and his son’s place over God’s kingdom appear to be a working out of the implications of God’s covenant to him. The Chronicler “did not create *ex nihilo*” but seems to have taken some of his cues from significant traditions concerning the dynastic promise, namely those found in Second Samuel 7 and to a lesser extent Psalm 132.¹⁷ David’s views concerning Solomon as the king over God’s kingdom are rooted in his election by and sonship to God. David’s extrapolations from the dynastic promise also include explaining the reasons for his own disqualification from building the temple. All of this bears upon the function of Saul in Chronicles.

¹² See Gary N. Knoppers, “Changing History: Nathan’s Oracle and the Structure of the Davidic Monarchy in Chronicles,” in Moshe Bar-Asher et al., eds., *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its exegesis, and Its Language* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 101*. Knoppers suggests that one of the incongruities bothering the Chronicler is the divine mandate to build a shrine and the restriction against David building it (cf. esp. Deut 12:10 echoed in 2 Sam 7:1) (see 100*).

¹³ All biblical translations mine. David’s view was passed down. King Abijah told Jeroboam he could not stand against “the kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of the sons of David” (2 Chron 13:8).

¹⁴ Japhet, *Ideology*, 314, also see esp. 308-20.

¹⁵ I have not translated יִדְבֹר (Hif impf [homonym of דָּבַר]) as *shall subdue* or *will subdue* since the context sounds like an historical reference to the conquest and David’s military dominion (47:4). On the use of *yiqtol* (impf) with the value of *qatal* (pf)—usually in poetry—see Joüon, § 113 h, o; GKC, § 107 b, and p. 314, n. 1.

¹⁶ See Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 489.

¹⁷ Regarding the Davidic covenant as shaping the narration of the latter part of David’s life in Chronicles, see Knoppers, “Changing History,” 123*. He says “the Chronicler employ[s] the Davidic promises as an overarching rubric to structure this period [David’s latter life in 1 Chron]” (119*; and see entire essay 99*-123*).

First, David's interpretation of God's will for Solomon springs from his highly ironic disqualification to build the temple. In Samuel, Nathan reports God's will, "I will give you rest [נִירָה Hif] from all your enemies" and connects "Yahweh will make you a house" (2 Sam 7:11), which in Chronicles becomes "I will subdue [כָּנַע Hif] all your enemies" with "I will build you a house" (1 Chron 17:10).¹⁸ David extrapolates or deduces that subduing enemies creates the rest necessary to qualify his son to build the temple. David paraphrases God's word to his son, "See, a son will be born to you, he will be a man of rest [מְנוּחָה], and I will give him rest [נִירָה Hif] from all his enemies from all around" (1 Chron 22:9). From this David reasons backwards that he is not qualified because he is not a man of rest. As he paraphrases Nathan's oracle privately, "the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, 'You have poured out much blood and have made great battles. You shall not build a house for my name because much blood you have poured out to the earth before me'" (22:8), and publically, "God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and you have poured out blood'" (28:3). In the latter case the word of God is a response to David's desire "to build a house of rest [מְנוּחָה] for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, for the footstool of our God" (28:2).¹⁹

David's temple-building disability is identical to the prerequisite for the temple. This deep irony precludes any one person from building the temple. Building the temple of God is by nature a multigenerational project. The father subdues enemies to make rest and the son builds the house of God.

Second, Nathan's dynastic oracle leads David to see himself, his son, and his entire ancestral line as elect by God. He extrapolates from the divine quasi-adoption language—"I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son" (2 Sam 7:14). Select psalmists read the father-son language as covenantal divine adoption of the dynasty, like "Yahweh said to me 'You are my son, today I have fathered you'" (Ps 2:7), and "he will call to me [God], 'You are my father' ... I

¹⁸ On כָּנַע in Chron, see Knoppers, "Changing History," 104*ff, 112*.

¹⁹ On *rest* and *footstool* see Num 10:35-36, *rest* = return from battle (cf. Ps 132:8, 14; Isa 66:1). Japhet seeks to distinguish between the ark rests, not God; and between ark or temple as *footstool*, see *I & II Chronicles*, 487. While the Chronicler may be working against 2 Sam 7:4-7 (that a stationary sanctuary is not necessary) and/or Isa 66:1-2, it seems he rather concurs with Ps 132 in several respects; especially in David and the people bringing the ark to Jerusalem, along with the use of Ps 132 in the psalm of dedication for temple (2 Chron 6:41). See Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10—29*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 2004), 926. On the relationship between 1 Chron 22 and 28 tying together the temple preparations in the intervening chapters, see John W. Wright, "The Legacy of David in Chronicles: The Narrative Function of 1 Chronicles 23—27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110.2 (1991): 229-42.

will appoint him firstborn” (89:27-28).²⁰ David and the Chronicler reason that God had elected Judah himself and the line that led to David (1 Chron 5:1-2; 28:4, in both contexts Judah is called “leader” [לְיָדָד]).²¹

If readers saw anti-monarchical tendencies embedded in the scriptural account of the rise of Saul, maybe the Chronicler felt the need to adjust their thinking. Yahweh is king and theocracy is his will. For the Chronicler theocracy is not mutually exclusive to God’s election of a human king. The Chronicler accents the son of David as the human king of the kingdom of God over Israel. The Chronicler ostensibly follows David’s deductions based on Nathan’s oracle. The Chronicler’s strong testimony for the election of the Davidic monarchy from the earliest times provokes another more troubling question. Why Saul?

III

Why did God appoint Saul of Benjamin? This question points to several interrelated difficulties. Whatever answers can be inferred from the Primary Narrative and Chronicles are murky at best. Any easy categorical answers indicate an incomplete grasp of the issues.

Did God choose Saul in a “backhanded way” to punish his people by giving them what they asked for?²² Samuel stressed the burdens the people would bear by having a king (1 Sam

²⁰ See Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90.2 (1970): 190-91 [184-203]; Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study of Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Harvard University Press, 1963), 29-46. While Japhet rightly works against the over readings of von Rad and others, she overstates, “The concept of a covenant with David has no importance or theological significance in the book of Chronicles” (*Ideology*, 358). For a more viable view see Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10—29*, 671-73, 928. Also see Gary N. Knoppers, “Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the David Covenant: A Parallel?,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996): 670-97; idem., “David’s Relation to Moses: The Contexts, Content, and Conditions of the Davidic Promises,” in John Day, ed., *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 270 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 91-118; Steven L. McKenzie, “The Typology of the Davidic Covenant,” in *The Land that I Will Show You*, 152-78.

²¹ I read 1 Chron 5:1-2 as the Chronicler’s interpretation of Gen 37-46, see *The Torah Story*, 160; also see Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10—29*, 938-39. The importance of God’s election of David and Judah is also reflected in the massive genealogy in 1 Chron 2-4. The only other genealogies of 1 Chron demonstrating similar interest in connection to the patriarchs and matriarchs are the Levitical Koathite priests (5:27-41), Joshua of Ephraim (7:20-23, 25-27), and Saul of Benjamin (8:29-40; 9:35-44), see Gary N. Knoppers, “The Davidic Genealogy: Some Contextual Considerations for the Ancient Mediterranean World,” *Transeuphratene* 22 (2001), 43 [35-50]. Also see Gary N. Knoppers, “Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120.1 (2001): 15-30; idem., “‘Great Among His Brothers,’ But Who Is He?: Heterogeneity in the Composition of Judah,” *Journal of the Hebrew Scriptures* 3 (2001) (http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_16.pdf [accessed 10.22.10]); Gerrie Snyman, “A Possible World of Text Production for the Genealogy in 1 Chronicles 2.3—4.23,” in M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers, eds., *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (T&T Clark International, 2003), 32-60; Japhet, *Ideology*, 347-53.

²² See McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 162. I am indebted to my colleague Herb Hirt for the idea that God granted Saul as a judgment. Hirt suggests the purpose of the judgment is to instruct the people and prepare them for the king God desired for them.

8:11-18).²³ Saul as burden offers some attractive theological and interpretive partial solutions. Saul's place in the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic narratives exceeds this reading, even if it is correct.

Saul as negative foil for the rise of David rightly stands as the dominant reading of Saul's function in the book of Samuel.²⁴ It seems like his story is just beginning when Samuel tells him, "Now your kingdom shall not stand, Yahweh has sought for himself a man according to his own heart, and Yahweh has appointed him as ruler over his people" (1 Sam 13:14). The narrative function of Saul juxtaposed against David instructs readers with the profound realities of God's ways amongst his deeply flawed people. The problem with Saul is not how he fits in the narrative—he makes it great!—but the historical and theological implications of his divine election.

Samuel makes a categorical statement to Saul, "You have behaved foolishly, you have not obeyed the command of Yahweh your God which he commanded you, for now Yahweh would have established your kingdom over Israel forever" (13:13). The force of the verb "would have established" (יָבִיחַ Hif pf) does not express actual but potential past actions to which speakers often refer with confidence.²⁵ How can this be given the election of a Judah king, the tradition of which stretches back to the days of the Hebrew ancestors (as discussed in the section above)?

To more adequately frame the issue requires considering the Benjamin-Judah relations across the Primary Narrative. I will oversimplify and speak approximately both for space and because it is sufficient for my present purposes. I will highlight the traditions which remain within the Primary Narrative, each from different hypothetical readerly vantage points.²⁶

First, Judah protected Benjamin and saved Israel from Joseph. Joseph used his power to psychologically terrorize his brothers, even incarcerating Simeon, all in the name of testing them.

²³ With respect to the highly nuanced and complex relationship between the outlook of the prophet Samuel and the narrator, see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 4: 323.

²⁴ For example, von Rad regards the Saul tradition as inherently dependent upon the one who would rise after him, see *Old Testament Theology*, 1: 327.

²⁵ See examples in GKC, § 106 p including 1 Sam 13:13; also see § 159 dd. The *qatal* (pf) can be used with "past future" conditional sense, esp. with terms like יָבִיחַ, as is the case in 1 Sam 13:13 (see Joüon § 112 i; Waltke/O'Connor, *IBHS*, 30.5.2; this passage is not amongst the examples listed). That is, within certain discourse contexts the *qatal* (pf) can take on some of the modal nuances (e.g., might, would, should) characteristic of the *yiqtol* (impf) (on the modal nuances of *yiqtol* [impf] verbs see Joüon, § 113 l, m, n). Robert Alter translates this phrase "would have made your kingdom over Israel unshaken forever" based on the combined sense of both *establish* and *keep on firm foundation* in יָבִיחַ, see *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1999), 73.

²⁶ I am not making an argument for dates, sources, composition, or redaction. I am simply spinning out hypothetical functions of select narrative traditions at different historical points. The purpose is to expose some of the narrative-theological tendencies of selected Judah-Benjamin traditions in the Primary Narrative.

After making a deal with his father, Judah functioned as leader and acted as spokesperson for his troubled family. His claim that if the Egyptian ruler took the youngest brother the father would die seems realistic even if it sounds melodramatic (see Gen 44:30-31). Joseph was not trying to kill Israel, though, according to Judah, this would be the unintended consequence of his deceiving power play to keep his little brother. Judah's wise and courageous speech marks the highpoint of the Genesis narrative.²⁷

How could this narrative tradition have been regarded at a hypothetical reading point during the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah? The story brilliantly and efficiently casts the father of Ephraim, the leading tribe of Israel, as a bitter, vengeful tyrant who would destroy Israel by his power schemes. Moreover, if Benjamin was more likely to align themselves with their brother's tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, the protection and self-sacrifice of Judah on behalf of Benjamin against Joseph displays an ancient bond upon which a tribal alliance could be based. The story affirms that Judah not Joseph had Benjamin's best interests in mind even while Judah maintained a place above Benjamin as benevolent lord and protector.

I will consider the next two together. Second, Judah leads the tribes against the Canaanites and Canaanized Benjaminites.²⁸ The book of Judges begins with Yahweh's declaration that Judah would lead the attack against the Canaanites (1:1-2). The final episode of the book contains Yahweh's assertion that Judah would lead the tribes against the Sodom-like Benjaminites (20:18).²⁹ Third, a youthful civilian shepherd of Judah slings down a Philistine champion after the giant of the tribe of expert slingers sat for forty days listening to his God being taunted and mocked. Why a sling? The Benjaminites were famous for their troop of super accurate left-handed slingers (20:16, lit. "impeded right hand").³⁰ Any other way David could have killed the Philistine warrior would have been less humiliating for the Benjaminite king of Israel. That is the point.

How could these narrative traditions function at a reading point during the rule of David and/or Solomon? The stories of Judah leading the way against the reprehensible Benjaminites and David doing what should have been done by a Benjaminite warrior both could have served

²⁷ See David A. Diewert, "Judah's Argument for Life as Wise Speech," in J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund, eds., *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 61-74.

²⁸ See Marvin A. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *Vetus Testamentum* 47.4 (1997): 517-29.

²⁹ See Daniel I. Block, "Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 325-41.

³⁰ Within the book of Judges the emphasis on left-handed warriors from the tribe of the sons of the right hand (*benyamin*) is part of the humorous and ironic, polemic rhetorical strategy. I have discussed these literary and theological tendencies at some length, see "The Trouble with Jephthah," Evangelical Theological Society paper, 2009 (www.ScriptureWorkshop.com/studies), and the numerous sources cited therein.

polemic ends. These were the days when the threat of the unified kingdom coming apart had to be watched against. The rule of David and Solomon would have each benefitted from entertaining stories which were emblematic of the place of Judah above Benjamin. There is no way to know if the Chronicler considered Benjamin-Judah relations from these hypothetical vantage points. However, the Chronicler's narration includes both Judah over Benjamin and Benjamin's alignment under the Judah leader even during the Benjamin phase of the monarchy.

The narrative section of Chronicles begins with Saul, not David. Several lines of interpretation explain aspects of the situation but none has gained an upper hand toward a consensus. Sara Japhet contends that the immediate narrative transition of the kingdom of Saul to David demonstrates continuity and strengthens the Chronicler's presentation of unified Israel.³¹ Other views include Saul's doom as a foil for David's glory, the need to interpret Saul in Chronicles in its own right, and the Chronicler presenting Saul's death as the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecies in the book of Samuel.³² A more straightforward answer seems preferable, namely, the Chronicler tells the story of the monarchy of the First Commonwealth from the first king to the last—Saul to Zedekiah.³³ Since the kings of the First Commonwealth's monarchy hailed from two families, both genealogies are emphasized.³⁴

To say Saul rightly stands at the head of the Chronicler's account of the monarchy does not mean his rule is important in its own right within the narrative. Rather, in Chronicles the leading narrative function of the Davidic monarchy pertains to the temple. And, the narrative function of Saul orbits the vehicles by which David along with all Israel established the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. These vehicles include the ark of the covenant and defeating the Philistines along with the other enemies of Israel. Considering these shows that Saul is not merely a negative foil against which to define David as he seems to be through much of the book

³¹ See Japhet, *Ideology*, 319-20; idem., *I & II Chronicles*, 230.

³² For summary of these, see Gary N. Knoppers, "Israel's First King and 'the Kingdom of YHWH in the hands of the sons of David': the Place of the Saulide Monarchy in the Chronicler's Historiography," in C. S. Ehrlich and M. White, eds., *Saul in History and Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 189-91; idem., *I Chronicles 10—29*, 526-31. Also see Saul Zalewski, "The Purpose of the Story of the Death of Saul in 1 Chronicles X," *Vetus Testamentum* 39.4 (1989): 449-67; James M. Trotter, "Reading, Readers and Reading Readers Reading the Account of Saul's Death in 1 Chronicles 10," in M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie, eds., *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 263 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 294-310; Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Chronicler as Exegete," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2 (1977): 3-9 [2-32]; Donald C. Raney, II, *History as Narrative in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, vol. 56 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 43-46.

³³ See Knoppers, "Israel's First King," 192. While the Deuteronomist presented the Davidic kings after Rehoboam as ruling Judah, the Chronicler regards the Davidic kingdom's geographic boundaries as the districts of Benjamin and Judah but the citizens come from all Israel (see Japhet, *Ideology*, 228-30).

³⁴ See 1 Chron 2:3-4:43 (Judah); 8:1-40 (Benjamin); 9:35-44 (Saul).

of Samuel. Rather, in Chronicles Saul's rule provides the context, albeit a negative one, from which David's rule emerged particularly with respect to war and worship. Saul is portrayed negatively with respect to David in both Samuel and Chronicles. The difference in the latter concerns the Chronicler's interest in public David—especially military and worship—rather than private David.³⁵ These differences are not absolute, but they are real, at least in emphasis and basic narrative orientation.

First, David together with all Israel and Yahweh determine as the priority under the new ruler to reacquire the ark of Yahweh. The first part of the ark's journey to Jerusalem is relocated from its place in the narrative sequence of Second Samuel and placed as the immediate act of the new king.³⁶ David makes explicit the priority of worship as an innovation in the monarchy. He said, "Now, let us bring back to us the ark of our God, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul" (1 Chron 13:3). Michal's cameo appearance reinforces seeking the ark as a new, though undesirable, direction. "And when the ark of the covenant of Yahweh came to the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out from the window and saw the king, David jumping and dancing, and she despised him in her heart" (15:29). If Michal had grounds for complaint in the Samuel narrative, the Chronicler's recontextualization merely shows her continuity with her father's attitude toward the ark.³⁷

Second, the Chronicler efficiently introduces the Philistines as Israel's nemesis through the account of the death of Saul in battle against them. The Philistines and all of the other enemies around Israel must be defeated to create rest so the temple can be built as noted above. In Chronicles, immediately following Saul's death all Israel gathers to David seeking his rule as God's will. "All Israel gathered to David at Hebron, saying, 'Look, we are your bone and your flesh. Even in times past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel. And, Yahweh your God said to you, "You will be shepherd to my people Israel, and you will be leader over my people Israel"'" (11:1, 2). In Chronicles the tribal leaders mention a prophecy to which Nathan will later refer (1 Chron 17:6; 2 Sam 7:7).³⁸ Moreover, they maintain that David's military leadership is in continuity with a long established pattern under Saul's rule.

³⁵ Displaying the character of David stands close to the heart the narrative interpretation of Saul and David in the book of Samuel.

³⁶ The Chronicler may be aligning his narrative sequence more closely with Ps 132:2-10 (see Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10—29*, 590-91). The source sequence is David defeats the Philistines (2 Sam 5:17-21, 22-25) then getting the ark (6:1-11), and the Chronicler's sequence is getting the ark (1 Chron 13:5-14) then defeating the Philistines (14:8-12, 13-17). Neither narrative sequence is chronological; see my "Narrative Time in the Books of Joshua Through Kings," Evangelical Theological Society paper, 2008 (www.ScriptureWorkshop.com/studies).

³⁷ See Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 308; Knoppers, "Israel's First King," 206.

³⁸ This word of God is referred to a couple more times here, see 1 Chron 11:10; 12:23.

The Chronicler uses a series of flashbacks in the next two chapters to demonstrate that many of the tribes, including Benjamin, Saul's kin, had been aligning themselves under David's military leadership for many years during Saul's rule. The continuity of David's military leadership and the solidarity of the tribes under David set him apart from Saul.³⁹ What of the Philistines? David's decisive defeats of the Philistines is placed between the two stages of the ark's move to Jerusalem (as opposed to before the ark's movement in Samuel).⁴⁰ Moreover, the Chronicler uses two broad references to David's defeat of the Philistines to frame the series of accounts of his subduing of Israel's several enemies—Philistia (18:1); Moab, Aram, Edom, Ammon, Amalek (18:2-20:3); Philistia (20:4-8). Defeating the Philistines both sets David apart from his predecessor and is part of the dominion prerequisite for building the temple.

Both themes which the Chronicler accented in his presentation of David's rule—worship of Yahweh and defeating the Philistines—appear in the only plus in his account of Saul, which is otherwise carried over from the book of Samuel. The Chronicler offers this commentary: "Saul died for his unfaithfulness by which he acted unfaithfully against Yahweh, with respect to the word of Yahweh which he did not obey, and even to ask a medium to seek guidance, but he did not seek Yahweh, so he killed him. Then he turned over the kingdom to David son of Jesse" (1 Chron 10:13-14).⁴¹ The Chronicler's story of the monarchy of the First Commonwealth begins with Saul, the first king. Saul's rule, however, serves as the negative framework within which we learn of the solidarity of the people under David in warfare and worship. The continuity then is not between the rule of Saul and David, but between the leadership of David under Saul and after Saul.

IV

Why Saul? The biblical presentation of Saul is difficult in both the Primary Narrative and Chronicles. That God chose Saul as the first king of Israel is clear enough. Yet, the clarity of this historical fact gives rise to manifold difficulties.

Samuel is a prophet of God. He is disinclined toward a human monarch. The complexity and subtlety of the rise of Saul narratives add to the challenges. Over and against Samuel's apparent sentiments are the ancient traditions in the Primary Narrative which anticipate a ruler

³⁹ See esp. 1 Chron 12:2, 16-18, 19, 22, 29. See Knoppers, "Israel's First King," 193-98.

⁴⁰ See note 36 above.

⁴¹ Note, *to ask* (לְשׂאֵל) is a wordplay on Saul (שׂאֵל). Isaac Kalimi demonstrates that 1 Chron 10:13-14 is the Chronicler's work rather than a later interpolation, by comparing it to other elements in the book, see *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Eisenbrauns, 2005), 339, and 220.

from Judah. This makes it difficult to apprehend what it means that Saul's kingdom could have stood forever.

What are select implications of the Chronicler's recycling and repurposing Saul's rule in the Primary Narrative? First, the Chronicler answers the problem readers often have with a human king in the Deuteronomistic Narrative, namely, a human king challenges theocratic rule. In Chronicles the monarchy does not displace theocracy but, when it promotes the worship of Yahweh, is the theocracy. David's public address spells out that his son will build the temple and will sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel.

Second, the election of Judah and the Davidic dynasty is intertwined with the establishment of the worship of Yahweh, creating rest by defeating Israel's enemies, and building the temple. Nathan's oracle, especially David's interpretation of it, interconnects David's warfare and his son's temple building by means of the quasi-adoption of the Davidic heir by Yahweh. The election of the Davidic line is affirmed within this complex of elements in Chronicles.

Third, the Chronicler does not exclude Saul nor does he explain Saul. When the narration begins Saul is there to die. Saul is necessary to Chronicles—he is the first king. Moreover, the narrative function of Saul is to reveal David's tendencies even before David became king. The solidarity of the tribes under David's military leadership began under Saul's rule. The innovation upon anointing David as king is the solidarity between the new king and all Israel in seeking the ark of Yahweh.

I am aware that these findings are somewhat counter-intuitive for a study of Saul. I did not set out in this direction but my research brought me here. Why Saul? It's unclear because it's not explained. I still think we are right to ask the question. The scriptural storymakers at one time seem uninterested in answering it and pleased to raise it.

Why Saul in the Primary Narrative? God gives the people what they want even while the blessing of Judah awaits fulfillment. Why Saul in Chronicles? The Chronicler tells the story of the monarchy of the First Commonwealth, and he is its first king. The storymakers of the Primary Narrative and Chronicles both use Saul effectively in presenting their stories. Neither answers the questions about how or why a king from Benjamin can be God's will. But it is.