

**THE BEGINNING OF THE ISRAELITE MONARCHY AND ITS  
IMPACT UPON LEADERSHIP IN ISRAEL**

by SHMUEL ABRAMSKI

In my book, *The Monarchies of Saul and David*,<sup>1</sup> my purpose is neither to provide a chronological summary of the histories of Saul and David — the commentaries are filled with such accounts — nor to discuss these two monarchies as distinct entities, but rather to analyze the beginnings of the Israelite monarchy and its establishment as a regime whose validity extended into the future. The focus of the discussion is not on the monarchy as an abstract concept, nor on the regime in general, with its underlying organizational and social elements, but on the process of its formation, viewed as a synthesis of the salient features of the two earliest monarchies — those of Saul and of David.

I do not see Saul's reign as merely a transient phase, signifying the conclusion of the period of redemptive leadership of the Judges, but as a transitional period during which the monarchic regime took shape, following the interim period of the priesthood of the family of Eli and the leadership of Samuel, which may be described as the proto-monarchic era. Our view is opposed to that prevalent

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1. שמואל אברמסקי, מלכות שאול ומלכות דוד. ראשית המלוכה בישראל והשפעתה לדורות. ירושלים, שקמונה, בשיתוף עם אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון, 1977.

Shmuel Abramski, [*The Monarchies of Saul and David: The Beginnings of the Israelite Monarchy and its Influence upon Future Generations* (Heb.). Jerusalem: Shikmona, in co-operation with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1977. 424 p.

among most historians and Bible scholars, both today and in the past, who argue that Saul was originally merely a redeeming judge, and even afterwards did not function as a king in the full sense of the word — as if he did not establish a royal dynasty, and his reign was merely a transitional one between the rule of the Judges and the Davidic monarchy.<sup>2</sup> In our view, Saul was the first king of Israel, his monarchy marking a revolutionary change from the period of the Judges which preceded it. Although only the first stage of the Israelite monarchy, it already lacked many characteristics of the older tribal regime and, most significantly, involved more change than continuity with respect to the *ancien régime* of the Judges. Paradoxically, the Davidic monarchy was closer in spirit to the period of the Judges and their redemptive leadership than was that of Saul. But David's reign, established following the collapse of Saul's dynasty and in its wake, is primarily a continuation of the previous reign, that of Saul.

While it is generally accepted in Biblical and historical studies that the Davidic monarchy to a great extent had a momentum of its own and a broad authority, encompassing judicial and administrative functions, in our book we have attempted to prove that its rule rested primarily on traditions from the period of the Judges, as well as on memories of the charismatic leadership of the wilderness period (particularly according to the prophecy of Nathan in II Samuel 7). Although it was the successor monarchy to that of Saul, it laid down several basic elements of the future monarchic regime which were already latent in Saul's time.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, already during Saul's and David's reigns, the main elements of the ideology of Israelite monarchy were created (primarily by the prophet Nathan), in connection with the conceptions of leadership inherited from the previous generations — namely, deliverance from one's enemies.<sup>4</sup>

This parallel between the reigns of Saul and David, despite their sharp differences, is one of the essential characteristics of the early period of the Israelite monarchy embodied in the description of the monarchy in the Book of Samuel. It is also the axis upon which the principal innovations of my book revolve, including the attempt to interpret anew the relevant Biblical sources.

## **I. The Historiography of the Book of Samuel**

Our book deals primarily with various questions of a chronicle nature (I Sam.

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2. See on this particularly my book, p. 18, n. 3 and also pp. 108–113, 345–347, and the bibliography there. In the footnotes I have only cited those pages on which I explain my views. The bibliography which preceded my book, as well as the opinions of other scholars with which I contend there, are not quoted here. The interested reader will find references to this literature in my book on the pages mentioned.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 223–225, 339–345.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159, and footnotes.

14:47–52; II Sam. 8:1–15), as well as with Nathan’s prophecies (II Sam. 7:1–18). In these chronicler’s accounts, both Saul and David are characterized as fighter kings: Saul as warrior, and David both as warrior and as one who is saved by God (I Sam. 14:48; II Sam. 8:6, 14). Saul wages war against Israel’s enemies and saves it from Amalek, while David dispenses justice and righteousness to all his people (I Sam. 14:47; II Sam. 8:15). The kingship is thus characterized — in its initial stages under Saul, and in its later, fuller development under David — in terms of salvation from enemies and the performance of justice. Through extensive analysis of these facets, both as found in the Book of Samuel and in comparison with parallel chapters in Chronicles and in the chapters relating to the monarchy in Psalms (Ps. 20, 21, 45, 47, 62, 89, 110), other aspects also come to light.

The principle innovation of the monarchy was the introduction of a stable form of dynastic rule, maintained by force and attempting to dispense justice (in contrast with the rule of the Judges), and its validity in subsequent generations. Consequently, a large part of the book is devoted to an analysis of Nathan’s prophecy to David (II Sam. 7; I Chron. 17), which primarily involves the assurance that the ruling dynasty of David’s descendants will continue forever, as well as a brief review of Israel’s past prior to the Davidic monarchy — as if to say that it, rather than Saul’s monarchy, constituted the decisive turning point in Israel’s history.

An important methodological principle I have tried to follow is to understand what the author of the Book of Samuel himself says regarding the nature of the monarchy as compared to the regime which preceded it: that is, what is the thinking of the author concerning the change which took place in Israel upon the establishment of the monarchy? In my opinion, the closer the view of a particular ancient author or authors to the event (e.g., the account of Absalom’s revolt), the greater its importance for our study of the past. Thus, the study of the monarchy in this volume is based, not only on the attempt to reconstruct historical reality, but on the way in which these events were understood in light of the world-view of the people who lived during or close to that period.

## **II. The Wars of Saul and David**

The author of the Book of Samuel (as well as that of the Book of Judges) perceived the principle difference between a judge and a king in that, while the former leads the people in battle against only one enemy or group of enemies attacking it at a given time, the latter fights “against *all* his enemies.” The victory of the judge, while he may save several tribes of Israel, is essentially a one-time occurrence, of limited duration, centered around his tribe or the clans nearest him. The role of the king, by contrast, is to save all Israel, fighting against *all* its enemies and securing its borders for an extended period of time. This is suggested

by the verse, “After Saul had secured his kingship over Israel, he waged war on every side against *all* his enemies” (I Sam. 14:47). The same is suggested with regard to David, as well as Solomon, in numerous passages.<sup>5</sup>

The description of the king in Psalm 21:8 — “Your hand is equal to *all* Your enemies; Your right hand overpowers Your foes” — also seems directed towards the same non-utopian concept of the monarch, and may be derived from a tradition associated with the beginnings of the monarchy. The ideal king is further regarded as the ruler of all nations: “Let all kings bow to him, and all nations serve him” (Ps. 72:11).

The list of Saul’s battles in I Sam. 14:47–51 indeed indicates that he fought *all* the enemies around him; the authenticity of this list seems beyond dispute. The author of the Book of Samuel, who was clearly biased in favor of David, must have included this list in the book because it was already well known, and may have formed the kernel of the later list of David’s battles (II Sam. 8:1–15). There is no reason to assume that this was a deliberate projection back into Saul’s times of battles known from the Davidic list, for why should this author-editor have attributed to Saul battles which David merely continued?

The similarity between the two lists may be explained in two mutually complementary ways. First, that the wars of the kings were customarily recorded in this way during the period of the united kingdom, at least insofar as their basic elements are concerned — the sequence and results of the wars, and their proximity to a genealogical or administrative list. Second, that the author deliberately arranged the lists in this order, which he received in a fixed literary form, in order to stress that David was the one who completed these wars and eventually defeated “*all* of [Israel’s] enemies round about,” thereby making him the true redeemer-king.<sup>6</sup>

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5. See, for example, II Sam. 8:6, 14; 7:1, 9, 11; cf. I Ch. 17:8–10; and, regarding Solomon, I Kings 5:1, 4, 11, 14; Cf. I Ch. 22:9.

6. Due to limits of space, I cannot discuss here in detail this point, which is developed at length in my book. See pp. 37–39, 41–47, 63–74, 134–148, and the bibliography there. The interested reader of the Hebrew Bible may compare the usages, in the various passages describing military victories, of the verbs *hiṣil* (saved), *hirshi’a* (worsted), as in “wherever he turned he worsted them” [I Sam. 14:47]), with *hoshi’a* (redeem). The tendency of the author of Samuel is to represent Saul as warrior or as one who “worsts” his enemies, but not as redeemer. A second motif deserving of note is the stress upon David’s victories over Aram of Damascus and Edom (II Sam. 8:5, 6; *Ibid.*, v. 13, 14) above the victories over the Philistines, the Amalekites and others, which seems based upon the tendency to downplay Saul’s victories, and to show David as anticipating or foreshadowing Solomon’s suppression of rebellions in Aram and Edom (I Kings 12). See on this my articles, “King Solomon in the Eyes of the Author of Chronicles” (Heb.), *Erez Yisra’el* 16 (1982), pp. 4, 11 and “The Rise of the Kingdom of Damascus in Solomon’s Time and Its Impression on Historiography” (Heb.), *Kovez Mehqarim ba-Miqra uva-Mizrah ha-Qadum*, ed. I. Abishur and Y. Blau (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 27–45.

### III. David as Executing True Justice (*Mesharim*)

Kingship not only involves victory in war, however, but also acting as judge. Saul is neither explicitly described as acting as judge, nor as establishing a regime in which the performance of justice was one of the functions, as befitting a monarch of the ancient Near East. David was the one to establish such a regime.

Saul is described in the phrase, "...and wherever he turned he worsted them" (I Sam. 14:47), a vague expression referring to his meting out of retribution to the neighboring nations, but not to his function in dispensing justice within Israel. By contrast, we read about David: "...and David executed justice and righteousness among all his people" (II Sam. 8:15), that is, he was a king like the other monarchs of the ancient Near East. This refers not only to the act of adjudication between men, or even to his status as supreme judge, but to the fact that he established a regime of justice for the entire nation. That is, he not only performed acts of judgment, but was a judge in his essence — the embodiment of the institution of justice. In this respect, he resembled the rulers of Mesopotamia, particularly the law-givers among them, who instituted a regime of *mišarum* (uprightness).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, unlike Saul, David administered true justice to all his people. Saul was an acceptable king, who was chosen by the people and with God's assent via the prophet Samuel, until he sinned. He was not, however, a complete or perfect king. According to the prophetic sections of the Book of Samuel, Saul failed because of the sins he committed during the wars against the Philistines at Michmas and against Amalek; according to the account, however, perhaps this was due simply to the causal sequence of events. He did not manage to dispense justice because he was still preoccupied with wars and had not overcome the surrounding nations. On the other hand, David exhibited both attributes of a proper, and even exemplary monarch: he was a victorious redeemer, helped by God, and he dispensed justice and righteousness to all his people. In other words, during his reign a valid monarchy was established, similar to those of the ancient Near East. But David was a just king, like the ancient monarchs, perhaps because of the beginnings made by Saul in establishing the monarchy.

While the historical accounts naturally reflect the actual historical situation, their pro-Davidic bias is quite evident, not only in the narratives and the prophetic sections of the Book of Samuel, but also in the chronological accounts. Thus,

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7. Incidentally, the Hebrew cognate to this term, *mesharim*, occurs only rarely in the Bible, appearing mostly in ancient poetry and prophecy, and applied also to the appearance of the kingdom of God. The equivalent term more commonly used in Biblical prose and historiography is *mishpat u-ẓedaqah* (justice and righteousness), as in the catalogue here.

notwithstanding the various traditions and literary units before the author, the tendency in David's favor is evident throughout the Book of Samuel. The accounts hint that David, rather than Saul, fulfilled the people's demand to Samuel to appoint a king over them: "Appoint a king for us, to govern us like all the other nations... Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles" (I Sam. 8:5, 20). Whatever may have been the original meaning of the phrase "to govern us" — i.e., whether "ruling" or "judging" or both together — the author of the Book of Samuel wished to indicate that Saul only partially fulfilled the people's wish by leading them in warfare, while David was both redeemer and the founder of a regime of justice. On this basis, he is to be regarded as the actual founder of the monarchy.

The Davidic monarchy, moreover, also served as an example for those who followed it. A proper and legitimate monarch, and certainly an ideal one, dispenses justice and righteousness to his people. There are many instances in the Bible to support this contention. The queen of Sheba characterizes Solomon as follows: "He made you king to administer justice and righteousness" (I Kings 10:9). The prophet Jeremiah, in describing a fair king (one of flesh and blood, not necessarily a utopian monarch), in contrast to those contemporary monarchs who ruled unjustly, says: "Your father ate and drank, and dispensed justice and righteousness — then all went well with him" (Jer. 22:15). In our opinion, this definition of a proper king is based upon one established at the very beginning of the Israelite monarchy, during the reigns of David and Solomon. It is possible, however, that the description in I Samuel 8 served as a general model for the definition of a proper king in Israel in Biblical times.

#### **IV. The Concept of Monarchy in the Book of Samuel**

Thus, in its initial stages, the description of the monarchy served as an example for the appropriate form of monarchy in Israel in later generations. This applied not only to the model of a monarchic regime which continued after Saul and David, when the regime was founded, but also to the concept of the monarchy, which began during the period of Saul and Samuel and came to fruition during David's reign, as shown in the chronology of subsequent events in the Book of Samuel.

This also provides a link between the chronological accounts in the Book of Samuel and Nathan's prophecies to David (II Sam. 7). The salient point of this prophecy is the unconditional assurance that the monarchy will remain in the hands of the Davidic family, which is, in the final analysis, the basis of every monarchy. It is true that Saul endeavored to establish a ruling dynasty, and that Jonathan was intended as his heir, as evidenced by his position in the battle of Michmas and the conversations between him and David (I Sam. 14:1-6; 19:1-11; 20:1-18 and especially 20:30-32, 42; 23:16-19). But Saul's dynasty

did not survive, not only because of the death of his son Ish-Bosheth, but because his fate had already been sealed during his own lifetime, when David fled to Judah and to the Land of Philistines, where he headed a band of man who opposed Saul. By contrast, Nathan promised the throne of the kingdom to David “forever,” in accordance with God’s word to him. The prophet does not state exactly which one of David’s sons will succeed him, as befits a prophecy, but that he will strengthen his monarchy and establish an “everlasting” dynasty.

I believe that the term “house” (*bayit*) is used in Nathan’s prophecy in two senses — that of Temple (I Sam. 7:13) and that of ruling dynasty (*Ibid.*, 11, 12, 16); there is no reason to assume that the promise to build the Temple is a later addition, as there is no contradiction between the two. On the contrary, the double sense of the term “house” in the prophecy gives it a literary-aesthetic meaning as well as ascribing a significant conceptual aspect to the validity of the monarchy: *the son who establishes the dynasty will build the house of the Lord*, as was the practice of many ancient Near Eastern kings. The monarchy would thus be associated with worship: a house of the Lord and a royal house. God’s assent would prove the validity of the monarchy.

If one removes the twofold meaning of “house” from Nathan’s prophecy, one obviates its main point: the establishment of the dynasty on the basis of divine choice and the combination of sacred worship with monarchic rule. Those scholars who wish to distinguish between the various meanings of “house” in this prophecy oversimplify matters, in regarding the prophecy (or its author) as presenting a few banal ideas, albeit clothed in artistic language. The significant point here is that the dual meaning of the term “house” agrees with the main point of the concept of monarchy in the Book of Samuel — a continuous ruling dynasty, and the crucial role played by divine choice.

## **V. Dual Rule — Monarch and Prophet**

We now come to the main point underlying the presentation of the monarchy in the Book of Samuel, as I see it — both through the analysis of certain specific chapters and in light of the general outlook of the Book of Samuel. The king is chosen by the representatives of the people: this was the case with Saul and David, as well as with Solomon, to a certain extent; but he must also receive Divine approval through a prophet, and later through a priest, as was the case with Saul at Mitzpeh and Gilgal, with David in Hebron, and with Solomon. Anointing and enthronement “before the Lord” (i.e., in a holy site) are the signs of divine assent, which may signify the divine inspiration of the king during the anointing, by means of the prophet.

In my view, the concept of monarchy, as expressed in the Book of Samuel, is not embodied in an utopian king, such as that described by the later prophets and in

the Psalms, nor for that matter in the idealistic image of the monarchies of David and Solomon themselves found in Psalms and Chronicles (although even the author of the Book of Chronicles does not see them as ideal in every respect). *Neither of the kings in the Book of Samuel* — that is, Saul and David — *are sacred kings*. They are rather the Lord's anointed, "the chosen of the Lord," kings who have been anointed by a prophet. It is interesting to note that, according to the most ancient, reliable seeming tradition (II Sam. 21:6), this definition refers to Saul, while according to the Psalmist (89:4, 20–39) it refers to David as well — possibly reflecting his pro-Davidic tendency.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, it is only at the time of his anointing that the king is granted divine inspiration, through the medium of the prophet. *The king is not the direct recipient of Divine inspiration, but always requires a prophet in order to hear the word of the Lord*. There are certain exceptions to this, as in II Samuel 21; 23 or in certain dreamlike visions granted to the kings, such as Solomon's dream at Gibeon, which appears in the Book of Kings, whose evaluation of David and his dynasty differs from that of Samuel.

Unlike the kings of the ancient Near East, the Israelite kings — and this is equally true of Saul, David and Solomon — did not act as intermediaries between God and the people; they did not stand between God and the people as did Moses (see Deut. 4:10–15; 5:5 and 5:19–30) or convey the word of God to the nation. On the contrary, they themselves needed intermediaries — whether seer, prophet or man of God — in order to hear the word of God. Nor were the Israelite kings law-givers, like Moses (and to some extent the prophets who followed him, such as Samuel — in *mishpat ha-melukhah*), nor did they transmit laws, statutes, admonitions and rules of behavior. They acted as priest or minister only in special situations. Nor was the king a prophet, conveying God's moral message to the people, although Saul, prior to becoming king, was involved in prophesying with a band of prophets. This manifestation of prophetic ability, which was a prelude to his becoming king, was thereafter repeated in only one strange incident (I Sam. 19:19–24). In any event, this ability had no influence on the way he discharged his function as king, whether in war, at court or in his pursuit of David. It was merely a social-ecstatic preparation for ruling Israel during the period of Philistine domination, which only occurred with the first king.

The rule was that the king was not a prophet but a human king, like any other man. It is doubtful whether, according to the Book of Samuel, he could even be designated as the representative of God the King. His attributes were those of a purely human ruler: going out to battle, organizing the kingdom, and, primarily,

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8. See my book, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–195.



what might be defined as “judgeship” and not merely judging. Thus, we find both Saul and David establishing an orderly kingdom, but performing acts of murder and failing to supervise sufficiently the events within their court. This reason, at least in itself, was insufficient to deprive him of his dynasty or kingdom, but he did need to be punished, and the nation had to suffer as well. The prophet needed to be ever-vigilant, attempting to warn the king, to turn him away from wrongdoing and to advise him, not only in the service of God, but also as to how to rule and to dispense justice.

Thus, according to the author of the Book of Samuel, the king was not the exclusive ruler. He had to share authority with the prophet, not so much with regard to the actual functions or tasks or rulership, but in ways of leadership, supervising the administration of true justice, and in the worship of God. The king was not subordinate to the prophet in the sense of doing his bidding, but he required his advice and guidance, as well as his divine inspiration, without which he could not rule — not only according to the ancient view, but by virtue of the essence of rule at that time. It is doubtful whether a king who lacked Divine approval, who had not been chosen by God through the prophet at his side, would be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the people he ruled.<sup>9</sup>

This was the crux of the dispute between Samuel and Saul. Saul had been anointed by Samuel, who stood by his side and was supposed to judge the people — or to be the judge passing on the word of God — even during the period of monarchy. But when, by virtue of his divine commission, Samuel attempted to interfere in matters of war, either in determining when to set out for battle (in the Michmas campaign) or in deciding the nature and mode of battle (i.e., in the war against the Amalekites), unbridgable differences between himself and Saul emerged. Without going into details, I believe that there is a historical background to this disagreement. It seems authentic, and characteristic of the shadowy period of beginnings of the monarchy, or of any new rule in general: there was a lack of clarity regarding the authority of each of the factors influencing and even ruling the nation: namely, *the prophet* and *the king*. Were this only a projection from a later period, it would undoubtedly reflect the moral claims of the so-called “classical” prophets. But the dispute here focuses solely upon the question of authority and of adherence to the word of God, according to Samuel. The ancient historical nucleus of the dispute lay in Saul’s attempt to free himself from total dependence upon Samuel.<sup>10</sup>

It would thus seem that, at the very beginning of the monarchy, the foundations were laid for the future form of rule in Israel, which I would describe as *dual rule*

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9. On dual rule, see *Ibid.*, pp. 355–363.

10. See *Ibid.*, pp. 7–11, 216–218, 225–227, 337–365.

— *prophets alongside kings*. During Samuel's time, this was done openly, involving a definite struggle for power. During the reign of David, the prophet's mission was to advise the king, as well as to prophesy, rebuke and guide, unequivocally and independently. After the split in the kingdom, prophets became at once admonishers, rebukers and advisers, as they were in the period of Elijah and Elisha; from the time of Amos and Isaiah, they were rebukers and challengers, as well as prophets of wrath and destruction.<sup>11</sup> *However, apart from Ezekiel, the prophets never challenged the institution of the monarchy, nor called for it to be abolished or replaced by a different king of regime.* They were also aware of the king's role as administrator of justice. These attributes of monarchy were regarded as positive bases for the regime in Israel. While the prophets fiercely criticized the kings of their own day, just as Samuel did at the beginning of the monarchy, they did not insist upon the pre-eminence or superiority of prophetic leadership, as did Samuel. Generally speaking, this quasi-dual form of rule was established at the time of Samuel and Saul, and continued in a latent form throughout the First Temple period. Prophecy and monarchy were the two components of Israelite rulership, as distinct from the regimes of the ancient Near East. It seems to us that, already during the early years of the monarchy, in the reign of Saul, the regime in Israel was unique in its dual nature; although accompanied by disputes, this did not cease in later generations either (at least as regards the conceptual view hinted at in the Bible). The basic elements of monarchic rule were already established at that time, during the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon: war against all surrounding enemies as a fundamental duty of the redeeming king, the dispensation of justice to the entire nation and, in the time of Saul and David, the need for a prophet to obtain divine consent to the king's manner of rule.

The source of the unique character of this regime was the monotheistic belief which, by its very nature, tended to reject any attribution of a divine aspect to the monarch. This was accomplished by the presence of a prophet through whom alone the word of God could be heard, because of God's uniqueness. Also, the delay in the establishment of monarchy within Israel may have been partly responsible for this "dual" rule, as even earlier men of God or judges and prophets chosen by God — from Moses through Samuel — had been leaders. In later generations, this form of leadership was embodied in the prophets' status as advisers to the king, or as rebukers and men of wrath.

## **VI. The Book of Samuel: The Book of Monarchy**

The author (or author-editor) of the Book of Samuel has left us a reliable record

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11. See B. Uffenheimer's typology of different roles of the prophets in the body politic in his article, "Ancient Hebrew Prophecy — Political Teaching and Practice," *Immanuel* 18 (1984), pp. 7–21.

of his concept of the monarchy, from which we are able to reconstruct the nature of prophetic leadership prior to the monarchy and in its early stages, as well as its effects. In my book I have also dealt with the structure and unity of the Book of Samuel, and will here simply cite the main topics in brief. Like many other scholars, I believe that the book indeed consists of a number of oral traditions, as well as written sources, but I am convinced that already in Solomon's day, or perhaps shortly thereafter, there arose a creative author who left his mark upon the entire book. He was not merely a redactor or compiler, nor even a simple editor who adjusted, read, amended and edited out items, but an inspired author, who wrote this book on the basis of existing traditions. Primarily, however, he considered himself a Divine messenger, a sort of prophet, whose task it was to record the events of the early days of the monarchy for his generation, and the manifestation of the Divine within those events (comp. I Chron. 29:29, 30). The author's basic style is maintained throughout the book (except for the chapters of poetry), although he is loyal to the specific styles of the various traditions: narratives, chronological accounts, genealogies, prophetic sections and rhetorical addresses. I also propose a structure which is different from that customarily accepted for the traditions.<sup>12</sup>

Several comments are in order concerning the evidence for the unity of the book:

1. Unlike the Book of Judges and Kings, this book does not have a Deuteronomistic framework. This is true of all parts of the book. Events are not judged in conventional, absolute terms, in terms of a scheme of that which is good and evil in the eyes of the Lord, such as we find in the Book of Kings. While there are passages revealing some signs or hints of Deuteronomistic style, such as Nathan's prophecy and David's reply (II Sam. 7), Samuel's final speech to the people (I Sam. 12) and also, to an extent, the narrative of the war against the Amalekites (I Sam. 9), these are indications of the dawning of a Deuteronomistic style in Biblical historiography, which I would designate as a "proto-Deuteronomistic" style.

2. Nowhere in the book do we encounter a negative attitude towards the Amorites and Canaanites, such as we find in both Judges and Kings. *This is the only book of the Bible with an entirely tolerant attitude towards the Canaanites and the Amorites, without even a hint of condemnation.* In Samuel's time, there was peace between Israel and the Amorites (I Sam. 7). David's attitude to the Jebusites is tolerant, possibly even liberal, as reflected by the narrative concerning

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12. The reader is advised to consult my entry, "Samuel," in *ha-Enzeqlopedyah ha-Ivrit XXXII:36-40*, which is largely based upon my book, and my introduction to the new encyclopedic commentary on Samuel, *Enzeqlopedyah 'Olam ha-Tanakh: Shmu'el Aleph* (Ramat-Gan, 1985), pp. 8-19.

Araunah the Jebusite (II Sam. 24). In the census of the inhabitants of Israel, the Hivite and Canaanite cities are considered as an integral part of the country (II Sam. 24:7). We even find David taking revenge against the House of Saul on behalf of the Gibeonites, “the remnant of the Amorites,” without any censure on the part of the author (II Sam. 21:1–11). Nor is there any mention in this book of the commandment to destroy the Canaanites or the Jebusites. This does not mean that these commandments, which appear principally in Deuteronomy, were unknown to the author, *but rather that David, because of the peculiar situation, adopted a policy of “realpolitik” in his dealings with these nations.* This is reflected, not only in the political approach of David, as depicted in the Book of Samuel, but also in the author’s own viewpoint, which approves of David’s approach. This is additional evidence of the early date of the book’s composition — i.e., during or close to Solomon’s reign — when the echoes of this approach were still prevalent. In no other book of the Bible is the impression of this political approach on the author so evident and consistent throughout the book.

3. The author of the Book of Samuel consistently approves of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. He portrays Samuel’s hesitations and God’s reservations, evidently following contemporary tradition, but he essentially regards the monarchy as a *compromise initiated by Samuel himself*, in accordance with God’s instructions. In Samuel’s opinion, monarchy is tyranny, which no excuse based upon historical background or Ugaritic or Alalah texts can alleviate (I Sam. 8). *It is a tyranny which harms the people and which was unknown at the time of the judges; but it is an unavoidable historical necessity.*

The political and social situation at the time of Samuel — the power of the Philistines, the hostility of the Ammonites, the perversions of justice by the sons of Eli and of Samuel, and the general absence of justice in Israel (Jud. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) — necessitated the establishment of the monarchy. Israel had many enemies, primarily the Philistines and the Ammonites, and a king was needed in order to fight against all the enemies surrounding the country. At that time, a rule for all later generations was established; *The monarchy, no matter how despotic, was necessary to make Israel safe against its foes, and so that there would be a regime of justice, or at least some sort of regime.*

This, then, was the explicit or implicit perception of the monarchy in the Book of Samuel, and to some extent also among the biblical prophets and historiographers. *The Book of Samuel is the book of the monarchy*, approving of the monarchic regime despite all difficulties. Even when Saul failed, Samuel did not consider abolishing the monarchy, but rather establishing a different royal dynasty. Nor did Absalom oppose the monarchy in general and, while there may have been signs of such an opposition in the revolt of Sheba son of Bichri, this was doomed to failure.

In my opinion, the central conclusion of the Book of Samuel is *approval of the monarchy as a compromise, without idealization*. The monarchy was not regarded as being a supreme value, nor did it carry a divine message; *the king was a man like any other*, but the monarchy was necessary in order to unite the tribes and assure their physical existence. The prophets (such as Samuel and the prophets in the time of David) were responsible for developing social values, for conducting sacred worship and ritual, and for insuring the fulfillment of God's commandments and proper moral behavior. This was first done by Samuel, then by the prophets who succeeded him. For this reason, I have described the form of rule in Israel as "dual."

Consequently, the author of the Book of Samuel incorporated in his work traditions which apparently opposed his pro-Davidic tendency, particularly the narratives concerning Saul (I Sam. 9–11; 13–14, excluding 13:8–15; and possibly also 31), which evince support and even concealed admiration for Saul. This was not only due to an aesthetic-artistic approach veering towards objectivity (similar to Homer's *Illiad*), or to the author's eagerness to tell his story. As a writer who sought to reveal essential positive aspects of the monarchic regime, he found it appropriate to *relate history as it actually occurred*, with regard to both Saul and David. He wished to demonstrate how the monarchy developed by stages and how it struggled for survival until David established a royal dynasty. Even though Saul failed, the monarchy did not. To the contrary, Saul was succeeded by a legitimate heir, and it was he who established the monarchy on a firm basis, which would be "everlasting."

In the narratives concerning David, the author attempts to demonstrate to what extent the son of Jesse was Saul's legitimate heir: he was anointed by Samuel, he slew Goliath (rather than the king, who was supposed to be the redeemer of the people, doing so); he made an alliance with Jonathan, married Michal, and was even recognized by Saul himself as having been chosen to be king (I Sam. 24:16–22; 26:21, 25), and obtained the agreement of the elders to accept him instead of Saul (II Sam. 5:1–3). All this should not be regarded as an uprising or revolt against Saul, but as an indication that he was the successor chosen by the people in accordance with a sign from heaven.

While Saul was the precursor of the monarchy, so to speak, David was the one to actually establish it. Saul failed where David succeeded. Thus, by recording Saul's history, the author shows us the legitimacy of David as the successor of the son of Kish, the first king, "the chosen of the Lord" (II Sam. 21:4), who brought about a drastic change in the leadership of Israel. This constitutes clear evidence of the fact that Saul was in the author's day still regarded as the first monarch, one accepted by the nation, who smote its enemies and united the tribes of Israel. He is depicted as a heroic leader who began the salvation of Israel from

the Philistines and the Ammonites. The author could not ignore this image of the initial stages of the monarchy; I regard this as further evidence of the early date of both the writing and the final editing of the Book of Samuel.

## VII. The Omission of Saul's Role

I will conclude with a few remarks concerning the tendency of the Book of Samuel, notwithstanding what we have mentioned above, to minimize Saul's greatness and his rule. One indication of this is found in Nathan's prophecy (II Sam. 7:6–12), in which Saul is not mentioned at all except in passing with regard to his deposition (*Ibid.*, v. 15), implying that David's rule directly followed the period of the judges, making him Israel's first ruler (*Ibid.*, v. 7, 8, 11). He is represented as having brought respite to the people of Israel from their surrounding foes, and as the first ruler to secure the land for the people of Israel (7:9–11).

This ignoring of Saul's rule, which may not have been unintentional, is evident later in the prophets, in the historiographical writings (i.e., the Book of Kings) and in the Psalms. In Psalm 78, the psalmist omits mention of Gibeon and Benjamin, and of Saul's rule over Israel, subordinating Shiloh to Jerusalem and connecting the choice of Judah and of David with the destruction of Shiloh, as if Saul's rule had never been (78:59–72), and David had been the first king of Israel.

In Psalm 89, again, David is the chosen one of God, and no mention is made of Saul or of his reign. Moreover, certain characteristics are directly transferred from Saul to David: David is referred to as “the chosen (*behir*) of the Lord” and “the one who has been chosen” (89:4, 20), even though in Samuel it was Saul, rather than David, who was called “a chosen (*bahur*) young man” and who was literally a head taller than any of the people. The psalmist thus not only deprived Saul of his characteristics, but ascribed those features which were considered to have marked him as king, at the very beginnings of the monarchy, to David (*harimoti bahur mi-'am*; “I have exalted one chosen out of the people” — Ps. 89:20), as though he had been the first king. Indeed, the process of diminution of Saul's image and ignoring his reign is already vaguely evident in the Book of Samuel.

After many generations in which Saul was forgotten and ignored, the author of Chronicles listed Saul's descendants (I Chron. 8:24–40; 9:35–44), as though remnants of Saul's royal dynasty had continued to exist until the exile of Judah, and as if they embodied both a reminder of Israel's first monarchy and a hope for the future.

This anti-Saul tendency was totally reversed by the author of the Book of Esther, whose hero, Mordecai, is a descendant of Kish the Benjaminite. The monarchy

which had been dismissed in David's time is now restored to its rightful position with even greater glory, as one of his descendants assumed a lofty position, second only to the king, in the great Persian empire which extended "from India to Ethopia." He was a descendant, not of David, but of Kish, Saul's father. Thus, a monarch whose memory had nearly been obliterated throughout the generations was here revived by means of a hint, in a universal, imperial situation which can only be described as surrealistic.<sup>13</sup>

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13. I have discussed this point in my article, "Return to the Kingdom of Saul in the Books of Esther and Chronicles" (Heb.), *Mileyt: Meḥqerey ha-Universitah ha-Petuḥah be-toldot Yisra'el uve-tarbuto* (Tel-Aviv, 1983), pp. 39–65.