

# The Deuteronomistic History: Prophets and Kings (1 and 2 Samuel)

## Lecture 13 Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-145/lecture-13>

### *Overview*

The transition from a tribal society under the leadership of elders and eventually charismatic “judges” to a nation under a monarch is traced through the books of Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel. Early stories of local heroes are woven together into a larger history that conforms to the exilic perspectives of the Deuteronomistic School. An extended look at representations of Saul and David (including God’s covenant with David) reveal historical shifts and some ambivalence about monarchy and the ideal form of leadership.

### *1. Distinguishing between Israelis and Israelites*

[1] *Professor Christine Hayes:* One thing that kept cropping up [in the mid-term exam], and it is something that crops up every time I teach this course, and I should always say something about it preemptively, is just a terminological issue. Israelites are not Israelis. The word “Israeli,” term “Israeli,” refers to a citizen of the modern state of Israel. So there are no Israelis before the year 1948. Okay. And we use Israelite to refer to the ancient inhabitants of the ancient kingdom of Israel. So that is an important distinction. I know you hear “Israelis” and so that is just a term that people thought would apply to anyone who inhabited a place called Israel. But Israeli and Israelite are used precisely in order to make that distinction between the ancient and the modern period. Okay. So we are talking about Israelites.

[2] And while we are on the subject, we are not talking about Jews yet, either. We cannot really use the term “Jew.” It is not historically accurate for the period that we have been dealing with in the Bible. When we get towards the very end of the biblical period, we’ll see that when Persia conquers and reconstitutes this area, or designates as a province, this area as Yehud (so the Persians are going to be the ones to create a province called Yehud in this area, including Jerusalem) they will allow the Israelites who are in exile to go back and live there, and they will become Yehudites. And

this is going to be where the word Jew comes from. But that is not going to be historically accurate before the end of the sixth century. And even then it is still a technical term having to do with living in the Province of Yehud. It is not an ethnic term. The word “Yehud” or “Jew” does not become an ethnic term for quite some time. So “Israelites” is the correct term for the group that we are dealing with here. Hebrew is not bad, either, it basically is a linguistic term that refers to people who speak Hebrew. And so the Hebrews — it is something of a social-ethnic term, but based mainly on the linguistic feature of speaking Hebrew. Okay. So no Israelis, only Israelites.

### *2. An Alliance of Tribes*

[3] All right. We were reaching the end of Joshua, and we are going to be moving on to Judges today. And the Bible describes the early Israelite socio-political unit as the tribe. And this is what is going to be featured in the last part of the Book of Joshua. We are going to see that tribes are territorial units. A tribe is attached to a territory. Within the tribe you have clan elders, and the clan elders are the ones who dispense justice. They make decisions regarding the general welfare of the tribe. So the second half of the Book of Joshua — so the first half recounts the conquest, and then the second half recounts the division of the land among the 12 tribes, who, it is claimed, were descended from the 12 sons of Jacob. We have a couple of different lists of the tribes in

the Bible, so if you take a look some time, you might want to compare the list that is in Genesis 29 or 30. It is pretty much the same list that is in Genesis 49. These are in [a list of] blessings. Patriarchs will very often give blessings of all their children, so you look at the names of the children and you will see the list of twelve. You have the six sons of Leah. You have the four sons of the two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, and the two sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. And that is probably the oldest list that we have. But if you compare it to Numbers 26 and the list that is in Joshua with the distribution of the land, you will see that Levi or Levi is not included, presumably because the Levites, who were to function as a priestly class in Israel, they have no land allotment. They are supported through the cultic practices and the perquisites that come from the sacrifices. And so instead of the Levites, we find that there are tribes named for the two sons of Joseph. So there is no Joseph tribe per se. Joseph's two sons are Ephraim and Manasseh, and this is how we then reach the Number 12. So there is no Levi in the later lists, but the Joseph tribes have been split into Ephraim and Manasseh, if you will, who are said to be the two sons of Joseph.

[4] So the consensus is, the scholarly consensus is, that what you have in Canaan is an alliance of tribes, perhaps not precisely twelve, you know. At different times there might have been a different number and different groups that came together at different times. But you have these tribes who are worshiping Yahweh, perhaps not exclusively as we have seen. And they have some loose obligations of mutual defense in these different alliances. The Book of Joshua presents this very idealized portrait of these twelve tribes who are preexistent. They come into the Land of Canaan already formed basically as twelve tribes. They are united with one another by their covenant with Yahweh, and they conquer the land in concert. But there are other elements of the biblical narrative, as we have already begun to talk about, and will continue to talk about today as we move into Judges, which really suggest there was much more sporadic cooperation among the tribes. You never have more than one or two really acting in concert until the very end of the Book of Judges. And so this suggests that there really was no super-tribal government or coordination at this early stage. The Ark is said

to have circulated among the different tribal territories; it did not rest permanently in the territory of one tribe until somewhat late in the period — it comes to rest at a place called Shiloh. Shiloh. And it seems that only in extraordinary cases would you have the tribes acting together, perhaps by decision of the tribal elders. But superimposed upon the authority of the elders is the authority of certain inspired individuals. And these are known as judges, and it is the exploits of these individuals that are recorded in the Book of Judges. And we will turn to the Book of Judges now.

### 3. *The Book of Judges*

[5] The Book of Judges is set in that transitional period between the death of Joshua and the establishment of a monarchic system. It is about a 200-year period, from about 1200 to 1000 or so. It is an imaginative and embellished reconstruction of that period of transition. We'll also see it is a very ideologically laden reconstruction. So the stories depict local tribal skirmishes, rather than confrontations between nations. You have pretty much skirmishes with groups around the country. And that makes a lot of sense for this 200-year period, when Canaan is making a transition. A transition from city-states in the Bronze Age to the emerging nation of what will be Israel, next to it Philistia, on the east side, Aram. So we have — nations are going to be coming into being by the end of this period, but there is this 200-year transitional period before you get the formation of these independent states.

[6] Like Joshua, the Book of Judges consists of various sources that were fused together in a Deuteronomistic framework. I will come back to that. In fact, it is really a collection of individual stories that center on local heroes, several of whom are, interestingly enough, socially marginal. These are pretty scrappy characters. You've got the illegitimate son of a prostitute. You've got a bandit. You've got very interesting, colorful, and as I say, socially marginal people. And these stories have a real folkloristic flavor to them. They're full of drama and a lot of local color, local references to places and customs and so on.

[7] So if you were to list the stories of the various judges, the major judges — we have six major and six minor judges; the minor judge is just simply a reference to the fact that they judged for a certain [short] period of time. So there are 12 listed in all, I believe) and there are six major judges for [each of] whom there is a lengthy story, beginning with Ehud in chapter 3. It is a very funny story. Ehud leads the Israelites against the Moabites; a lot of sort of bathroom humor in that one. In chapters 4 and 5, you have Deborah, who helps the Israelites in battle against certain Canaanite groups. You have three chapters, four chapters, chapters 6-9, recording the adventures of Gideon. Gideon fights against the Midianites. Gideon is interesting. There are signs in his story that he is divinely chosen. There is some evidence of the annunciation of his birth, and some signal that he is divinely chosen. Then in 11 and into a little bit of chapter 12, you have the story of Yiftah or Jephthah, who fights against the Ammonites — very interesting and tragic story of his daughter, which echoes similar sorts of stories in Greek legend. You also have in chapters 13-16, Samson who, of course, fights against the Philistines. Samson is somewhat atypical. He also has a tremendous and fatal weakness for foreign women, and that is a strong theme throughout the Samson stories. We will come back to some of that. Then towards the end: you have some interesting chapters at the end. 17 and 18 tell the story of Micah or Micah, and his idolatrous shrine. And then finally, the quite horrifying and gruesome tale, beginning in chapter 19, going on through 20 and 21 — the story of the Levite's concubine and the civil war. We will come back and talk about some of these in a little more detail. But that is just to give you a sense of the different units that are in the story, that are in the book. And these stories have then been embedded in a Deuteronomistic framework. This framework provides the editor's view and pronouncement on and judgment of the period.

[8] Some of the stories seem to have been left pretty much intact themselves. There isn't in many cases, a lot of interference inside the story, only a few interpolations that express the editor's theology of history. But the editor's theology of history is best seen in the preface to the book, which is why I sort of stuck these over to the side, this preface that frames the

book. And chapter 1 gives a detailed summary of the situation at the end of Joshua's conquest — taking stock, listing the extensive areas that Joshua had failed to take from the Canaanites, despite the impression that is given by the Book of Joshua (certainly the first part of it) that they did everything they were supposed to have done and fulfilled the commandments to Moses and so on. But here, we get a list of all the places they failed to take from the Canaanites, starting in Judah and moving northward. They tend to always start in the southern area, in Judah, and then list things in a northward direction. Then in Judges 2:1-5, an angel appears before Joshua's death, and the angel recounts God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt and then quotes God as follows: "I will never break my covenant with you. And you, for your part, must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you must tear down their altars." That is a phrase that is found in Deuteronomy 12: again, one of those phrases that makes us link Deuteronomy with all of these subsequent books, and we refer to it all as a school, the Deuteronomistic School, because we have these phrases from Deuteronomy that will be peppered throughout the rest of these books. God will be faithful to his covenant, in other words. But it is a two-way street. And if Israel does not do her part, she will be punished. The editor is setting us up with that expectation before we even begin to read an account of what happens. The angel then relates that Israel has already not been obedient, so God has resolved — this is a fait accompli at this point — God has resolved that He will no longer drive the Canaanites out before the Israelites. He will leave them as a snare and a trap to test their resolve and their loyalty. So it is a very far cry from the idealized portrait that we had in the first half of the Book of Joshua.

[9] So that opening announcement listing all of the ways in which they had failed to take the land, and the visit by the angel who tells them: you have already failed in so many ways, and so God is not even going to help you to rout the Canaanites any longer — that is followed then in a section from chapter 2:11 through chapter 3:6. And this is a kind of prospective summary, a summary before the fact of the nation's troubles. And this is a passage that expresses the editor's judgment on the nation of this period. "Another generation arose after them,

which had not experienced [the deliverance of] the Lord, or the deeds that He had wrought for Israel. And the Israelites did what was offensive to the Lord," literally what was evil in the eyes of the lord. An important phrase: what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[10] ...They followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples around them, and bowed down to them; they provoked the Lord....Then the Lord was incensed at Israel, and He handed them over to foes who plundered them...as the Lord had declared and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up leaders [see note 1] who delivered them from those who plundered them. But they did not heed their leaders either; they went astray after other gods and bowed down to them...

[11] I am sort of skipping, right? I am condensing all of this.

[12] ...When the Lord raised up leaders for them, the Lord would be with the leader and would save them from their enemies during the leader's lifetime; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their moanings because of those who oppressed and crushed them. But when the leader died, they would again act basely, even more than the preceding generation — following other gods, worshiping them, and bowing down to them; they omitted none of their practices and stubborn ways.

[13] So in short, it is the view of the Deuteronomistic historian expressed here in Judges, that Israel's crises are caused by her infidelity to Yahweh, through the worship of Canaanite gods, and for this sin, God sells the Israelites to their enemies and then, moved to pity when they cry out under the oppression, He raises leaders to deliver Israel. This pattern of sin, punishment, repentance and deliverance through leaders is the recurring pattern throughout the book. It punctuates the transition from each of these leaders that God will raise up. So it is this recurring pattern. This Deuteronomistic perspective, as well as Deuteronomistic ideology, generally, isn't always apparent within the individual stories themselves, as I stressed. Some of them seem to be pre-Deuteronomistic folktales about the exploits of these local heroes. They were

popular stories. So Gideon, we'll see, builds an altar despite the fact that we know Deuteronomy insisted on centralized worship and prohibited outlying altars or multiple altars. He is also known, his other name, if you will, is Jerubbaal. It is a name that is made with Baal, meaning Baal will strive, or Baal will contend. So this is an alternate name for Gideon. He erects an idol. The people of Shechem, where he is — after his death they continue to worship Baal Berit, the Baal of the covenant, which is an interesting sort of merger of Baalism and covenantal religion. So you have a lot of these elements that presumably the Deuteronomist would disapprove.

[14] The story of Samson also appears to be largely pre-Deuteronomistic. It was again probably a very popular, entertaining folktale about a legendary strong man. You know, he can lift up the gates of the city. He can tie the tails of 300 foxes with torches and so on. But this great strong man is undone by his one weakness, which is a weakness for foreign women, particularly Philistine women (at least we think Delilah was Philistine). And that proves to be his downfall. So you can see in a way how these stories were fodder for the Deuteronomistic editor. The Deuteronomistic editor insists that foreign gods often accessed through marriage to foreign women, exercised a fatal attraction for Israel. And it was the inability to resist the snare of idolatry that would ultimately lead to ruin. You have to remember that the final editing of this narrative history is happening in exile. Right? It is happening for people for whom all of this is ultimately leading towards a tragedy.

[15] All right. So the leaders who are raised by God are called judges. That is the term that is used in other Semitic texts to refer to leaders in the second millennium, sometimes human and sometimes divine. So the term is used here in the biblical text. It refers always to a human leader, and one who exercises many different powers or functions, not merely judicial. We think of the word "judge" really in a judicial context, but that was not the extent of the function of the judge. The Israelite judge was actually primarily a military leader, commissioned with a specific task, and only in times of national crisis. The judge had a charismatic quality, which in several cases is expressed by the phrase, "the spirit of the Lord came upon him." God would raise up the judge

to deliver the people from a specific crisis. The judge might muster troops from two tribes, or three tribes, sometimes only a clan or two, which suggests that there was no real national entity at this particular time. We never see more than one or two tribes acting together or some clans of a tribe. But the institution of judges never created fixed political forms. And each judge differed from the last in background, in class, and even gender. We do have one female judge, Deborah, who did exercise judicial functions evidently, according to the text. The judges are not chosen necessarily for their virtue. Many of them seem to fall into the literary type of the trickster, a bit like Jacob. Some of them. They are crafty, tricky types. Gideon is explicitly chosen for his weakness, and not because of his strength. It turns out that he is quite a ruthless fighter, and he is clearly not a devout Yahwist. Jephthah is an outlaw. Samson is hardly a moral exemplar. So these are not meant to be idealized heroes, but popular heroes.

chapter 21:25. “And in addition it is said that everyone did as he pleased, or everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” It is in chapter 21:25. By the end of the book, the Israelites find themselves spiraling out of control in an orgy of violence and rape, and in the final chapter, all out civil war. A Levite’s concubine is raped by a gang, murdered by the tribe of Benjamin. And this is an atrocity that is to be avenged by all the other tribes. The Levite takes her body, cuts it into 12 parts, sends a part to each of the tribes as a call to war, to join together in a war of extermination against Benjamin. And many scholars have observed that it is ironic and tragic that the one time the tribes do all act in concert is against one of their own. This is the only time all 12 tribes, or the other 11 tribes, come out against a common enemy and it is the tribe of Benjamin. At a certain point, however, they realize with some regret that the tribe of Benjamin is near extinction. This is not a good thing, so the other tribes then arrange to kidnap women from Shiloh as mates for the remaining Benjaminites. So as a final comment on this horrible symphony of barbarity, of rape, murder, civil war, kidnapping, forced marriage, the Deuteronomistic historian concludes the Book of Judges with this refrain: “In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did as he pleased.” It is a wonderfully polysemic phrase, no king in Israel, no human king, perhaps also given their behavior no divine king. So again, I see that as sort of an ominous refrain throughout. There was no king in Israel. Every man is doing as he pleases, and look at the situation we have reached by the end of the Book of Judges.

[16] There is a very interesting tension in the Book of Judges that will continue beyond into the Book of Samuel, as well, but a tension regarding kingship. The individual stories seem to suggest a very deep-seated distrust of kingship. So in Judges 8, the people ask one of the judges, Gideon at that time, to become king. And he responds this way: “I shall not rule over you, nor shall my sons rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you” [Professor Hayes’s translation]. That is 8:23. And indeed, the short reign of Gideon’s ruthless son Abimelekh, which means “my father is king” ironically, is a complete disaster. The position of judge is temporary. God was viewed as the permanent king in Israel. The temporary authority of the judge derived from the kingship of God. So the judge’s position could not become absolute or permanent. That would be a rejection of God’s leadership. The Book of Judges seems to be squarely against the notion of kingship in Israel. But the book as a whole seems to suggest a certain progression towards kingship, and this emerges from some of the editorial elements and interpolations.

[17] The final chapters of Judges document Israel’s slow slide into disorder and ultimately into civil war. Chapter 18 opens with an ominous statement or phrase that recurs throughout the final chapters. “In those days, there was no king in Israel.” That happens again in chapter 19:1,

[18] The Deuteronomist’s explanation for the moral and social bankruptcy of Israel at the end of the period of the judges at the dawn, or on the eve, of the monarchy, is Israel’s continued infidelity. And the prescription for this situation at some level in the text is a king. This sits uneasily with an anti-monarchic trend in some of these stories. But according to the Deuteronomistic historian, the institutional structure of a kingdom of God — right, a sort of “theocracy” is how a later Jewish historian would describe this period — a kingdom in which God is the king and the community is led by inspired judges in times of crisis — that structure, that institutional structure failed to establish stability, a stable continuous

government. It failed to provide leadership against Israel's enemies within and without. You have Ammon and Moab to the east. You have the Philistines to the west, and they soon manage to subjugate the entire land. So the tribes seem to be conscious of the need for a centralized authority, a strong central authority; and the demand for a king arises.

#### *4. Samuel, a Transition Figure and the Last in a Line of Prophet Judges*

[19] In their search for a new political order, the people turn to the prophet Samuel. Samuel is the last in a line of prophet judges, and they ask him to anoint a king for them. So we are moving now into the Book of Samuel. And the Book of Samuel deals with the transition from the period of the judges to the period of the monarchy. In the first Book of Samuel, you have the opening chapters that record the birth and career of Israel's last judge, Samuel. So that is chapters 1-4. The next few chapters through chapter 7 deal with the Philistine crisis, and at this time the Ark of the Covenant itself is captured and taken into Philistine territory. Chapters 8-15 give us a story of Samuel and Saul, who will be Israel's first king. And then the last half of the book, 16 on to 31, are going to give us the story of Saul and David.

[20] So 1 Samuel opens with the story of Samuel's birth to Hannah, and her dedication of her son to the service of God at Shiloh, at the sanctuary at Shiloh. So Shiloh appears to have been the most important shrine in the period before the monarchy. The prophet, Jeremiah, is going to refer to Shiloh as the place where God first made his name to dwell. You remember the Deuteronomist is always speaking about centralization around a place where God will cause his name to dwell. At first that was Shiloh. It has been noted that after the birth of Samuel, the text conveys a sense of three crises, and I have listed them on the far side of the board over there.

[21] The first crisis is a religious crisis. The priest of the time, Eli — he is also described as a judge, but perhaps that is just to fit him literarily into the pattern of leadership that predominates in this section of the Bible — he is said to be aging, and his sons are quite corrupt. As a result, the text says, "The word of Yahweh is

rare in those days." So there is a crisis in religious leadership. There is also a crisis in political leadership, or political succession to some degree. Judges 2 tells us that Eli's two sons are clearly not worthy. They dishonor the sacrifices, and according to one reading they lie with the women at the door of the shrine. God says he will cut off the power of Eli's house. His two sons will die in one day. And God will find and raise up a faithful priest. But in the meantime, no leader is apparent. So we have a crisis in succession, if you will. The third crisis is a military crisis. In Judges 4-7, the Israelites suffer a defeat at the hands of the Philistines. I'm sorry, in 1 Samuel! They suffer defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The Ark is captured. Eli's two sons are killed and the news of all of this kills Eli, as well. So when we first meet Samuel we wonder: is he going to be the answer to all of these crises, these problems? Chapter 3 says that the word of God comes to Israel through Samuel. In contrast to the statement that the word of God was rare in those days, we hear that the word of God is now coming to Israel through Samuel. It raises some hope. In chapter 7, Samuel exhorts the people to stop serving alien gods and Ashteroth and to serve God, and only then will God deliver them. So the people do this, and Samuel leads them. He employs — his military tactics mostly include prayer and confession and sacrifice, but he manages to lead them to victory over the Philistines. God thunders and the Philistines flee in fear.

[22] So Samuel seems to be combining in one person several functions. He is a priest. He is in the shrine. He offers sacrifices. He builds altars. He is also a seer and a prophet. He receives the word of the Lord and, like a prophet, he will be anointing kings. And he is also a judge in the sense that he leads Israel to military victory. But he also travels a circuit acting as a judge in a judicial sense — it says throughout Israel, but really most of the places we hear about are within the confines of Benjamin. So this story seems to mostly be focused in the southern region in the tribe of Benjamin. But even he is unable to provide Israel with the kind of leadership that the text suggests is required. The Philistine threat is going to reemerge, and the crisis of succession will remain, obviously. And so the representatives of the twelve tribes come together to Samuel to ask for a king. Samuel is

therefore a kind of a transition figure between Israel, the semi-democratic confederation, and Israel, the nation and monarchy. It is going to be a huge transformation, as we will see. But he is going to be the one to bridge the gap to this new kind of leadership.

[23] Now as in Judges, the historical account that we have in 1 Samuel contains many contradictions, many duplicates, so scholars take these as evidence of the existence of various conflicting sources and traditions that have been put together in a larger framework. So for example, we have three different accounts of the choice of Saul as king. We have two accounts of his being rejected ultimately by God. We have different accounts of how David came to know Saul and how David entered Saul's service. We have more than one account of David's escape into Philistine territory, of his sparing Saul's life. That happens twice. Twice he has the opportunity to kill him. Twice he spares his life, and so on. Goliath is killed twice. Only one of those occasions is by David. On the other occasion he is killed by some other hero. So most important for us, however, is the existence of sources that hold opposing views of the institution of kingship. This makes for an interesting and complicated structure in the book. Some of the passages are clearly anti-monarchic and some are clearly pro-monarchic. And I have put them up here, the anti-monarchic passages: 1 Samuel 8. There is a passage in 10. There is a passage in 12. The pro-monarchic passages are sandwiched in between these, right, in 9 and 11. So you have this alternating sequence of anti, pro, anti, pro, anti.

[24] 1 Samuel 8 is a classic example of the anti-monarchic perspective. Samuel is initially opposed to the whole idea. He apparently resents the usurpation of his own power. Until God says,

[25] Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king.... Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them. [1 Sam 8:7-9]

[26] And so Samuel does that. He does that in verses 11-18. He warns of the tyranny of kings, the

rapaciousness of kings, the service and the sacrifice they will require of the people in order to support their luxurious court life and their large harem, their bureaucracy and their army. "The day will come", Samuel warns, "when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and the Lord will not answer you on that day" — a very anti-monarchic passage. The people won't listen to him, and they say quite significantly, "No... We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles" [1 Sam 8:19-20]. So this is an explicit and ominous rejection, not only of Yahweh, but of Israel's distinctiveness from other nations. And what, after all, does it mean to be a holy nation, but to be a nation separated out from, observing different rules from, other nations. In Samuel 12, Samuel retires, and he says as he does so, "See, it is the king who leads you now. I am old and gray" [Professor Hayes's translation]. And he, again, outlines what is required of a good king, and then again chastises the people for even having asked for a king, warning that really God must be served wholeheartedly. A king should not interpose himself.

[27] Some have argued that the editors who compiled the text preserved the pro-monarchic perspective of their sources, but they chose to frame the pro-monarchic passages with their own anti-monarchic passages, with the result that the anti-monarchic passages really provide a stronger interpretative framework and are dominant. The implication is that despite positive contemporary evaluations of Israel's kings, from the perspective of the later period, from the perspective of the editors and perhaps those sitting in exile, the institution of kingship was a disaster for Israel. And that negative assessment is introduced by the Deuteronomistic redactor into his account of the origin of the institution: that God, himself, warned at the time that this transition was being made and this request was being made — God himself, warned that this had the potential to be quite disastrous. Others feel that the pro-monarchic and anti-monarchic views were contemporaneous and both ancient, and we see that simply reflected in these dueling sources. So whether one view is older and one more recent, whether both are ancient views or both are recent or later views, the end result is a very complex narrative. As you read it you feel

thrown back and forth between these positive and negative assessments of kingship. And we feel these, and see these very different views of monarchy in ancient Israel. So these views really defy categorization in the end. They are one of the things that give the book such complexity and sophistication.

### *5. Saul and David as Representations of Ambivalence about Monarchy*

[28] Not only is there ambivalence, however, about the institution of kingship or monarchy, there is also a great deal of ambivalence about the first inhabitant of the office, the first king, King Saul, himself. Judges has three different accounts of Saul's appointment as king. In chapter 9, 1 Samuel 9, it is a private affair. It is just between Saul and the prophet Samuel. Samuel anoints Saul as king with oil in a kind of a private encounter. The anointing of kings is also found among other ancient Near Eastern groups, the Hittites, for example. In Israel, it seems to be a rite of dedication or consecration, making sacred to God, ("con-secration," making sacred). And it is done not just for kings. It is also done for high priests. They are also anointed with sacred oil. Then in 1 Samuel 10, you have Saul's appointment represented as being effected by a lottery. It is a lottery that is presided over by Samuel, but there is a lottery system and the lot falls to Samuel to be appointed king. In the next chapter, in 1 Samuel 11, we have Saul victorious in a battle over the Ammonites and so he is elected by popular acclaim, if you will. These could all be complementary ways of his slowly securing the position. They could be seen as competing accounts. But he is an important and a striking figure. Nevertheless, there seems to have been some controversy about Saul and it is preserved within our sources. On the one hand, he is described in very positive terms. He is tall. He is handsome. He is winning. He is charismatic. In fact, he is associated with ecstatic prophecy: the spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he prophesies in a sort of raving and dancing and ecstatic mode. He defends his own tribe. He is from the tribe of Benjamin, and he defends them from Ammonite raids. And he is hailed by the tribes as a leader in time of war. As king he did enjoy some initial military victories. He drove the Philistines from their garrisons, and he was such a popular and natural leader that

even Samuel, who at first resented Saul and resented the idea of a king, came to appreciate him and was said to really grieve for him upon his death.

[29] But once David enters the story, which is about halfway through the Book of 1 Samuel (it's 1 Samuel 16), then we begin to see clearly negative assessments of Saul, perhaps because the sources about David stem from circles that were loyal to the House of David, and David is going to succeed Saul, obviously, as the second king of Israel. Perhaps the negative assessment is because of Saul's ultimate failure and suicide. That had to be accounted for by identifying some fatal flaw in him. So now his ecstatic prophecies are presented as irrational fits of mad behavior. So where once the spirit of the Lord was said to come upon him, now he is said to be seized by an evil spirit from the Lord that rushes upon him suddenly causing him to rave in his house. Elsewhere he commits errors. He doesn't obey Samuel's instructions to the letter, and that is going to cost him the support of Samuel and ultimately God. We have two stories of disobedience related in 1 Samuel. One is in chapter 13. He sees that the morale of his men is sagging and so to rally them together he officiates at a sacrifice. He was supposed to wait for Samuel to arrive and do it, but he sees that it needs to happen now, and so he officiates at the sacrifice himself. And this appropriation of a priestly function enrages Samuel, and this is Samuel's first pronouncement or prediction that God will not establish Saul's dynasty over Israel, despite the fact, by the way, that other kings at other times will sacrifice with impunity. So it is interesting because David and others will sacrifice and it doesn't seem to be a problem. But here it is given as the occasion for Samuel's fury and his first pronouncement that the dynasty of Saul will not be established.

[30] In chapter 15, we have a second instance of disobedience that earns Samuel's disapproval. Again, against Samuel's order, he spares the life of an enemy king. This is King Agag. He spares his life and otherwise violates the terms of herem: this notion of total destruction or devotion of booty and enemies to God through total destruction. And, again, when he violates the order of herem, Samuel again announces that God regrets having made Saul king. "The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who

is worthier than you.” That is chapter 15:28. In any event, with his support eroding, Saul seems to sink into a deep depression and paranoia. And toward the end of his life, he is depicted as being completely obsessed with David and the threat that David poses to Saul himself, but also his dynasty. Saul is angry that his own son, Jonathan, who presumably should succeed him to the throne, has a deep friendship with David and, in fact, throws his support over to David instead of himself. In several jealous rages Saul attempts to kill David or to have him and his supporters killed. In one particularly violent incident he kills 85 priests whom he believes have given shelter to David and his supporters. So in these encounters between Saul and David, the sources portray Saul as this raving, obsessed paranoid person, and David is seen as a sort of innocent victim, and he protests his loyalty and his support for Saul. He does not seem to understand why Saul should view him as a threat. And twice he passes up the opportunity to do away with Saul himself. He says, I will not raise my hand against the Lord’s anointed [see note 2]. So the portrayal of Saul as a raving and paranoid man who is obsessed with David probably reflects the views of later writers who were apologists for the House of David.

[31] Positive views of Saul’s character weren’t entirely extinguished by the biblical writer. David’s own lament, when he hears of Saul’s death by suicide, and Jonathan’s death, also, may reflect Saul’s tremendous popularity. David orders the Judahites to sing what is called the Song of the Bow in praise of Saul.

Your glory, O Israel,  
Lies slain on your heights;  
How have the mighty fallen!  
...  
Saul and Jonathan,  
Beloved and cherished,  
Never parted  
In life or in death!  
They were swifter than eagles,  
They were stronger than lions!  
Daughters of Israel,  
Weep over Saul,

Who clothed you in crimson and finery,  
Who decked your robes with jewels of gold.  
How have the mighty fallen  
In the thick of battle —  
Jonathan, slain on your heights!  
I grieve for you,  
My brother Jonathan,  
You were most dear to me.  
Your love was wonderful to me  
More than the love of women.  
How have the mighty fallen,  
The weapons of war perished! [2 Sam 1:19,  
23-27]

[32] Of course, representing David as bewailing Saul and Jonathan in these terms, would have served an apologetic function, as well. And David is cleared of any part in or even desire for the death of Saul. So half way through the Book of Samuel then, is the first part of the story of David and his encounters with Saul, running through to the end of 1 Samuel and the first few chapters of 2 Samuel — about Second Samuel 5. And this whole section, this first part of the story of David, has the feel of a historical novel, or narrative. There is a lot of direct speech and lots of dialogue. So it has the feel of fiction, of a novel. Given that the ruling family in Judah was referred to as the House of David for several centuries, and given a wonderful archaeological find dating from the ninth century — it’s a Syrian inscription that refers to the House of David dating to the ninth century — so given those two pieces of evidence, I think most scholars would see David as a real person. None of the details of the biblical account can really be confirmed, of course, but I think the consensus is that David was a real person. There are obviously some who do not hold that and believe this is a much later retrojection. But David is, surprisingly enough, presented as very human. He is not a divine character, and he is certainly not even a highly virtuous character. The first installment of his story through about 2 Samuel 5, is clearly sympathetic to David and favorable to David. But it is not entirely obsequious or flattering, which is the sort of genre that we very often have coming out of ancient Near Eastern texts dealing with royalty.

[33] This part of the story may be an apology for David, but it is also subtly critical of him. Certainly, David is a hero, but if you read between the lines, he is also an opportunist. He is an outlaw. He serves as a mercenary for the Philistines for some of the time, and he can act pretty unscrupulously. So this isn't royal propaganda in the simple sense, even though to some degree it may be an apology for David. As we are going to see in a minute, David will fare much, much worse in the second installment of his story, and this is the story that takes up the bulk of 2 Samuel. So moving now into the Book of 2 Samuel and the latter part of David's story.

[34] Actually, no, I lied [made a mistake]! We are going to back up for one minute just to talk about the different accounts of David's emergence — the three different stories, if you will, of David's discovery, because in the first, Samuel, again, secretly anoints him king of Judah. So it is a private affair. He anoints him as the king of Judah, which is just the southern region. He does this in Saul's lifetime. David is the youngest of his father's sons, so this anointment is another reversal of primogeniture, the exaltation of the lowly that we see so often in the Bible. In the second account we first meet David when he is summoned to play music for a disturbed Saul who, of course, is suffering from these irrational fits. And then in the third account, David is introduced as the 98-pound weakling who takes on the legendary Goliath. Later, after the death of Saul, David will be anointed king in Hebron over his own tribe, Judah. He then manages to either win over or kill off the rest of Saul's household, anyone else who could make a dynastic claim to the throne based on descent from Saul, anyone who might be a threat to his claim to kingship in the more northern region. And eventually the northern tribes will also elect him king. And so the united kingship of the northern parts of Israel and the Tribe of Judah is finally formed. Once his reign seems secure, and the nation is consolidated behind him, David then captures Jerusalem and launches attacks against Israel's neighbors. And the text says that the Lord gives him victory. This is in 2 Samuel 8 now, verses 6 and 14. God gives him victory.

[35] The biblical narrative depicts him as the master of a huge empire that stretches from the desert to the sea. There is very little evidence that

Israel actually established lasting control over all of the states in this region. It's likely that David was able to take advantage of a power vacuum. Egypt's hold on Canaan was crumbling. Again, the migration of these "peoples of the seas" throughout this region and other peoples pressing in from the desert had really upset the two major powers in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and they really had lost control of the central region. And so David was — and the Israelites were able to take advantage of this and establish an independent state. And David's independent state was probably able to dominate the area for a little while, ending the Philistine threat, for example, and possibly even collecting tribute from some of the surrounding or neighboring states, Ammon and Moab and Edom.

## 6. *The Davidic Covenant*

[36] But it is the prophet Nathan, who transmits God's promise to David, a promise that will become the basis for the faith in the eternity of the Davidic kingdom. And that happens in 2 Samuel, chapter 7:8-17, a very important passage and very important in the construction of what we will see is a royal ideology; a royal ideology that comes to contest some of the basic ideology of the nation. "Thus, says the Lord of hosts." This is Nathan speaking now, quoting God:

[37] "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel, and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house." [meaning here dynasty] "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body,

and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house [meaning now a temple] for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.” [RSV; see note 3]

[38] It’s a very important passage, and it’s with this passage that you have the idea of an eternal and unconditional covenant between God and the House of David, or the dynasty of David. And this is now the fourth covenant that we have met: the Noahide covenant, the patriarchal Covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, and now the Davidic covenant. Note that God says that David and his descendants may be punished for sin. They certainly will be punished for sin, but he will not take the kingdom away from them as he did from Saul.

[39] So God’s oath to preserve the Davidic dynasty and, by implication we will see later, next time, Jerusalem as well, would lead eventually to a popular belief in the invincibility of the Holy City. In addition, the belief in Israel’s ultimate deliverance from enemies became bound up with David and his dynasty. David was idealized by later biblical and post-biblical tradition, and became the paradigmatic king. So even when the kingdom fell finally to the Babylonians in 586, the promise to David’s House was believed to be eternal. The community looked to the future for a restoration of the Davidic line or Davidic king, or a messiah. Now the Hebrew word messiah simply means anointed, one who is “meshiach” is anointed with the holy oil. That is a reference to the fact that the king was initiated into office by means of holy oil being poured on his head. So King David was the messiah of God, the king anointed by or to God. And in the exile, Israelites would pray for another messiah,

meaning another king from the House of David appointed and anointed by God to rescue them from enemies and reestablish them as a nation at peace in their land as David had done.

[40] So the Jewish hope for a messiah, speaking now in the post-biblical [period] where it is correct to say Jewish, the Jewish hope for a messiah was thus always political and national. It involved the restoration of the nation in its land under a Davidic king. We are going to talk next time about the royal ideology that begins to emerge and challenge the older Sinaitic and covenantal ideology. But that is too much to get into now. So we will deal with that on Wednesday and then move on through the rest of the Deuteronomistic history.

[41] [end of transcript]

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[42] Notes

[43] 1. This follows the JPS translation, with the substitution of “leaders” for JPS’s “chieftains.”

[44] 2. This is a paraphrase of 1 Samuel 24:11.

[45] 3. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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[46] References

[47] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from “Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.” Copyright (c) 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

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