

**CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION
IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL**

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Chapter 6

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY, ULTERIOR MOTIVES
IN SAMUEL'S FAREWELL SPEECH?:

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PROPHET IN 1 SAMUEL 12

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THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PROPHET
IN 1 SAMUEL 12*

J. Richard Middleton

Until the rise of critical biblical scholarship, pious readings of the figure of David dominated Judaism and Christianity, aided and abetted, no doubt, by his image in Chronicles and in Psalms superscriptions. In more recent times, however, it has become common for contemporary interpreters to question David's motives and strategies in his rise to power in 1 Samuel in such a way as to anticipate the character defects that led to David's crashing fall in 2 Samuel 11–12.¹

With few exceptions, however, the prophet Samuel has been read as a faithful (if strident), representative of YHWH's will—especially in contrast

* This chapter is based on material originally presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, at the University of Victoria, Victoria, BC.

1. For my own analysis of David's character, see J. Richard Middleton, "The Battle Belongs to the Word: The Role of Theological Discourse in David's Victory over Saul and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17," in *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood, and Postmodern Faith*, ed. James K. A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 109–31; and Middleton, "A Psalm against David? A Canonical Reading of Psalm 51 as a Critique of David's Inadequate Repentance in 2 Samuel 12," in *Explorations in Interdisciplinary Reading: Theological, Exegetical, and Reception-Historical Perspectives*, ed. Robbie Castleman, Darian Lockett, and Stephen Presley (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017), 26–45.

to Saul, who is typically viewed negatively.² In contrast to this approach, I have been developing a reading of the character of Samuel that is suspicious of the prophet, by attending to his narrated abuse of power vis-à-vis Saul; and I have been teaching 1 Samuel 1–15 from this point of view.³

My Approach to 1 Samuel 12

This essay engages in a close reading of Samuel's so-called farewell speech at Gilgal in 1 Samuel 12, though its character as a farewell speech is disputed, since Samuel doesn't retire afterwards.⁴ Indeed, he continues to have a determinative influence on Saul, the newly installed king (though he has not a whit of influence on David). And while some scholars dispute the intended location of the speech at Gilgal, since the link between chs. 11 and 12 is unclear, it makes perfect sense to view the speech as a continuation of the narrative of Saul's installation as king at the end of ch. 11.⁵

The characterization of Samuel has been developing from the opening narratives of his birth and childhood in 1 Samuel 1–3. At his birth his

2. Significant exceptions to this typical reading include Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary*, HBM 19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008); Marti J. Steussy, *Samuel and His God*, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); and Tamás Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership: A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of Saul, David and Solomon*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), esp. Chapter 2.

3. This approach is being developed into a monograph, tentatively entitled: *Portrait of a Disgruntled Prophet: Samuel's Resistance to God and the Undoing of Saul* (in preparation). For a summary, see Middleton, "Samuel Agonistes: A Conflicted Prophet's Resistance to God and Contribution to the Failure of Israel's First King," in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Lissa M. Wray Beal (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 69–91.

4. Whereas Robert D. Bergen claims that here "Samuel closed the books on his own lengthy tenure of service as a leader for all Israel" (Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary 7 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 140), Keith Bodner's comment about Samuel's continuing role is more on target: "the reader may be tempted to think that... Samuel is going out to pasture. But, like the odd *professor emeritus*, Samuel has no immediate plans to retire" (Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 149). Although Bodner's comment has to do with Samuel's role after his criticism of Saul in 1 Sam. 13, it is *apropos* also of his continuing role after the speech of ch. 12.

5. Given that the chapter divisions are a late phenomenon, a number of scholars follow Josephus, who has Samuel assemble the Hebrews for his speech (*Ant.* 6.86), right after the confirmation of Saul's kingship at Gilgal (6.83).

mother, Hannah, explains Samuel's name in relation to the verb "to ask" or "lend" (1:20), which is more clearly linked to Saul's name, thus putting the reader on notice of the coming rivalry between them. Indeed, at one point (1:28) Hannah says that as long as Samuel lives he is "lent" (*šā'ûl*) to YHWH (where the Hebrew for "lent" is identical to the name *Saul*). After Samuel's introduction to YHWH by the priest Eli in 1 Samuel 3, his "character zone" develops especially throughout 1 Samuel 7–16, from the first account of his public leadership to his anointing of David as a replacement king after Saul's rejection.⁶ It even continues post-mortem in 1 Samuel 28, where the dead prophet, still in character, speaks to Saul from the grave. Yet there is warrant for focusing on 1 Samuel 12, since it contains Samuel's longest discourse in the entire book.⁷ This chapter is thus particularly revelatory of the character of the prophet.

In my reading of 1 Samuel 12, I will juxtapose the "orthodox," so-called Deuteronomistic, theology to which Samuel appeals in his speech with the complex rhetorical strategy of his words, examining his possible motivations and the effect of Samuel's rhetoric on his audience. I do not intend to try to get behind the text to putative sources, with their varying ideological points of view.⁸ My focus will be on the "Samuel" presented in the world of the text.

Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 12 has a relatively clear structure. Samuel first looks back to his impeccable career as judge (vv. 1-5), then

6. The notion of a "character zone" is derived from Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422; see esp. 316. This notion is used to great effect in the writings of Keith Bodner (for his definition, see *1 Samuel*, 7).

7. I am not particularly interested in parsing whether (on source critical or other grounds) the chapter represents two or three separate speeches or simply one continuous discourse in three parts (my divisions are vv. 1-5, 6-13, 14-25, though others divide the chapter differently). For the claim that vv. 6-15 (along with vv. 20b-22, 24-25, and possibly 19b) are later Deuteronomistic insertions into an earlier speech, see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, AB 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 214, 219.

8. We should note that there is considerable disagreement about the extent that this chapter represents the work of a Deuteronomistic editor (who may or may not be anti-monarchic in outlook). For a nuanced analysis of the supposedly pro- or anti-monarchial sources in 1 Samuel, see Lyle Eslinger, "Viewpoints and Point of View in 1 Samuel 8–12," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 61–76. My use of "Deuteronomistic" is not meant to come to a decision about sources or tradents, but simply to recognize ways in which the theology articulated by Samuel in this chapter reflects language and ideas usually attributed to the Deuteronomistic history.

reviews the history of God with Israel, from the exodus to the monarchy (vv. 6-13), with a focus on the people's sin in asking for a king and on his own indispensable role as prophet (vv. 14-25). All of these foci—Samuel's impeccable career, his recounting of Israel's history, the people's sin, and the prophet's indispensable role—are the clear emphases of Samuel's rhetoric. The question is: What is Samuel (the character in the text) trying to accomplish by this rhetoric?

At this point an interpreter of the Bible may be expected to say something about their methodology or theoretical orientation, as a prolegomenon to the actual interpretation. However, my experience of biblical studies as a discipline over the years has led me to be less impressed by textual analyses that are over-determined by methodological issues, since the interpretation of Scripture (or any literature) is much more a matter of practiced art than extrapolation from theory.

Nevertheless, perhaps something of my assumptions about the Samuel narrative might be helpful at the outset—though these assumptions are not formulated in advance, but have been developed via my engagement with the text itself (indeed, the best theory is a reflection on praxis).⁹

To begin with, I treat the text of Samuel as opening up a narrative world that readers are invited to enter.¹⁰ This world is both continuous with, and discontinuous from, the world of the reader (or of the succession of readers, over time). While discontinuities have to do with the temporal,

9. This coheres with Greger Andersson's suggestion that theory is often based on the memory of prior readings; see Andersson, *Untamable Texts: Literary Studies and Narrative Theory in the Books of Samuel*, LHBOTS 514 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 69–70, 260 (thanks to Benjamin J. M. Johnson for this reference). Special thanks are due my former student T. L. Birge for suggestions about relevant literature (below) that intersects with my methodological comments (from her doctoral proposal on reading biblical narrative).

10. For a long time, formalist approaches to biblical narrative, derived from the literary discipline of "narratology" (a term coined by Tzvetan Todorov in *Grammaire du Décaméron*, 1969) have dominated the field. These approaches laudably attempt to understand the internal reality created by the narrative, based on various semantic cues; however, such approaches have tended to minimize the role of the reader. In recent times alternative approaches have been developing (so-called post-classical narratology), which attempt to understand how narrative and reader interact and affect each other. See David Herman, "Cognitive Narratology" (online article revised September 22, 2013) in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al. (Hamburg: Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology, Hamburg University Press), <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/cognitive-narratology-revised-version-uploaded-22-september-2013> (this is an ongoing revision of *Handbook of Narratology* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009]).

linguistic, cultural, and conceptual distance of the reader(s) from the context of the author(s), the continuity is rooted in the shared human experiences of both, since contemporary readers are acquainted with transitions of power, the role of speeches in such transitions, and ways in which rhetoric may be used to manipulate a situation.¹¹

Admittedly, there are many gaps or lacunae in the account in 1 Samuel 12, as there are in any biblical narrative. And readers (whether scholarly/technical or ordinary/naïve readers) will always fill in the gaps, either from either own expertise or from some common realm of human experience. Narratives invite us in to inhabit their world for a while, which allows that world to impact our own world—and vice versa.¹²

Is there subjectivity in my reading of 1 Samuel 12? Undoubtedly. But subjectivity is not a vice to be avoided. Rather, subjectivity is a pervasive feature of being human, and thus intrinsic to all interpretation. The question is never *whether* a reading is subjective; all readings are subjective. The question is whether a particular reading is helpful in opening up the meaning of a text. This means that not all interpretations (including attempts to fill in narrative lacunae) are equally successful and thus legitimate.¹³

I take it as axiomatic that no interpreter worth their salt would settle for the first, seemingly obvious, way they understand the meaning of a given text. Rather, the interpreter needs to live with the text, inhabiting its narrative world—in multiple ways, on many occasions, open to learning new meanings and correcting initial impressions (even if those initial impressions are shaped by scholarly training).¹⁴

11. Post-classical narratologists have begun using the term “storyworld” to describe the space that opens up between the world of the text and the world of the reader. It is a function neither of the literary text alone nor of the reader’s imagination, but is dialectically related to both. This concept is central to David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2013). For a short definition, see Marie-Laure Ryan, “Space” (online article revised April 22, 2014) in Hühn et al., eds, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/space>, para. 9.

12. Gap-filling is discussed by Catherine Emmott and Marc Alexander, in “Schemata” (online article revised September 22, 2014), in Hühn et al., eds, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/schemata>.

13. For more in-depth exploration of the constitutive nature of subjectivity for interpretation, see J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 34–42.

14. Indeed, Ehud Ben Zvi is famous for suggesting that no text is meant to be read just once; rather, texts are meant to be reread repeatedly. See Ben Zvi, *The Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, JSOTSup 367 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 1–14.

This developing sense of the text’s meaning will be strengthened by challenges from other interpretations—including both alternative perspectives and previously unexamined data. Such challenges may come through reading secondary literature (both contemporaneous and historical) or through interacting with an embodied community of learners (whether in academic or faith settings), who are invested in grappling with the meaning of a common text.

In my own case, my reading of the character of Samuel has been developing through twenty years of teaching 1 Samuel, while attending to a wide variety of scholarly perspectives on this material, as well as to the insights of my students (which have proved to be just as helpful as scholarly perspectives).¹⁵

The Prophet Doth Protest Too Much, Methinks (1 Samuel 12:1-5)

From the start, Samuel’s rhetoric is highly confrontational. He frames his speech as a series of quasi-legal disputations, first concerning his own innocence (in the first five verses), then concerning the people’s guilt (in the rest of the chapter). Throughout, we find an abundance of attention-getting language—*wě’attâ* (“and now”) with one *gam’attâ* (“even now”), and lots of *hinnê* (“behold”), with *hinnâm* (“behold them”) and *hinēni* (“behold me”).¹⁶

In his opening salvo, in 12:1-5, out of the blue and in the absence of explicit accusation by anyone, Samuel jumps to defend his past career as judge. Here we find an accumulation of “behold” (four times), with the first “and now” (*wě’attâ*) at the start of 12:2. After this *wě’attâ*, Samuel contrasts the king’s present leadership (12:2a) with his own past leadership (12:3a), using the metaphor of “walking before” in each case. This contrast leads the reader to think that he is handing over the reins of power; he must diminish, the king is taking over (hence the idea that this is Samuel’s farewell speech).

15. For post-classical perspectives on narrative characterization, see Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*, Chapter 5: “Characters, Categorization, and the Concept of Person”; and Keith Oatley, “On Truth and Fiction,” in *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues Between Literature and Cognition*, ed. Michael Burke and Emily T. Troscianko, Cognition and Poetics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 259–78. Oatley’s essay is helpful in reflecting on how readers run simulations of reality through their minds as they read, testing the narrative world and the characters therein by their own experience of extra-narrative reality.

16. All biblical translations in this essay are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Yet sandwiched in the middle of this contrast between Samuel and the king is the distinction between his old age and his sons' current presence among the people (12:2).¹⁷ This muddies the waters somewhat; is it the king who is replacing Samuel or is it his sons? Indeed, given the unethical behavior of his sons, it is unlikely that he is suggesting that they would replace him (even though he had appointed them as judges; 8:1-2). So the question arises as to why Samuel mentions his sons here. Whereas some suggest that this is Samuel's last nostalgic look back at the possibility of his sons' dynastic succession as judges, others more plausibly suggest that Samuel intends a contrast between his own practice of judgeship and that of his sons.¹⁸

Then Samuel calls the people to testify against him "before YHWH and before his anointed" concerning his tenure as judge, with a series of questions about his honesty and lack of profit from his position (12:3). These questions implicitly contrast Samuel's impeccable leadership with that of his sons; "from whose hand have I taken a bribe?" distinguishes Samuel's behavior from the bribery of his sons, which was mentioned in 1 Sam. 8:3.

But his use of the verb "take" both in the question about the bribe and in two other questions ("Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken?") suggests, instead, a contrast with the way Samuel had previously portrayed the typical behavior of kings, who, according to ch. 8, would *take* (*lāqah*) the people's sons, daughters, fields, vineyards, slaves, cattle, donkeys, and sheep, until finally they became slaves to the reigning

17. This could be thought of as a chiasm. While the two outer lines (1 and 4) contrast the king with Samuel (using the language of walking before), the two inner lines (2 and 3) contrast Samuel with his sons (as for me, as for my sons):

1. And now, behold [*hinnē*] the king who is walking before you.
2. As for me, I am old and gray.
3. As for my sons, behold they [*hinnām*] are with you.
4. As for me, I have walked before you from my youth until this day—behold me [*hinēni*].

However, it is possible that these verses are not chiastic, but should be read as two sets of sequential contrasts—between lines 1 and 2 (Samuel and the king) and between lines 3 and 4 (Samuel and his sons).

18. For the former suggestion, see Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 2000), 65. For the latter suggestion, see Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*, LHBOTS 365 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 188.

monarch (8:11-17).¹⁹ So Samuel may be contrasting his leadership with both his sons and the king—at least in his description of what a king would do.²⁰

It is clear what answer Samuel expects to all of his questions—namely, "No-one." That is essentially what he gets in 12:4, when the people reply: "You have not defrauded us or abused us and you have not taken anything from the hand of anyone." I would interject, however, that the narrative of 1 Samuel 9–15 suggests that Samuel has indeed defrauded and abused *Saul* so that his leadership ability becomes compromised (and he becomes mentally unstable), though this, admittedly, takes us beyond the narrative of ch. 12. And while Samuel may not have taken anything from the hand of anyone, the narrator tells us in 9:22 that "Samuel *took* Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall" (where the addition of the verb *lāqah* is technically unnecessary; "brought" works just fine by itself).²¹

But my main point here is that instead of Samuel's questions functioning to clear his name from any evildoing as he prepares to pass the torch of leadership, they seem intended to portray his past leadership as superior to either that of his sons or of the newly installed king, with the implication that there was no need for his replacement. Especially in the absence of any accusation of wrongdoing by anyone, the prophet "doth protest too much, methinks."²²

19. Samuel's speech also echoes language from Moses's prayer to YHWH in response to the accusations of Dathan and Abiram, when he says: "I have not taken (even) one donkey from them" (Num. 16:15).

20. This point is widely noted in the commentaries. Here I would emphasize that this contrast is between Samuel and *his prediction* of what a king will do (fulfilled in the case of Solomon and Rehoboam, for example); it is not an accurate contrast between Samuel and Saul specifically, since the latter is not portrayed by the narrator as fulfilling this prediction. Indeed, while Saul does (later) "gather" men into his military service (1 Sam. 14:52), the verb "take" is not used there.

21. Many commentaries note that Samuel, in contrast to his description of the king in ch. 8, is clearly innocent of "taking." I suggest that this is not so clear to the reader who attends to the phrasing of 1 Sam. 9:22 as a clue to Samuel's treatment of Saul (especially in 1 Sam. 9–10). But Samuel is not the only one who "takes" Saul; the people "took" Saul from hiding among the baggage (1 Sam. 10:23). Thus Saul is more typically on the receiving end of taking than being the one who takes (at least, early in his reign). For further analysis of chs. 9–10, see Middleton, "Samuel Agonistes," 73–4.

22. Here I refer to the words of Queen Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

And if one might be inclined to a charitable reading of the protesting prophet, I would point to two items in the text that corroborate my reading. The first is Samuel's rhetorical shift from defense to accusation in 12:5. Whereas he had challenged the people (in the absence of any accusation) to "testify against" him "before YHWH and before his anointed" (12:3), when the people admit that he is guiltless (12:4) Samuel turns the tables from defending himself to accusing them, by stating: "YHWH is witness against you, and his anointed is witness that you have not found anything in my hand [i.e. you have found me guiltless]" (12:5).²³

How does an accusation against the people follow from Samuel's proven innocence? Are guilt and innocence a zero-sum game such that Samuel's impeccable leadership implies the people are guilty? Of what would they be guilty? Certainly not of accusing him directly of impropriety. They do no such thing.²⁴

As we shall shortly see, the missing part of Samuel's argument is that the people are guilty for seeking to replace Samuel's impeccable leadership as judge with a king. That is, their asking for a king implied—from Samuel's point of view—that he had been lacking as Israel's leader. Methinks the prophet definitely doth protest too much.

The second corroborating item that something strange is going on here is Samuel's opening sentence in 12:1, which begins with *hinnê* and continues with two falsehoods—or at least two cases where he has massaged the truth.

First, Samuel states that he has listened to the people's voice in all that they said to him—whereas he had clearly resisted the people's voice. This resistance began in ch. 8, when the people asked for a king. God had to twice tell him to "listen to the people's voice" (1 Sam. 8:7, 22) and he still ignored their request for a king at the end of ch. 8, even after God added the explicit command "and install a king for them" (8:22).

23. Note that Samuel avoids calling Saul by name anywhere in his speech. In the first five verses he refers only to "a king" (12:1) or to YHWH's "anointed" (12:3, 5), while in the rest of the speech he speaks only of "a king" (12:12, 13, 17, 19), "the king" (12:13), or "your king" (12:14, 24; also 12:15 LXX). Samuel's use of the verb "asked" (*šā'al*) in 12:13 (referring to the people's request for a king) is the only allusion to the name Saul in the entire chapter.

24. Given the absence of any accusation from the people, it is difficult to understand Robert Bergen's claim that "the people were prosecutors" (Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 140). This might be a case of taking Samuel's point of view over that of the narrator, who is mum on that point.

And if anyone would defend the prophet by noting that in the end he did give them a king, I would point out that it was only reluctantly, with many obfuscating moves and feints (throughout ch. 10) to delay the process as long as possible—a secret anointing, followed by convoluted instructions to the new king, and then the casting of lots to discover who the king would be (as if God had not revealed his choice of king to Samuel in ch. 9 and as if the king had not already been anointed).

The second case of massaging the truth, if not outright falsehood, is Samuel's statement in 12:1 that he has installed a king for them (the Hiphil of *mālak* followed by *melek*; he has kinged a king). This identical verb was used only one verse earlier (in the last verse of ch. 11) to describe *the people* installing Saul as king (11:15).²⁵ And while technically Samuel might be able to take credit for what turned out to be inevitable, despite his objections, the fact that two adjacent sentences (separated by an artificial chapter division) make contradictory *prima facie* claims about who it was that installed Saul as king should arouse our suspicions about Samuel's motives here. By taking credit for a situation that he had long resisted, but now realizes is inevitable, Samuel is here attempting to take control of the fledgling monarchy as it gets underway.²⁶

Samuel's Confusing Retelling of Israel's Story (1 Samuel 12:6-13)

Our suspicions about Samuel's motivations are put on high alert when we turn to Samuel's creative (and initially confusing) retelling of Israel's story in 12:6-13. Near the start (in 12:7), Samuel utilizes the language of legal challenge: "take your stand and I will enter into judgment with you before YHWH" (12:7). Whereas in 12:1-5 YHWH and "his anointed"

25. This is the same Hebrew phrasing used in God's original instruction to Samuel to install a king (1 Sam. 8:22).

26. Evidence for Samuel's sense that the monarchy is now inevitable (despite his aversion to it) is that although he affirms in no uncertain terms that asking for a king was a great evil (which the people admit), nowhere in 1 Sam. 12 does he call the people to repent of this sin (there is simply no going back at this point). This is astutely observed by Robert Polzin, who contrasts this with Samuel's earlier speech against idolatry in ch. 7, where Samuel explicitly calls the people to repent (*šûb*; 7:3) and they respond by putting away their idols (7:4). See Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Part 2: *1 Samuel*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 122-3.

have been witnesses, the single witness to the proceedings from here on is YHWH. This is rhetorically significant, in that the king will be taken to be part of the problem (so he cannot function as witness here).²⁷ In other words, the purpose of the retelling of Israel's story is to provide the basis for an accusation against the people precisely for wanting a king. This accusation leads some scholars to view the chapter as a covenant lawsuit (and there is, indeed, language here that might be taken from the covenant lawsuit of Mic. 6:1-5, along with similar texts).²⁸ However, this is much more a lawsuit between *Samuel* and the people than between God and the people.²⁹

Samuel tells Israel's story in three stages. Beginning with the exodus (12:6-8), he then moves to the time of the judges (12:9-11), and ends with a reference to contemporaneous events (12:12-13). In all three stages of the story we find contradictions between his retelling and what we know from elsewhere in the Bible.

27. This rhetorical shift is noticed by A. Graeme Auld, who correctly attributes it to the fact that from here on the king and people are together treated as defendants. Auld, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 131. In contrast to this shift, Josephus's version of Samuel's speech (*Ant.* 6.86-94) consistently has God and the king as witnesses to Samuel's challenge and warning to the people (which may suggest his more sanguine view of the monarchy), while the version in Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* 57) pits God and Samuel (and Moses) consistently against the people and king (and Korah) throughout the entire speech (the king is never a witness, only a defendant). See Joachim Vette, "Samuel's 'Farewell Speech': Theme and Variation in 1 Samuel 12, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World*, ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 325-39.

28. Samuel's speech shares with Mic. 6 mention of Gilgal (Mic. 6:5; 1 Sam. 11:14), Moses and Aaron (Mic. 6:4; 1 Sam. 12:6), the call to "testify against [lit. "answer"] me" (Mic. 6:3; 1 Sam. 12:3), and the "righteous deeds of YHWH" (Mic. 6:5; 1 Sam. 12:7). Other parallels can be found in other prophetic or covenantal contexts, such as Amos 5:12 ("take a bribe"; 1 Sam. 12:3), Deut. 28:33; Amos 4:1; Hos. 5:11 (the verbs "crush" [or "defraud"] and "oppress"; 1 Sam. 12:3), and Isa. 1:15 ("hide my eyes"; 1 Sam. 12:2). On these, see Auld, *I and II Samuel*, 128-9.

29. Some scholars think that Samuel's speech in ch. 12 represents a covenant-renewal ceremony, parallel to the one in Josh. 24, as a means of providing continuity in a transitional time. A prime example is J. Robert Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of 1 Samuel 11:14-12:25* (1978; repr. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 178. Although David G. Firth disputes that the chapter represents a covenant-making ceremony, he admits that it uses terminology typical of covenant speeches by Moses (Deuteronomy as a whole) and Joshua (ch. 24). Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, ApOTC 8 (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 144.

The Exodus (1 Samuel 12:6-8)

In his summary of the exodus, Samuel focuses on the role of Moses and Aaron. His focus on these two leaders is usually thought to emphasize that they were personally chosen by YHWH, in contrast to the king whom *the people* asked for (thus Samuel will later mention "the king whom you have chosen, for whom you asked"; 12:13). If this is the point, like all of Samuel's points it is tendentious, since we might note that in response to the people's asking for a king, YHWH specifically selects Saul (1 Sam. 9:15-17). And in the following chapter, Samuel admits that YHWH has "chosen" Saul (1 Sam. 10:24).³⁰

Samuel makes two narrative claims about Moses and Aaron, namely that they brought the ancestors up from Egypt (12:6 and 8) and that they settled the ancestors in the land (12:8). Whereas the former claim is uncontroversial, the latter claim does not fit any known account of Israel's founding narrative. Not only was it Joshua who settled them in the land, but Moses died on the other side of the Jordan (Deut. 34:1-5; Josh. 1:1-2). So Samuel seems a tad confused here. Or, more plausibly, Samuel is at pains to deny the passing of the torch from Moses to Joshua, since this might justify the transition from judge to king, thus granting legitimacy to Saul.³¹

The Judges (1 Samuel 12:9-11)

Samuel's retelling of the story of the Judges is even more confusing than his version of the exodus. Admittedly, Samuel follows the basic pattern of the cycles (or spirals) of sin, oppression, cry of distress, and deliverance or salvation found in the book of Judges. Samuel even utilizes stereotypical language found in Judges, such as Israel *forgetting* or *abandoning* YHWH their God (1 Sam. 12:10; Judg. 3:7; 10:10; also Deut. 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 32:18), YHWH *selling them into the hand* of various enemies (1 Sam. 12:9; Judg. 2:4; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7), and their *crying out* to YHWH (1 Sam. 12:10; Judg. 3:9; 10:10).

30. Bergen claims that Samuel's point is that YHWH specifically "appointed" and "sent" these human agents, in contrast to Saul (Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 142). Firth has a somewhat more nuanced position, claiming that "this king is one he [God] has permitted, not one he desires" (Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 144). While these explanations may reflect Samuel's perspective on the matter, neither one fits the facts of the case.

31. Thus even the nuances of Samuel's version of salvation history illumine his motivations, which contribute to his characterization throughout ch. 12.

What is strange, however, is that whereas the narrative of Judges 3–16 lists five cycles of oppression and deliverance, Samuel lists only three sets of oppression in 12:9 and four deliverers or judges in 12:11. Further, the three examples of oppression he lists are out of chronological order. To top it off, the second judge in Samuel's list (Bedan) is unknown from the book of Judges;³² hence the replacement of Bedan with Barak in the LXX and with Deborah and Barak in the Peshitta (since Deborah is technically the judge and Barak is her lieutenant). The Peshitta also puts Gideon (a.k.a. Jerubbaal) after Deborah and Barak, presumably to correct Samuel's confused narrative order.³³ A further confusion is that Samuel gives his own name as the fourth judge, which seems so self-serving that this is replaced with Samson in the Lucianic text of the LXX and in the Peshitta.

32. Some Rabbinic traditions interpreted Bedan as meaning "from Dan" (*b. Roš Haš.* 25a) or "son of Dan" (Kimchi), taking this as a reference to Samson, the Danite. Serge Frolov attempts to explain the presence of Bedan as a judge in Samuel's version of the narrative by postulating a rhetorical situation (internal to the narrative) in which Samuel wants to avoid upsetting the Philistines, who had been active in 1 Sam. 4–7 and would plausibly have been dominant in the region at the time of his speech. To accomplish this, Samuel focuses on Transjordan events (in the east), where the Philistines (on the western coast) had no stake. Thus, he cites two deliverers (Gideon/Jerubbaal and Jephthah) of Transjordan origin, who fight against Transjordan enemies (Midianites and Ammonites). And he will soon introduce the Ammonite threat to Jabesh-Gilead (in Transjordan) as the basis of the people's request for a king (replacing the Philistine threat, which had been the real reason)—all in an effort to convey to any Philistine agents who might overhear his speech that he was concerned only with Israel's liberation from oppression in the east (far from Philistine interests). In this context, Frolov speculates that Bedan is introduced into Samuel's narrative based on his lineage from Manasseh, a Transjordan tribe (1 Chron. 7:17). See Frolov, "Bedan: A Riddle in Context," *JBL* 126 (2007): 164–7. Whether or not we buy Frolov's explanation of the occurrence of the name Bedan (and his thesis about the Philistines seems contraindicated by their occurrence in 12:9), he is surely correct that "the mention of Bedan as a deliverer is but a relatively minor component of the massive twisting of biblical traditions that takes place in Samuel's overview of the Israelite history" (*ibid.*, 165).

33. The replacement of Bedan with Barak is found in three versions of the LXX: Codex Vaticanus (LXX^B), Codex Alexandrinus (LXX^A), and the Lucianic recension (LXX^L).

<i>MT (Hebrew)</i>	<i>LXX^{BA} (Greek)</i>	<i>LXX^L (Greek)</i>	<i>Targum (Aramaic)</i>	<i>Peshitta (Syriac)</i>
Jerubbaal	Jerubbaal	Jerubbaal	Gideon	Deborah, Barak
Bedan	Barak	Barak	Samson	Gideon
Jephthah	Jephthah	Jephthah	Jephthah	Jephthah
Samuel	Samuel	Samson	Samuel	Samson

Figure 1. Textual Traditions for 1 Samuel 12:11

If we were to correlate the examples of oppression and deliverance in Samuel's retelling (from the MT), we have oppression by Sisera of Hazor, with rescue by Jerubbaal (Gideon); then oppression by the Philistines, with rescue by Bedan; then oppression by the king of Moab, with rescue by Jephthah; and finally rescue by Samuel himself, with no oppression listed.

<i>Judges 3–16</i> <i>(5 sets of oppression and deliverance by judges)</i>	<i>1 Sam. 12:9–11</i> <i>(3 oppressors, 4 judges)</i>
Eglon, King of Moab → Ehud (ch. 3)	Sisera of Hazor → Jerubbaal
Sisera of Hazor → Deborah (and Barak) (chs. 4–5)	Philistines → Bedan
Midianites → Gideon (= Jerubbaal) (chs. 6–9)	King of Moab → Jephthah
Ammonites → Jephthah (chs. 10–11)	? → Samuel
Philistines → Samson (chs. 13–16)	

Figure 2. Samuel's Implicit Narrative of Oppression and Deliverance

Instead of trying to get behind the text to putative alternative traditions of Israel's history that Samuel may be drawing on (as some scholars are wont to do), I am interested in the rhetorical effect of portraying the prophet as either confused about Israel's past or as outright rewriting history for his own purposes (or some combination of the two).³⁴ I will soon address the missing oppression in Samuel's recounting of Israel's history and how it serves his agenda.

34. Tony W. Cartledge notes that the difference between Samuel's version of the story and that found in the book of Judges suggests "the presence of an older variant tradition." Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 162. Likewise Ralph W. Klein affirms the antiquity of this material in this chapter because it "seems to represent a different history than that recounted in Dtr." Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Waco: Word, 1983), 112. Neither considers these variants as part of the narrative characterization of the prophet.

But for now we can see one way that Samuel selectively uses history for his purposes by attending to the confession of sin that he quotes from the time of the Judges. After listing the three sets of oppression by enemies, Samuel claims: "Then they cried out to YHWH, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have forsaken YHWH, and we have served the Baals and the Astartes. And now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you'" (1 Sam. 12:10). Whereas this confession is supposed to serve as a typical example of Israel's cry for help in the time of the Judges, we should note that of all the times when Israel cries out to YHWH for help in Judges, only *once* do they ever confess their sin. According to Judg. 10:10, "The Israelites cried out to YHWH, saying, 'We have sinned against you, because we have abandoned our God and have worshiped the Baalim.'" In every other case in Judges when Israel cries out to God for help, there is no specific acknowledgment of sin. So Samuel is being very selective in his recounting of the time of the Judges, since he wants a precedent for the people acknowledging their sin.³⁵

The Origin of Israel's Monarchy (1 Samuel 12:12-13)

Samuel's confusion (or his bending of the facts) is evident in his account of the recent events that led to the people's request for a king. According to Samuel, it was in response to the Ammonite threat that the people demanded a king (12:12). However, Samuel here juxtaposes language from 1 Sam. 8:19 (where the people say, "No! but a king shall reign over us") with the narrative of Nahash and the Ammonite threat recounted at 11:1-5, which comes *after* Saul's anointing (and certainly after the people's request for a king). Some commentators try to harmonize Samuel's statement with a passage from Qumran (4QSam^a) that suggests that Nahash had been terrorizing Israel for at least a month before the incident at Jabesh-Gilead; so they postulate that this threat could have been part of the motivation for the people's request for a

35. The particular confession of sin that Samuel cites comes in the context of the Ammonite threat in the book of Judges; and Samuel will soon connect a more recent Ammonite threat with the people's request for a king, thus implying that they might have followed their ancestors in confessing their sin, instead of asking for a king (which in his view simply compounded their sin). Bergen comments: "Israel's oft-repeated pattern of repentance and return to the Lord in the face of a foreign threat was broken...in their demand for an earthly king" (Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 143). Here I simply note that Bergen has accepted Samuel's reconstruction of this "oft-repeated pattern" over the pattern actually found in Judges.

king (depending on how much time is supposed to have passed between 1 Sam. 8 and 11).³⁶

Some justification for this postulate could be found in the fact that when God brings Saul to Samuel's attention in ch. 9 as the one to be anointed *nagid* over Israel, the reason given is that YHWH has heard the cries of his people under Philistine oppression and will deliver them by the hand of Saul (1 Sam. 9:16-17). Yet note that YHWH lists Philistine oppression and not the (later) Ammonite threat. Plus, when the people reaffirm their request for a king in 1 Sam. 8:19 (the line quoted by Samuel) they make no mention of Nahash or the Ammonites, though they do say they want the king to go before them and fight their battles.

Perhaps more importantly, Samuel seems to ignore the original reason for the people's request for a king at the start of ch. 8, namely Samuel's old age and his sons' corruption (8:4); new leadership is therefore necessary. Samuel's reframing of the reason for the people's request for a king to omit mention of the need for new leadership further supports my claim that the prophet protests too much at the start of ch. 12; his defense of his previous leadership seems like an anxious act of self-justification.

We should also note here the significant disjunction between the way that Samuel and YHWH frame the need for a king qua deliverer. Whereas YHWH (in 9:16) portrays Saul's deliverance of Israel as part of the pattern of the Judges as a *legitimate* response to the people's cry of distress, Samuel (in 12:12) portrays it as an *illegitimate* request to replace YHWH's kingship. God and prophet are not on the same page here.³⁷

36. The passage from 4QSam^a seems to have been known by Josephus (*Ant.* 6.68-71). It is placed in the NRSV prior to 1 Sam. 11:1, without verse numbering. This passage makes sense of the LXX of 1 Sam. 11:1, which begins with "And it came to pass about a month after" by supplying the missing information.

37. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of how Samuel and God differ about the validity of the monarchy. But a summary may suffice. God explained to Samuel (1 Sam. 8) that the people were not rejecting him (Samuel); rather, the request for a king was simply a new form of rejecting YHWH's rule, which they had already been doing even during the time of the judges (so this was nothing new for God). However, Samuel delayed in carrying out God's explicit command, "listen to the voice of the people" (8:7), even after God repeated the command, along with the clarification "give them a king" (8:22), just in case he didn't understand. Not only did Samuel send the people home at the end of ch. 8, without giving them a king (or even letting them know that God has acceded to their request), but after God pointed Saul out as the king designate (9:15-17), Samuel anointed Saul in secret (9:26-10:1), so no-one knew he was king, gave him a series of convoluted instructions (10:2-6), including the following—"do what your hand finds to do" (10:7) and "I will tell you what to do" (10:8)—then publicly cast lots to decide who the king would be

*The Self-Serving Result of Reframing Israel's Story:
Samuel as Israel's Deliverer*

It is now time to turn to the lacuna in Samuel's reframing of the cycle of oppression and deliverance in 12:11. Having mentioned the lack of reference to the oppression to which he is the answer, it is time to figure out why Samuel leaves the oppression unsaid at this point.

We could fill in the lacuna by looking to *the past*, specifically to ch. 7, where Samuel is clearly portrayed as a judging Israel, though primarily through the exercise of a juridical function (7:6, 15-17). Yet Samuel is also instrumental (in that chapter) in delivering Israel from the Philistine threat, though not by military action (as is typical of the judges), but by prayer and sacrifice (7:7-12), in response to the people putting away their idols (7:3-6). However, in ch. 12 Samuel does not mention the Philistines as the oppression from which he delivers Israel, which he easily could have done.

Instead of looking to the past, it makes sense to look to *the future*, to Samuel's expected rescue of Israel from oppression, at least as he envisions it. Samuel's rhetorical framing of Israel's past and current history leads the reader to expect that it is *the monarchy* that will fill the lacuna, since this is the new form of oppression that Israel will need deliverance from. In other words, Samuel's rhetorical lacuna is intentional, to be filled in by what the prophet says in the remainder of ch. 12. This will reveal Samuel as Israel's true deliverer.

Now, someone might object that back in ch. 8, Samuel ended his warning about the monarchy by stating that the people would cry out for deliverance from the king, but that YHWH would not answer them (8:18). So that constitutes a clear contradiction with Samuel portraying himself as the deliverer from the monarchy in ch. 12. But what's a little contradiction among friends? Or perhaps we should say enemies—since it is clear from 12:14 following that Samuel places himself (along with YHWH) in an adversarial stance vis-à-vis the people (and also the king). It also turns out that Samuel seems quite comfortable with contradictions (or, at least, tensions) in what he says in the remainder of ch. 12.³⁸

(10:17-23), as if the king hadn't already been chosen by God and also anointed (with a tiny *vial* of oil as opposed to a horn, as is usual—which suggests how grudgingly Samuel performed his role as kingmaker). And then there is Samuel's condemnatory speech in ch. 12, *after* the king has been formally installed. God and prophet are clearly not on the same page about the monarchy.

38. Contradictions do not seem to faze Samuel, who, as we have seen, is willing to massage the facts in the service of his rhetorical ends. As Frolov notes, "to put it mildly, factual accuracy was not among his [Samuel's] primary concerns" (Frolov, "Bedan," 167).

These tensions can be read as a function of the adversarial stance that Samuel takes in the rest of ch. 12, through which he communicates both subliminally and openly his opposition to the monarchy.

First, the subliminal communication.

Samuel's Lopsided Statement of Covenant Sanctions (1 Samuel 12:14-15)

Having recounted Israel's history in 12:6-13, Samuel moves on to challenge the people, using traditional covenantal categories, with the alternatives of obedience and disobedience, which are articulated as (1) fearing YHWH and listening to his voice versus (2) not listening to YHWH's voice, but rebelling against his mouth (12:14-15). In one sense these alternatives constitute "orthodox" Deuteronomistic theology. The trouble is that Samuel's statement of the traditional covenant sanctions is lopsided. Whereas the consequence of rebellion (12:15) is that YHWH's hand will be against the people ("and their ancestors," MT; or "and their king," LXX), there is no positive consequence stated for obedience (12:14). Many translations therefore supply something like: "it will be well with you."³⁹

This lopsidedness leads some commentators to take Samuel's words in 12:14 to include both the protasis and apodosis (the latter being, "*then* both you and the king who reigns over you will follow YHWH your God"); but this makes for a tautology, not a consequence.⁴⁰ Whereas in the case of many imprecations in the Hebrew Bible the actual curse is missing, perhaps because it is too terrible to be said, here the blessing is missing.⁴¹ Could Samuel omit the positive apodosis because he can't force himself to countenance a positive outcome of the monarchy?⁴²

39. Some variant of this positive outcome is found in the NRSV, ESV, NIV, NAB, GNB, NJB, and McCarter, who claims that without this we are accusing Samuel (or the Deuteronomistic editor) of "some rather bewildering speechmaking" (*1 Samuel*, 209).

40. That this makes for a tautology is noted by Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 143. Some variant of this tautology is found in the NLT, NASB, HCSB, and Klein, *1 Samuel*, 110-11.

41. An example of a missing apodosis in an imprecation is found in Uriah's oath to David in 2 Sam. 11:11, which the NRSV renders as "As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." However, instead of "I will not do this thing," the Hebrew simply says, "if I do this thing..." without stating the consequence.

42. Peter D. Miscall wonders if the apodosis is missing because Samuel "simply will not connect the king with things going well" (though he also suggests other possibilities). Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 76.

Support for this possibility is found in the fact that Samuel continues to harp on the evil of the monarchy even *after* YHWH has given Israel permission for a king in ch. 8 and specifically chosen Saul in ch. 9; indeed, Samuel's affirmation of the evil of the monarchy comes even after he anointed Saul in ch. 10 and after Saul is installed as king in ch. 11. Clearly, Samuel cannot accept the fact that the monarchy (with Saul as the first king) could ever be legitimate.

The depth of Samuel's antipathy to the monarchy in ch. 12 is seen by his association of the monarchy with nothing less than idolatry; he makes this association in a series of subtle and not so subtle rhetorical moves.

Samuel Intimates That Monarchy Equals Idolatry (1 Samuel 12:10, 12)

First, the cry of distress that Samuel quotes from the book of Judges (in his retelling of the cycles of oppression and rescue) has the people identifying their forsaking of YHWH with serving the Baals and Astartes (12:10). This is not controversial for covenantal theology. But then Samuel goes on in 12:12 to identify asking for a human king with rejecting YHWH as king. If we put these two statements together, from vv. 10 and 12, we have an implied identification of forsaking or rejecting YHWH both with *following idols* and with *asking for a king*. So the monarchy is thus tantamount to idolatry in Samuel's eyes; both constitute rejection of YHWH.

Samuel Gets the People to Admit that the Monarchy is Evil (1 Samuel 12:16-19)

Perhaps this is too subtle.

So, having laid out the two ways, of obedience followed by... (whatever) and disobedience followed by YHWH's adamant opposition, Samuel goes on (in 12:16 and following) to predict and then perform a miraculous sign; this sign is meant as a show of power to convince the people of their *great evil* in asking for a king (12:17), and this right after the king has been installed. This sign is introduced with *gam-attâ* ("even now"), followed by a call for them to take their stand and see the "great thing" that YHWH will do.

The fact that the storm for which Samuel prays would in all likelihood have damaged (if not destroyed) the wheat that Samuel himself acknowledges is ready for harvest (12:17), simply demonstrates that the miracle is not for the people's benefit, but to exalt Samuel's prestige and authority in their eyes. And the miracle has the desired effect. The people "greatly feared" YHWH and Samuel (12:18); and they ask him to pray for them

that they do not die.⁴³ Then they acknowledge that asking for a king was *an evil* that they have added to all their other sins (12:19). To their idolatry, in other words—of which they repented in ch. 7—they have now added monarchy.⁴⁴

Samuel Identifies Monarchy with Idolatry (1 Samuel 12:20-21)

The parity or equivalence between monarchy and idolatry is confirmed in Samuel's response to the people's confession of the evil of monarchy.

In his response, in 12:20-21, Samuel contrasts, on the one hand, serving YHWH with all your heart and, on the other, turning aside after *tohû*, which (he adds) cannot profit (*lo' yô'ilû*) and cannot deliver. Now, *tohû* has a variety of contextual uses in the Hebrew Bible, but in Isa. 41:29 it is used of idols and in Isa. 44:9 it is a description of those who make idols. Likewise *lo' yô'ilû* ("they do not profit") can be used in different contexts, but is used to describe the impotence of idols in Isaiah's famous diatribe

43. That God backs Samuel up with the miraculous storm does not mean that God either initiated Samuel's words of judgment about the monarchy or approved of the miraculous storm (given the damage it would do). A key to understanding the YHWH-Samuel relationship is found in the earlier announcement (1 Sam. 3:19-20) that God ensured that none of Samuel's words would fall to the ground (the text ambiguously says "his words," which is appropriate since Samuel's words will henceforth be treated as God's words). The implicit rationale for this verse is that in light of the coming monarchy (which God foresaw), God rescinded his promise of a faithful/trustworthy (*ně'eman*) priest, who was to replace the Elide line (2:35), and provided, instead, a faithful/trustworthy (*ně'eman*) prophet (3:19) in the person of Samuel, in order to balance the power of the king, since that was more needed. Here faithful/trustworthy (*ně'eman*) refers not to the personal character of the prophet, but to the reliability of the prophetic word. On 1 Sam. 3:19-20, see Middleton, "Samuel Agonistes," 87-8 (*Thesis 5: God has chosen to be constrained by the choice of Samuel as the authoritative representative of God's will*).

44. J. P. Fokkelman makes an astute comment about a possible thematic connection (as well as a disconnect) between Samuel's miracle in ch. 12 (where he calls on YHWH to send thunder; 12:17-18) and Hannah's song in ch. 2 (where she affirms that the Most High will thunder in heaven; 2:10a). While the theme of thunder (the lexemes are different) links the words of mother and son, the very next line of Hannah's song states: "May YHWH give strength to his king / and exalt the horn of his anointed" (2:10b)—something her son could never affirm (for Samuel, YHWH's thundering is a condemnation of the monarchy). See Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses, Vol. 4: Vow and Desire (1 Sam. 1-12)*, SSN 31 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 525.

(Isa. 44:10) and in the covenant lawsuit of Jer. 2:8, where it stands in parallel with Baal, a clear reference to idolatry.⁴⁵

Samuel's use of these terms in 12:21, in his response to the people's admission that they sinned in asking for a king, clarifies the alternatives, at least in Samuel's mind: *either* serve YHWH wholeheartedly *or* turn aside to the monarchy, which (like idolatry) is described as *tohû* and that which cannot profit.⁴⁶ Interestingly, according to Samuel the monarchy cannot profit *and it cannot deliver*, even though YHWH intended the king to deliver Israel from the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16-17), and the new king has in fact already delivered them from the Ammonites.

Samuel's Prima Facie Theological Contradictions

At this point I want to explore what look suspiciously like theological contradictions internal to Samuel's own words to the people, beginning in 12:14 and continuing through the end of the chapter.⁴⁷

To Fear or Not to Fear (1 Samuel 12:14, 20, 24)

The first contradiction has to do with the motif of *fear*. Having listed *the fear of YHWH* as one of the covenantal alternatives (in 12:14), Samuel gives a miraculous sign, which results in the people *fearing YHWH and Samuel* (12:18). However, in 12:20 Samuel's identification of monarchy with *tohû* is prefaced by the exhortation *Fear not!* This is, paradoxically, followed in 12:24 by the warning "Only *fear YHWH*." Now I am fully aware that it is possible to argue for two meanings of "fear" here, one being the legitimate awe of God (12:24), the other unnatural terror (12:20); and, indeed, there need not be an intrinsic contradiction between these two

45. The phrase *lo'yô'ilû* is also linked to idolatry (though less directly) in Isa. 57:12 and Jer. 16:19.

46. Bill T. Arnold acknowledges that v. 21 represents Samuel's identification of the monarchy with a new form of idolatry, while arguing for a particular origin of the verse as a pre-Deuteronomistic adage that derives from the struggle against the Baals and Astartes in ninth-century Israel. Whether one agrees with Arnold's reconstruction of the origin of this verse (or with the more common view that it is a later post-Deuteronomistic addition to the text, or neither), Arnold is right to see this mention of idolatry as part of Samuel's critique of kingship as an institution. Arnold, "A Pre-Deuteronomistic Bicolon in 1 Samuel 12:21?" *JBL* 123 (2004): 137-42.

47. My terminology of theological contradictions is paralleled by Peter Miscall's reference to Samuel's "paradoxical assertion" and his combining themes "in oxymoronic fashion" (Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 77).

meanings of "fear" (as in Exod. 20:20). However, it seems clear that the very point of the miraculous sign was (to use a contemporary idiom) to put "the fear o' God" into the people, to scare them into acknowledging their guilt (which worked). So Samuel is being a bit disingenuous in his exhortation *not* to fear (12:20) after his (intentionally) fear-producing performance of the miraculous sign (12:18).⁴⁸

Guilt Tripping and Love Bombing (1 Samuel 12:22 and 25)

But there is another contradiction in Samuel's concluding words (in 12:20-25) that parallels the two uses of *fear*.

On the one hand, Samuel affirms in 12:22 that "YHWH will not forsake his people, for the sake of his great name, for YHWH has resolved to make you a people for himself." These are words of assurance and comfort; they fit with *fear not* and suggest that no matter what the sin, YHWH's love is unconditional.

Yet in the last sentence of the chapter (just three verses later), we find the words, "But if you dare to do evil [*hârê'a tārê'û*; the infinitive absolute followed by the finite form of the verb], both you and your king will be swept away" (12:25).

So, which one is it? *Fear YHWH? Or Don't be afraid?*

Are we to believe *YHWH will not forsake you? Or You will be swept away?*

Having grown up in the era of new religious movements (also known as cults), I am struck by the parallel between Samuel's emotional manipulation of the people with his rhetoric and what was known in cult circles as "love bombing" and "guilt tripping." It is precisely the alternation between positive affirmation and negative condemnation that characterizes what has come to be known as the initial stages of cultic "brainwashing."⁴⁹ This immediate and irrational alternation between affirmation and condemnation served to keep new converts off balance and make them easily subject to manipulation by cult leaders. This is also practiced in terrorist

48. For a similar interpretation, see Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership*, 65.

49. The term "love bombing" was coined by the Unification Church (with an initially positive meaning), but it has now become a central feature in psychological descriptions of sociopathic, narcissistic behavior. Although guilt tripping has not had the same attention in the psychological literature, ex-cult member Michael Bluejay describes the relationship between these two poles in "How Cults Recruit and Indoctrinate Their Members," June 2013, <https://michaelbluejay.com/x/how-cults-recruit.html>.

interrogation, vividly portrayed in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty*, which recounts the search for Osama bin Laden.⁵⁰

I submit that something analogous is going on throughout 12:20-25 (though more like cultic practice than what we find at Guantanamo). Witness Samuel's three opening affirmations in 12:20:

1. "Fear Not!"—comfort.
2. "As for you, you have done all this evil!"—condemnation.
3. "Only, do not turn aside from following YHWH with all your heart"—warning.

And so it goes throughout the following verses, alternating comfort, condemnation, and warning. And in the midst of this rhetoric, Samuel makes an oath not to "sin against YHWH by ceasing to pray for you"; indeed, he promises to "instruct them in the good and straight way" (12:23), which is his way of guaranteeing continuing influence among the people after the monarchy has begun.

We are not told the people's immediate response to Samuel's concluding words in 12:20-25. But we can imagine with the help of an analogy.

An analogy for what Samuel is up to in the entire chapter would be to think of the installation of the king at Gilgal as a wedding, where the father of the bride (Samuel) is also the officiating minister and disapproves in no uncertain terms of the marriage of his daughter (the people). After the ceremony, which is meant to formalize and celebrate the relationship of bride and groom (read people and king), the disgruntled minister makes a speech at the wedding banquet in which he gets the bride to admit that he has always been an exemplary father to her, and he promises to be available at any time for marriage counseling, no matter what problems the ill-conceived marriage may bring. Having lectured the newly married bride on her sin in desiring this husband, he then gets her to admit publicly (on her wedding day) that the marriage was a bad idea from the beginning.

The question I have is: What possible chance would such a marriage have of succeeding? And what would be the effect of this speech on the groom?⁵¹

50. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Sony Pictures, 2012), screenplay by Mark Boal, directed by Kathryn Bigelow.

51. A possible effect of Samuel's speech on the fledgling monarchy is suggested by Joachim Vette, in his proposal that the fear the people have of Samuel (1 Sam. 12:18) continues into the next chapter. Thus, instead of coming out "as one man" (11:7) as they did in response to Saul's call to battle with Nahash, we find in ch. 13 that in preparation for the imminent Philistine attack "all the people trembled after him [Saul]" (13:7). This fear that Samuel has generated in ch. 12, Vette concludes,

Ulterior Motives, Deficient Theology: Samuel as Anti-Prophet

In the end, I need to answer the question in the title of this chapter: "Orthodox Theology, Ulterior Motives?" Clearly, Samuel's motives are mixed here, though he seems to appeal to standard covenantal (Deuteronomistic) categories.⁵²

But that distinction is too simple; there is something else going on here. Samuel's rhetoric serves to position himself on the side of YHWH in opposition to king and people. That the people understand the force of this rhetoric is evident in their plea for Samuel to pray for them "to YHWH *your God*," which suggests that Samuel's seemingly indispensable connection to YHWH prevents the people from having their own independent relationship with Israel's God.⁵³

However, as Abraham Heschel has shown, prophets are meant not just to identify with God, but also to identify with *God's people*. This is because they participate not in God's transcendent sovereignty, but in God's *pathos*.⁵⁴ This pathos is the wellspring of the biblical tradition of prophetic intercession, as numerous prophets not only bring YHWH's word of judgment to the people, but simultaneously stand "in the breach" (Ps. 106:23) in order to stave off God's judgment as long as possible.⁵⁵

"has a major part in driving a wedge between the king and his people" (Vette, "Samuel's 'Farewell Speech,'" 338-90). More radically, Czövek notes that by his tendentious speech "the prophet destines Saul to inevitable failure" (Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership*, 62).

52. My point here is similar to Keith Bodner's: "When the speech as a whole is evaluated, it is much like the characterization of Samuel himself: some personal crustiness mixed with some highly orthodox theology that Israel needs to hear in these first days of the monarchy" (Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 116). My characterization, however, has gone a bit beyond "personal crustiness," and will soon question the orthodoxy of Samuel's theology.

53. As Czövek puts it, "By now the audience has been convinced that rebelling against Samuel, Yahweh's mouthpiece, amounts to rebelling against Yahweh" (Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership*, 63). Saul's threefold use of this same expression ("YHWH your God") in ch. 15 confirms that this conviction comes to be shared by the king (15:15, 21, 30).

54. For the classic analysis of God's pathos, in which the prophet participates, see Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, Perennial Classics (New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 2001), esp. vol. 1, Chapter 6: "Jeremiah," and vol. 2, Chapter 1: "The Theology of Pathos."

55. On the theme of prophetic intercession, stemming from Moses, see Michael Widmer, *Standing in the Breach: An Old Testament Theology and Spirituality of Intercessory Prayer*, Siphrut 13 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

Thus Moses (the paradigmatic prophet) intercedes on behalf of the people after the Golden Calf episode.⁵⁶ But Samuel, having promised not to cease praying for both people and king (1 Sam. 12:23) reneges on his oath when he outright refuses to intercede for Saul in ch. 15.⁵⁷

When I began working on this chapter I expected to be able to affirm the terms of my title: “Orthodox Theology, Ulterior Motives.” However, I am now of the opinion that Samuel’s speech in ch. 12 not only reflects *ulterior motives*, but represents a *deficient theology of prophecy* as well.

56. True, not all prophets intercede on behalf of the people; but I am focusing here on Moses as the paradigmatic prophet. For my own exploration of the motif of prophetic intercession, see J. Richard Middleton, “God’s Loyal Opposition: Psalmic and Prophetic Protest as a Paradigm for Faithfulness in the Hebrew Bible,” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (2016): 51–65.

57. For an exploration of the contrast between Moses in the Golden Calf episode and Samuel in the narrative of 1 Sam. 15, see Middleton, “Samuel Agonistes,” 89–91. Widmer discusses Samuel as intercessor in Chapter 4: “Samuel: Israel’s Second Legendary Intercessor (1 Samuel 7, 12, 15),” focusing on similarities between Samuel and Moses, without addressing the differences. Yet Widmer is forced to note that “in contrast to Moses, none of Samuel’s actual prayers are recorded in the canon” (Widmer, *Standing in the Breach*, 174).