2 Samuel 21–24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?

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SINCE THE WORK OF LEONHARD ROST IN 1926,[1] the David materials in 1 and 2 Samuel have been understood in terms of two extended narratives, "The Rise of David" and "The Succession Narrative." While scholarship continues to critique this hypothesis, a scholarly consensus still holds roughly to Rost's proposal. Outside these two stories are the miscellaneous materials of 2 Samuel 5–8, which fall between the two great narratives, and 2 Samuel 21–24, commonly regarded as a miscellaneous appendix inserted before the conclusion of the Succession Narrative in 1 Kings 1–2.

Karl Budde had first seen that the appendix is not simply miscellaneous, but a deliberate chiastic arrangement of two narratives, two lists, and two poems.[2] For the most part, scholarhip has been content to reiterate this insight about the pattern, but has not probed beyond that observation.

I

TWO STUDIES MAY BE MENTIONED that propose a closer theological consideration of the appendix. First, R. A. Carlson, in an extended treatment, has suggested that the materials constitute a deuteronomic critique of royal

[1] Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship 1; Sheffield: Almond, 1982); this is a translation of the author's *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT 42, 3d series, vol. 6; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1926).

[2] Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 8; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1902) 304.

ideology.[3] Carlson's discussion is of great importance. In my judgment, however, his analysis is impeded by two factors. First, Carlson is preoccupied with his deuteronomic hypothesis when in fact evidence of the deuteronomic editors in these chapters is scant, if present at all. Second, Carlson is excessively attentive to his hypothesis about cycles of seven and the seven years of punishment. On both counts Carlson operates with quite hypothetical constructions which do not focus on the text itself.

The second helpful discussion is the brief comment of Brevard S. Childs, in which he proposes, predictably, that these chapters provide a canonical clue to the Samuel corpus.[4] He concludes:

> In sum, the final four chapters, far from being a clumsy appendix, offer a highly reflective, theological interpretation of David's whole career adumbrating the messianic hope, which provides a clear hermeneutical guide for its use as sacred scripture.[5]

Childs's comment is suggestive, and I am in agreement with his inclination. His suggestion, however, lacks specificity about the content of that messianism.

I wish to consider the theological intention of the appendix (and hopefully to make positive use of the work of Carlson and Childs). My particular perspective has been triggered by two factors. First, James Flanagan, in a remarkable study, has proposed that 2 Samuel 5–8 is not a mere miscellaneous collection, but is organized into three pairs of literary elements: two lists, two battle narratives, and two narratives of legitimation concerning ark and oracle.[6] This sequence of six elements is arranged chiastically. Moreover, observes Flanagan, in each of the pairs the second element is designed to supersede the first element, so that in the lists, the bureaucracy replaces kinship; in the war narratives, imperial wars replace Philistine struggles; and finally, in the narratives of legitimation, royal ideology replaces the tribal ark. In these three pairs, the narrative is arranged to enact the dramatic and decisive transformation of the power of David as it moved from chiefdom to monarchy. Flanagan comments:

> The scene of David and Michal was staged . . . as a period of release from usual constraints and an occasion for creative response. It was here that the structures of the former state no longer held sway and the new state of Davidic dynasty had

[3] R. A. Carlson, *David, The Chosen King* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1964) 194-259.

[4] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 273-75.

[5] Ibid., 275.

[6] James Flanagan, "Social Transformation and Ritual in 2 Samuel 6," *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (D. N. Freedman Festschrift; ed. C. Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 361-72.

not yet been fully established. The dialogue between Michal and David made explicit that the issue was the legitimacy of his house as leaders in Israel.[7]

Second, just as I was considering Flanagan's interpretation of chaps. 5–8 as designed to exhibit and assert the transformation of ideology toward a high view of kingship, my colleague David Gunn offhandedly suggested that 2 Samuel 21–24 intended to serve as a "deconstruction" of David. I understand by this that the literature seeks to dismantle the high royal theology which has been enacted elsewhere in the narrative, and historically in the Jerusalem establishment. The analysis of Flanagan and the comment of Gunn led me to wonder whether the six elements of 2 Samuel 21–24 are positioned to counter the six elements of 2 Samuel 5–8. Whereas chaps. 5–8 trace and enact a move to a higher royal claim, so chaps. 21–24 may seek to combat that higher royal claim. This suggestion has close affinities with Carlson's work and asks about canonical arrangement with Childs, but intends to stay closer to the text.

II

THUS I PROPOSE TO CONSIDER the six elements of 2 Samuel 21–24 to see to what extent they function to deconstruct and to combat the well-established royal ideology.

(1) The first narrative of *2 Sam 21:1-14* concerns David's slaughter of the seven sons of Saul. The narrative reads in a sequence of bloodguilt → famine → expiation. That is the plain telling of the narrative. The bloodguilt (revealed directly to David from the Lord) is said to be caused by Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites (v 1). That, however, is private information. The rest of the narrative argument is public data. There is a famine, and there is expiation by the execution of Saul's heirs. The only hidden part is the alleged bloodguilt, disclosed quite privately only to David.

The historical problem of this sequence is that we have no evidence of Saul's slaughtering of the Gibeonites.[8] Historical investigation suggests that Josh 9:3-16 contains evidence of an old treaty with the Gibeonites, so that it makes sense that a broken covenant with them must be "expiated." But what is missing in the sequence of bloodguilt → famine → expiation, or alternatively in the sequence of covenant → violation → response, is the dimension

[7] Ibid., 368.

[8] See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel* (SOTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972) 53-64; F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites," *BA* 27 (1964) 96-100; and A. Malamat, "Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel," *VT* 5 (1955) 1-12.

of bloodguilt or violation on the part of Saul. The connection between old covenant and David's action depends for credibility on the "Saul-element," which is missing. It is odd that this element is missing in the Samuel narrative which wants to be as dismissive as possible of Saul and which wants to legitimate David in every way possible.

Because of this glaring gap in narrative evidence, we are permitted for a moment to read the story backward from the expiation-execution to famine to bloodguilt. In 16:8, Shimei accuses David of "the blood of the house of Saul." This may refer to the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, and Eshbaal, or it may refer to the seven in our narrative. Either way, it attests that there was in Israel powerful suspicion about David's disposal of Saul's family.[9] If we may entertain the suspicion with Shimei that David is implicated in some Saulide murders, then our narrative may intend to call attention to the fact that the Saul-element of a Gibeonite crisis is missing from Israel's narrative repertoire. What we have, so far as evidence is concerned, is a famine blamed on Saul only in a private oracle, bloodguilt attributed to Saul only in a private oracle, and expiation-execution by David, justified by Saul's alleged action. But the blame, attribution, and justification all rest on a private communication to David, which at the most came to him through his hired priestly functionaries. The suspicion thus permits the possibility that in fact David killed Saul's family, but provided a rationale by blaming Saul, for which there is no public evidence.

This suspicious reading of the narrative is not necessary exegetically, but it is possible. Read suspiciously, this narrative presents David as a political killer who hides his actions in religious justification. Read less suspiciously, the categories of "bloodguilt" and "expiation" portray David as one who must act in terms of the most elemental religious taboos and constraints, as elemental as anything Samuel ever required of Saul. Even read in that way, the narrative punctures a royal claim that the king is a powerful person who can decree new social reality. The king in fact is portrayed as a modest agent who functions as a priest implementing rites, but without power beyond these conventional religious perimeters.

Read more innocently, of course, David is presented as a dutiful king, scrupulous about religious obligation, with ready access to God, one who deals gently with Saul and Saul's body, one who kills only as is necessary, and one who honors the memory of Saul. That surface reading, however, is placed in a context of suspicion and/or religious primitivism. Carlson has

[9] See Leo G. Perdue, "'Is There Anyone Left of the House of Saul . . .?' Ambiguity and the Characterization of David in the Succession Narrative," *JSOT* 30 (1984) 67-84; and James C. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal," *JBL* 99 (1980) 521-96.

seen that the narrative is now placed next to chap. 20, which discloses northern resistance to David.[10] Thus we may read suspiciously, ironically, or innocently. Shrewdly the narrative does not dictate our reading.

(2) The first list of *2 Sam 21:15-22* is a list of four great warriors in Israel who killed Philistine heroes. In the middle of this list "David's men" (presumably led by Abishai) pronounce a massive assertion of royal ideology: "You shall no more go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel" (v 17).[11] This sentiment is paralleled in 2 Sam 18:3, in which David's men want him safe, because "you are worth 10,000 of us." The person of the king has taken on sacral significance. I suggest that the narrative-list of 2 Sam 21:15-22 cites this royal ideology in order to assault it.

The royal assertion is placed in a telling context. Two matters are of note. First, in v 15, "David is weary." He is not filled with power and vitality, but is utterly dependent on his men. It is a consummate and daring piece of artistry to place the theme of weariness (v 15) next to the royal ideology (v 17). Second, in the list of four heroic killings, David does nothing. Especially in the noted case of Goliath, it is Elhanan the Bethlehemite who kills (v 19). This great king, who is the "lamp of Israel," accomplishes nothing even against the Philistines, who are in fact dealt with by other courageous Israelites. The narrative is arranged to leave the royal slogan suspended without any supportive statement or evidence. The slogan is deliberately placed in a vacuum where it appears ludicrous. The high claims for the person of the king are unsupported by any data of action or achievement. Without this "lamp," Israel does indeed deal effectively with the Philistines.

(3) The first poem is the long psalm of *2 Sam 22:1-51*. No doubt this is an independent, already existing song now inserted here. The song falls into three parts; the three-part structure nicely brackets the central section, which is of primary interest to us.

First, *vv 2-20* are a song of deliverance in which the singer acknowledges that God has rescued him from dire straights. Verses 5-6, in highly mythic language, report the threat of chaos. In vv 8-20, theophanic language is used to characterize the powerful coming of Yahweh and the rescue. In the midst of such daring mythic language, v 7 is a rather simple conventional statement: "I called, I cried/he heard." The structure of the rescue is thus traditionally expressed, and the speaker is a mere suppliant.[12]

[10] Carlson, *David, The Chosen King,* 194-96.

[11] Aubrey R. Johnson (*Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* [Cardiff: University of Wales, 1967] 1-2) has seen that this formula is set at the beginning of the course of royal ideology in Israel. Johnson juxtaposes it to Lam 4:20 at the end of the monarchal period.

[12] See 1 Sam 7:8-9; 12:17,18,23.

Second, in *vv 29-51* we have a victory song in which the speaker asserts all he has done by way of defeating his enemies:

I can crush a troop,
I can leap over a wall (v 30).
I pursued my enemies.
I destroyed them,
I consumed them,
I thrust them through (vv 38-39).
I beat them fine,
I crushed them,
I stamped them down (v 43).

All this self-assertion is matched, even overmatched, however, by "thou" statements, showing that it is the power and fidelity of Yahweh which is decisive. That is, the power of the speaker (ostensibly the king) is fully subordinated to and derived from the power of Yahweh. Finally, the claim for the king ends in praise and yielding. The king dramatically yields to the real governance (vv 50-51). The king lives by the steadfast love and triumphs of the Lord.

In between the song of rescue (vv 2-20) and the song of victory (vv 29-51) is the middle section of *vv 21-28*. This section is not doxological but didactic. It speaks of moral symmetry and strict retribution, in which God rewards according to righteousnes and wickedness. The speaker dares to say:

The Lord rewarded (*gml*) me
  according to my righteousness (*ṣdqh*);
  according to the cleanness of my hands
    he has recompensed me (*šwb*).
I have kept the ways of the Lord,
and have not wickedly departed from my God. . . .
  I did not turn aside,
  I was blameless (*tmm*),
  I kept myself from guilt (*ʿôn*).
Therefore the Lord has recompensed me (*šwb*)
  according to my righteousness (*ṣdqh*),
  according to my cleanness in his sight.
  . . . with the blameless (*tmm*) you are blameless. . . .

Astonishing! The rescue of vv 2-20 and the victory of vv 29-51 are put into the service of the king's innocence. The rescue and victory are the king's just reward from a God who is faithful.

Childs suggests that this is a portrayal of David, the genuinely righteous king, i.e., that the picture has been cleaned up.[13] Perhaps. But Israel, of course, knew better. In 1 Kings 15:4 (with another reference to a "lamp" in Israel), the Deuteronomist has given a most telling verdict on David: "David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life—except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Big exception! It is moreover an exception known in Israel.

The acknowledgment of 1 Kings 15:5 poses the dilemma of how to relate the high claims of *ṣĕdāqâ* and *tāmîm* in the psalm to the reality of David's life. It may be, as Childs proposes, a purged model for kingship. I prefer to think that this is a critique of David. He is a king not marked by *ṣĕdāqâ* and *tāmîm*. The deliverance and victory of the psalm are not due to his royal person, but to the incredible fidelity of Yahweh. The juxtaposition of the middle section with the first and third sections serves to remove from the king any claim of legitimacy, merit, or virtue. It shows that the king, like all others in Israel, is a creature of Yahweh's willingness to listen and intervene. The king achieves nothing, deserves nothing, guarantees nothing. It is Yahweh, only Yahweh, who delivers. It is all Yahweh, no one else, surely not the king. Thus, the middle section does not celebrate this king, but in fact indicts him and shows how the life-realities of David require a God who hears and acts freely.

(4) The second poem is *23:1-7*. Like 22:51, which mentions the king, the anointed, this psalm also alludes to the anointed who has been "raised up high" (v 1). This psalm also seems to assert high royal theology. At its beginning, it is the "spirit of Yahweh," "the God of Israel," "the rock of Israel," who has authorized kingship (vv 2-3). A high theological claim is made for kingship. At the end of the psalm (v 5), the king asserts: "For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure." Surely the *bĕrît ʿôlām* is high royal theology, echoing the decree of 2 Sam 7:14-16 and

[13] Childs, *Introduction,* 275. Gerald T. Sheppard (*Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct* [BZAW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980] 144-58) is also inclined to read this poem (as well as 2 Samuel 22) as a positive statement of the idealized David as righteous. Sheppard concludes: "Therefore, the readers of Scripture are invited to see in David a model of the obedient life in the manner of the biblical wisdom tradition" (p. 158). This may be correct. But my suggestion of a more subtle, more critical reading is warranted by Sheppard's own judgment that this "core assessment of David's righteousness is not a free and independent estimate of David. Rather, it is grounded in the actual interpretation of the preceding narrative" (p. 157). Just so. Israel knew too much about David. I suggest there is more critical irony here than Sheppard is inclined to recognize. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg (*I and II Samuel* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964] 415-16) makes the same positive rendering of David in this text.

reminiscent of Ps 89:24,33-36. This theology affirms that God's guarantee of this monarchy is indeed unconditional and therefore perpetual.

In the middle of the psalm, however, is this single line (2 Sam 23:3) that moves against the ideology:

> When one rules justly (*ṣāddîq*) over people,
> ruling in the fear of God,

then the king is like the morning light, sun, and rain, i.e., the source of life. The king is not unreservedly and automatically the source of life. Only the king who is *ṣāddîq,* i.e., who governs according to the torah, can give life.

Verse 3 has a sobering intention in the midst of exaggerated royal theology. Indeed, this single line sounds strangely like the warning of Samuel in 1 Samuel 12:

> If you will fear Yahweh and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandments of the Lord, and if both *you and your king* who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. But if you will not hearken . . . then the hand of the Lord will be against *you and your king* (vv 14-15). . . . But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both *you and your king* (v 25).

Three times the text asserts "you and your king." The king is like the others and not different from other Israelites. The speech of Samuel, and I believe this psalm, intends to subordinate the king to the rule of torah, to the old requirements. This means that the *bĕrît ʿôlām* of v 5 is considerably placed in jeopardy by the *ṣāddîq* of v 3. And if the claim is in jeopardy, then the royal ideology must be treated with circumspection. In both psalms, then, the middle section (22:21-28; 23:3) contains a peculiar challenge to the royal theology that the songs purport to articulate.

(5) The second list is in *2 Sam 23:8-39,* a list of "the Three" and "the Thirty." Four comments may be made in relation to our general topic.

(a) The list shows that there can be many heroes in Israel. The exploits of many brave men can be recited, and their names known. That is, there is a remarkable democratizing tendency, showing that David did not have a monopoly on greatness or public celebration, and David did not need to have such a monopoly.[14] Such a democratizing tendency clearly works against a high royal theology or personality cult in which there are no other heroes and

[14] If in fact David did not have and did not need such a monopoly of honor, it is possible that the David presented here would not be alarmed by lyrical comparisons of himself with other warriors, as was Saul in 1 Sam 18:7. Saul is portrayed as not being able to tolerate such a sharing of honor. It is proposed in this text that David could entertain much more of such sharing than could Saul.

no names can be honored except that of the king. My impression is that in high royal annals, the names of the others have all dropped out. Not here, however. This suggests an ordering of power that is understood as relatively open. Conversely, in this list as in 21:15-22, David does not do anything. He is not celebrated for his prowess or courage.

(b) In vv 9 and 12, the victories are credited to Yahweh: "The Lord wrought a great victory that day." This may be only a convention, but it is a nicely stated convention. In that formula, David is not mentioned. It is not said, as in 8:6,14, that "Yahweh gave David victory." Nor is it said, as in 8:13, "David won a name for himself." David is absent in this account, which is remarkably theonomous in its casting. The theonomous character of the list, like its democratic inclination, speaks against high royal theology.

(c) The last name among "the Thirty" is "Uriah the Hittite." It may be routine that his name is included. It cannot be routine, however, that his name is last. Uriah's name is last as a gesture, a reminder, a warning. His name is an assertion against royal propaganda that "we have not forgotten." The utterance of his name also evokes the entire scenario of royal hubris, of the limits of pride, and of the price paid for such pride. The presence of Uriah reminds those subscribing to the Jerusalem ideology that there is another Governance that will not be mocked. What may be pleasing in the king's eyes may not be pleasing in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Sam 11:25,27).

(d) In the middle of this list is an odd narrative account (vv 13-17). David wishes for water from Bethlehem. His men who adore him secure the water at the risk of their lives. David, in a magnificent gesture of solidarity, in an act of sacramental imagination, pours the water out on the ground, for he says, "Should I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives!" (v 17). His men must have adored him all the more.

No doubt this story is told to enhance the greatness of David. But we should notice the peculiar dimension of greatness that is articulated. David is one who is in the battle with his men, not back in the royal enclosure (contra 18:3; 21:17). He has a longing (a desire, if not a need), and he is intimate with his men, so that he is willing to share that desire/need with them. They are his comrades in arms, not his servants. They are willing to be his servants, but he does not treat them so, nor does the story present them so.

Most important, however, David does not drink the water. David does not assume that he is entitled to the benefit of the service and risk of others. David does not monopolize the benefit. In high royal theology, the others exist for the sake of the king, and the king is entitled to a disproportionate share, if not a monopoly, of what is produced by the community. But David eschews such preferential treatment and acts in sacramental solidarity. He has an awesome power with his men, but it is the power of magisterial

humanness, not ideological priority. Finally, notice that while he is at war, David does not fight, and he wins no battles. His greatness is not in his prowess, but in his solidarity, one "among brothers" (cf. Deut 17:15).

This episode, I suggest, performs a peculiar function in the midst of the lists of "the Three" and "the Thirty." The other soldiers are the great ones in Israel. David commands respect, but it is respect gained "from below," not insisted upon "from above."

(6) The second narrative is *24:1-25*. I will deal with the narrative under two groupings of motifs. First, there are three religiously curious elements which I shall consider. I do not believe they are crucial for my argument, but they are interesting and problematical. First, among these, in v 1 there is a framing comment in which Yahweh is said to "entice David." It was Yahweh who put David up to his unfortunate scheme. As in the manner of Job, or perhaps as in the private oracle of 21:1, this notice stands outside the narrative. It functions to support the claim that there is much more going on in David's life than David himself knows about or initiates. David does not in fact hold the final initiative for his life. Second, there is the curious playfulness in vv 11-13, in which David is given the choice of punishments, rather like playing Russian roulette. Third, in v 16, an angel of pestilence is dispatched by Yahweh and then recalled before full destruction. The religious playfulness of all three elements suggests that there is a primitive religious awareness that the high claims of royal theology have not been able to tame or subdue. The king and his learned, legitimated advisers may want to reduce all of life to their plans, but there is more on the loose than they can manage. The God who acts in these three elements may be like the parent of a teenager: the parent is always doing free, embarrassing things, just when the teenager has it all worked out. The freedom of God is maintained by the narrative in the face of ideology which seeks to order life in bureaucratic and rational ways.

It is the second group of elements that concerns us, however. There is a remarkably developed characterization of David offered in this narrative. We watch while David is transformed through the process of this narrative. I note five elements:

(a) David proposes a census. To be sure, "Yahweh enticed," but David proposed the census and David must answer for his policy. There is a vigorous protest from Joab, who is the voice of the old tradition and knows that the census if wrong (v 3). David overrides Joab's objections. The characterization of the census in vv 4-9 bespeaks an administrative flurry; fast horses, ruthless officers, government agents rushing into obscure villages. I suggest that the census is a form of bureaucratic terrorism in which the crown invades villages and tribal life. In v 9 we learn the formal purpose of the census. It is to number for the sake of the military, for the "valiant men."

In the census, David acts the role of the potentate who will mobilize all his power for his own ambitious and oppressive ends. In this act, David is indeed preparing to "take," the very taking anticipated by Samuel in 1 Sam 8:11-19. The narrative portrays the model of royal policy in all its ugliness.

(b) In v 10 David confesses, "I have sinned greatly." The narrative is laconic about David's awareness. We do not know how or why David came to this awareness. The narrative presents David as having some critical distance from the seductive ideology of kingship. It is David's awareness of sin that leads to the discussion of various punishments. David has already decisively broken with the royal self-description by making his confession.

(c) In v 14, David makes a staggering theological confession. He knows he must be punished. He would rather trust himself to God (i.e., the pestilence) than to human agents (through war), for "God's mercy is great." This dramatic move, which transforms David, is stunningly beyond our expectation of David. The king who had said, "Go . . . number the people" (v 2) had spoken in such unqualified self-assurance. David here has forsaken that mode of royal pretention and now speaks as a child of the covenant.

(d) In v 17, David reiterates his confession. This is in the face of the repentance of Yahweh in v 16.[15] But the confession of v 17 goes beyond that of v 10. In v 10 David cared about his own iniquity. In v 17 David cares more about "these sheep," i.e., the people. David no longer worries about his person or his throne, but he remembers the community entrusted to him. David anticipates Ezekiel 34 in his awareness that the shepherd exists for the sake of the sheep.

(e) Finally in vv 18-25, David acts as a religiously submissive and obedient man. He gets land and builds an altar. The outcome of v 25, which ends the appendix and the book of Samuel, is "Yahweh heeded the supplication." David prayed and Yahweh heard. The initiative is with Yahweh. David, proper David, is an obedient servant of his Lord, a child who cries out in need. David understands that petition, empty-handed petition, is his proper posture before Yahweh, as it is for any Israelite.

III

THIS LITERATURE IS HIGHLY COMPLEX and is not easily summarized. It is indeed the very telling that deconstructs, and when we summarize, we miss the subtlety of deconstruction. We may nonetheless note some elements that seem obvious concerning our suggestion of deconstruction:

[15] Yahweh's repentance in order to save the city is reminiscent of Jonah 3:10–4:2. The difference is in the reaction of the human agent. Whereas Jonah is chagrined that Yahweh should have compassion, repent, and save the city, David relies on the compassion of Yahweh, which causes Yahweh to repent and save the city. The same motif of Yahweh's repentance in order not to destroy a city is evident in Jer 18:1-11.

(1) In the narratives:

(a) In 21:1-14 David is either suspiciously critiqued for his *Realpolitik* in the name of religion or is portrayed as a child of extreme religious scruple.[16]

(b) In 24:1-25 David is dramatically transformed in the process of the narrative from a self-serving monarch to a repentant, supplicating creature of covenant.

(2) In the lists, David does not act but is surrounded by those who act.

(a) In 21:17 the high formula of royal theology is surrounded by David's passivity and weariness.

(b) In 23:8-39, David is portrayed as democratic and theonomous, and as a genuine comrade in solidarity.

(3) In the songs, David is held accountable for *ṣĕdāqâ,* which qualifies *bĕrît ʿôlām* (23:3-5). David's shabby righteousness and blamelessness are set in a context of God's delivering, faithful power.

All of these elements, I submit, intend to dismantle any high royal pretension and invite an understanding of David (or any king) that must be held in the framework of an older, covenantal theology.

Three conclusions may be drawn from this review:

(1) It is neither possible nor necessary to date the material. It is conventional to hold that these chapters are early pieces of material subsequently gathered together. It is worth noting that three elements present David at the threshold of Jerusalem power, i.e., the first narrative and the two lists.[17] Specifically, the two lists (21:15-22; 23:8-39) are largely set in the days of the Philistine conflict.That is, David's greatness, such as it is, belongs to those earlier days. Conversely, the settlement of the "Saulide problem" and the census reflect David's move to Jerusalem and the accompanying royal pretensions, as David participates in a new form of power and security.

In the poems, the *bĕrît ʿôlām* (23:5) and the mocking of David's *ṣĕdāqâ* (22:21-28) reflect the uneasiness of Israel with the Jerusalem enterprise. There are hints of arranging the materials so that the Philistine period offers a model that is approved, and the Jerusalem context is regularly critiqued as a distortion of David's proper role. This means that dramatically (not chronologically) the "good" David is the early David, the one who lived prior to the seductions of the royal ideology. Thus the deconstruction that operates here is not a deconstruction of everything about David or about kingship,

[16] The operation of *Realpolitik* in the rise of David is, of course, not in doubt. See Niels Peter Lemche, "David's Rise," *JSOT* 10 (1978) 2-25. What is at issue is whether there are other factors at work along with *Realpolitik.*

[17] I use the word "threshold" with intentional reference to the analysis of Flanagan, "Social Transformation," who uses the terms "threshold" and "liminality" on p. 367 and passim.

but it is the dismantling of a certain David, a David too certain, a David who believes in, acts on, and is defined by ideological claims that are regarded as alien to the older memory.[18] The narrative is still a celebration and an appreciation of David who is a king and a man of faith. The deconstruction asserts that it is possible to be king and a man of faith without the perversion of royal theology. The royal theology (which is here opposed) speaks against democratic and theonomous inclinations and in favor of killings (21:1-14) and countings (24:1-9) that oppress and betray the faith of Israel.

The method and approach of this paper do not require a chronological dating of the edited texts. The theo-political perspective of the texts is crucial. This perspective may have arisen at any time when the Jerusalem establishment was under criticism. This could be (a) in the immediate wake of Solomon, (b) during the period of prophetic criticism, or (c) when the monarchy had failed after 587 B.C.

(2) It is too early in my thinking to correlate this material more closely with that of 2 Samuel 5–8, but I suggest that this set of six elements intends to counter that set of six elements. Both pieces of literature have six elements arranged chiastically, even though the six of the appendix, so far as I can see, do not have an internal dynamic such as Flanagan has seen in chaps. 5–8. I do suggest, however, that as Flanagan has shown chaps. 5–8 to be a literary enactment across the threshold from traditional Yahwism toward "centralized supra- and extratribal administration [which] signaled class and social distinctions,"[19] so the appendix is a dramatic invitation to go back across that threshold to an egalitarian covenantal mode of life. What chaps. 5–8 regard as the great new facts, chaps. 21–24 regard as a distortion to be rejected. That is, what is deconstructed is not simply then the character of David, but patterns of faith and modes of power for which David is the literary and sociological vehicle.

The appendix wishes to assert that the new Davidic world of guaranteeing oracle (7:1-17), imperial wars (8:1-14), and bureaucratic power (8:15-18) will lead to death. The appendix urges a return to a more lively faith and simpler modes of power. Put in the parlance of chaps. 5–8, a return is urged to kinship relations (5:13-16), wars of defense (5:17-25), and tribal religion (6:1-23). As chaps. 5–8 brought Israel dramatically into a new arena, so chaps. 21–24 propose going back out of the heady land of "Jerusalem," back to better days. To be sure, the reduction of Israel's choices to these two options is a gross oversimplification. The actual historical formation of

[18] On the power of the older claims of Israel as a decisive political force, see Martin Cohen, "The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 36 (1965) 59-98.

[19] Flanagan, "Social Transformation," 363.

Israel's political structures is less clear, more complex, and more ambivalent. The literature nonetheless works with models that do not linger over complexity and ambiguity. The dramatic act of going back out is not unlike the vision of Hos 2:14-15 (MT vv 16-17), which wants to lead Israel back out of the land so that the "Valley of Trouble" may become "the door of hope." To depart from high royal theology back to simple faith is for this literature a "door of hope."[20]

Carlson has seen that 2 Samuel 24 leads to 1 Kings 1–2.[21] In 1 Kings 1–2, the culmination of the Davidic story shows the extreme edge of David's new mode of power, which is bloody and ruthless, and which could be topped only by the cynicism of Solomon.[22] At least in the culmination of the Succession Narrative (1 Kings 1–2), the deconstruction of 2 Samuel 21–24 is disregarded.

(3) Finally, I want to comment on one canonical dimension of this study. Childs has observed that the two poems of 2 Samuel 22:1-51 and 23:1-7 stand as a canonical balance to the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) at the beginning of the Samuel corpus.[23] The Song of Hannah provides a "hermeneutical key" for the entire Samuel literature. Robert P. Gordon has nicely referred to the Song of Hannah as the "clef sign" for the musical score of Samuel.[24]

In the poem, Hannah stands as the extreme counterpoint to royal power. She is empty-handed, full of trust awaiting God's inversion. Indeed, that

[20] Assuming that Flanagan is correct in the "rite of passage" to kingship in 2 Samuel 5–8, I propose that 2 Samuel 21–24 proposes an inverse situation of liminality back to a condition of trust and vulnerability. That inverse liminality is expressed in Hos 2:14-15:

> Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
> and bring her in to the wilderness,
> and speak tenderly to her.
> And there I will give her her vineyards,
> and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

If there is a parallel of deconstruction in our text to that of Hosea, it is not accidental. For Hosea has the most critical view of kingship in the OT and has Yahweh say, "They made kings, but not through me" (Hos 8:4). This statement, not uncongenial to the Shilonite ideology (see Cohen, "The Role," 65 n. 18), could readily apply to a high ideology of kingship which is "not through me." Such a critical deconstruction might be as appropriate to David and Jerusalem as to the northern kings of whom Hosea speaks.

[21] Carlson, *David, the Chosen King,* 196-97.

[22] Cohen ("The Role," 91-94) observes that the prophetic critique of Solomon in 1 Kgs 11: 29-39 is in the mouth of Ahijah the Shilonite. Cohen suggests that the most important characteristic of Ahijah is that he is a Shilonite, i.e., the voice of the party that most resisted the high ideology of kingship embodied in Solomon.

[23] Childs, *Introduction,* 272-73.

[24] Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 26.

inversion of the needy to sit with princes is embodied in David. Hannah's song, in its present form, ends in v 10 with reference to "his king" and "his anointed."

I wish to add to Childs's canonical observation one other point. As the poems at the end match the initial poem, I submit that 2 Samuel 24 matches 1 Samuel 1 in its canonical placement. In the initial chapter, Hannah is a barren woman, hopeless, without recourse other than to petition to God. Her petition is heard, God acts to give life and to begin a new history. Her tale ends in glad, submissive worship (1:28). What counts is that the Lord heard. In 2 Samuel 24, after his confession in vv 10,17, David also comes empty-handed, ready to petition. He must come empty-handed, for he has relinquished his census, emblem of royal power. David no longer comes as a king, but as a needy suppliant. He intercedes for his people. The conclusion is that Yahweh heard the supplication and gave life to the land (v 25).

On the one hand, David has now become the true king, the one Samuel envisioned, the one who claimed, presumed, and possessed nothing, but who trusted and cried out to Yahweh, and obeyed. David is indeed deconstructed of royal pretensions. On the other hand, David becomes the approved king because he has become more like Hannah, Samuel's mother. Like her, he is empty-handed, utterly needful, utterly trusting. These narratives of Hannah and David petitioning and being heard provide an *inclusio* for the Samuel narrative about power and the transformation of power. The power approved is empty-handed waiting for inversions that make full.[25] This is, to be sure, an odd notion of kingship, which is gladly abandoned in the heady moves of chaps. 5–8, but now urged again in chaps. 21–24. In the David proposed in chaps. 21–24, David is now indeed "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14).

[25] The theme of "empty-full" as crucial to the dramatic inversion of the story of Ruth has been well explicated by Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 193-94 and passim. It is perhaps not incidental that the Ruth narrative ends with a genealogy leading to David (Ruth 4:18-22), the one who is finally taken empty and made full. Notice that in 2 Sam 15:21, the response of Ittai to David is closely paralleled in Ruth's pledge to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). The story of Ruth is a useful heuristic clue to the links between the model of Hannah and the critical portrayal of David offered in these texts. See Carmel McCarthy, "The Davidic Genealogy in the Book of Ruth," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 9 (1985) 53-62.

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