

Human Kingship

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL



Rabbi David Silber

HUMAN KINGSHIP

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TRANSLATED BY

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Studies in the Book of Samuel

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*This book, written by our teacher and friend
Rabbi David Silber, is lovingly dedicated to
the memory of my beloved husband,*

*Reb Nehemiah Wolf
ben Avraham HaLevi and Itta
(Norman Bulow)
of blessed memory*

*a dear and generous man, always ready to assist those
he loved and to labor for the causes dear to his heart.*

And to the memory of my dear brother,

*Reb Avraham Yosef
ben Hayyim Shraga and Haya
(Avram Hellerman)
of blessed memory*

*a person of sharp intellect and creativity who toiled all his
life in study and in broadening the vistas of knowledge.*

Tova Bulow

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Preface

So that you may have the strength to go on your way.

I SAM. 28:22

The Talmud tells various stories featuring two rabbis who are walking together and discussing words of Torah. In the Zohar we often encounter two or more Sages who are studying while walking. The Torah commands us to speak words of Torah “when you are sitting at home and walking on your way” (Deut. 5:7, 11:19). What is the significance of studying Torah along the way?

In the Mishna in Tractate Berakhot (4:4), R. Yehoshua teaches, “One who is walking in a place of danger should pray a short prayer.” Many of the places on the outskirts of human settlement are “places of danger,” and so it is best not to linger and instead to pray only a short prayer, perhaps even the wayfarer’s prayer. When a person is traveling from place to place, he or she is vulnerable and exposed, as we learn from Amalek’s attack on the children of Israel when they were “on their way” out of Egypt (Deut. 25:18). Often when we are en route, we encounter the unexpected. In several talmudic and midrashic stories, a traveling

Sage will encounter a merchant, an old man, a young child, or another individual on the margins of society, and that encounter will give rise to new insights.

Readers of the book of Samuel travel along a path that confronts us with unexpected heroines and surprising stories. The first hero of the story is actually a heroine – a barren woman who prays for a son while her husband urges her to abandon her dream. Another heroine we encounter is the witch of Endor, who by the Torah's criteria, is engaged in an idolatrous practice and deserves to be put to death. But she is portrayed as a sympathetic figure who is as hospitable as Abraham himself. Then there is the surprising story of David and Bathsheba, and the character of Uriah the Hittite, who stands out for his honesty and integrity. The book of Samuel invites us to encounter these figures without prejudice and preconceived notions, seeking out the truth.

When we travel, we experience change and transition. At the beginning of the journey, we may leave behind all that is familiar – home, family, community – and set our steps toward an unknown destination. We must remember that the Torah itself was given to travelers through the desert, in that liminal space between Egyptian slavery and the service of God in the Promised Land.

The book of Samuel consists largely of changes and transitions. In the first few chapters of the book, we bear witness to the fissures that threaten the foundations of the Tabernacle at Shiloh. At the same time, we observe the growth of a boy, Samuel, who is being trained by Eli the priest and has already found favor in the eyes of God and his fellow human beings. Samuel leads the people on his own, but only for a single chapter of his book, because Saul is already on the ascent. Saul's kingdom, too, does not last long, because David is waiting in the wings. Many chapters in the book of Samuel describe the tense paths traversed by these two kings, including David's wanderings through hills and deserts in an attempt to flee from Saul. Before we have fully registered that David has become king, Absalom comes along and revolts against him so as to usurp the throne.

These stories of transitions are depicted as if by a master craftsman – stories about humble individuals and authoritative leaders in

moments of nobility and moments of despair, stories of victory and of fall and failure. These stories invite us to consider our own path.

This book is based on a series of classes that I taught about the book of Samuel at Drisha and elsewhere over the past forty years. I had the privilege to teach both American and Israeli students, including many women who did not have the opportunity to study Torah when they were younger. My students came from a variety of backgrounds and they held a range of worldviews, but when we sat down to learn, we were all encountering the same text. In moments of insight, it was as if the past and future fell away, and there was only the present moment in which we were all on a journey together – reading the text again and again, trying to tease out its secrets.

I would like to acknowledge those who assisted me in this writing journey. I have been fortunate to work with skilled and sedulous individuals throughout this process. First and foremost, I thank Ben-Zion Ovadia, who partnered with me in creating this book. Ben-Zion put all my ideas down on paper, expressing them clearly and precisely in beautiful Hebrew. His questions challenged me to hone my ideas, yielding new insights. Dr. Chayuta Deutsch edited the original Hebrew version of this book with utmost professionalism and offered valuable comments and suggestions. Special thanks to Hannah Fortgang, the Hebrew language editor, for her outstanding work. I am also grateful to Maggid Press, headed by Matthew Miller, and to Editorial Director Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, for providing a home for this book. My thanks also to Managing Editor Rabbi David Silverstein and proofreader Tali Simon.

I am grateful to Ilana Kurshan for her skilled and sensitive translation of the Hebrew edition. The content of the English version was further edited with precision and insight by Dr. Jon Kelsen. Our many discussions have enabled me to expand upon the ideas expressed in the original Hebrew version. Thanks are due to my friend Dr. Ron Levin for reviewing the English version and offering helpful suggestions. Debbie Ismailoff, our copy editor, is a skilled professional and I am grateful for her good work as well.

I thank my wife, Devora Steinmetz, with whom I share my insights and from whom I have learned so much.

This book would not have been published without the support of Tova Bulow, my longstanding student, and her husband Norman Bulow z"l.

Before concluding, I would like to share two personal notes: First, my parents named me David. My given name is actually Shmuel David, but no one ever called me that except my mother z"l, on those (rare) instances when she was angry at me and I became "Shmuel-David" – a single word. When my daughter once said to me, "Of course you would love the book of Samuel," I realized for the first time that I am essentially named for the book's two heroes. One way or another, the book of Samuel has always been one of my favorites.

The second thing I would like to share here is a story that took place many years ago. Devora and I were hiking in the hills of Massachusetts, when suddenly we noticed that someone was walking behind us. We turned around and asked her, "Where does this path lead?" and she responded, "To the top of the mountain. That's where the path ends." We continued climbing, though we could no longer see her behind us. But when we got to the top of the mountain, she was suddenly standing there next to us. "How did you get here?" we asked her in surprise. "We didn't see you further along the path." She responded with a smile, "There are many paths that lead to the top of the mountain." This has always been my goal. To strive toward a common goal of understanding the text, while also recognizing that there are many other paths that lead to this place, and to the place of the Omnipresent. It is my prayer that all of us – including the members of my beloved family – should merit with sincerity and integrity to find a path that leads to the top of the mountain.

The final stages of the writing of the Hebrew version of this book were completed in the shadow of the global struggle against the coronavirus pandemic. This global crisis was a powerful reminder of our vulnerability, the limits of our own vision, the shortsightedness of our leaders, and the uncertainty that is part of all human experience. But in between the unstable crevices flourish acts of quiet heroism and noble grace.

The bulk of the translation and editing of the present version of this book were undertaken in the aftermath of October 7, 2023 and the

Preface

ensuing war. Here, words fail me. Perhaps the great elegist of the Jewish people, King David, would have found the language to express our deepest sense of grief and loss, while at the same time recognizing the courage and self-sacrifice of so many, beloved and cherished.

May their memory be a blessing.

David Silber
New York, 2025

Introduction

The Attitude Toward Kingship in the Torah, the Book of Judges, and the Book of Samuel

The book of Samuel¹ begins with Samuel's birth and concludes with the end of David's life. During this period, which spans about a hundred years, dramatic changes unfolded in the institutions of leadership in Israel. At the beginning of the book of Samuel, the leaders of the nation were the priests of the house of Eli, but when Eli's two sons became corrupt, the family was cursed and ousted from power. During the next stage, leadership shifted from priesthood to prophecy – from Eli the priest to Samuel the prophet. But the children of Samuel did

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1. Though it is commonly divided into two books – I Samuel and II Samuel – for the purposes of this work we treat Samuel as one book, assuming its overall literary coherence.

not follow the path of their father, and the leadership was passed from prophet alone to prophet and king in a model of shared leadership. Samuel coronated Saul, and then, when Saul failed as monarch, Samuel tore the kingship away from him and coronated David as the sole leader, the autonomous king. Thus, the institution of kingship itself underwent a transformation: from the joint leadership of Saul and Samuel, king and prophet, to the autonomous rule of a single monarch, David.

At its core, the book of Samuel offers a deep meditation on the institution of kingship as a model of human political leadership. The transition from priestly and prophetic leadership to kingship was not an obvious one. It involved various difficulties and challenges, and it raises several central questions: Is kingship an ideal, a necessary evil, or was it simply a wrongheaded idea from the beginning? Can a human being ever be fit to reign as king, ruling justly and honorably and overcoming the temptations of power? Is it possible to realize the vision set forth by the book of Deuteronomy, in which the king reads from the Torah every day of his life, “lest he act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the commandments to the right or the left” (Deut. 17:20)? These questions are the central concerns of the book of Samuel. This is why it is only in the book of Samuel that the role of the king is defined in positive terms, as a judge and military leader. (The Torah in Deuteronomy, by contrast, never stipulates what a king does in the positive sense. It seems to presume that knowledge, and focuses instead on negative injunctions – what the king is *not* to do.)

The book of Samuel, then, is about kingship itself: the institution, with its possibilities and challenges, benefits and drawbacks. It is not fundamentally an analysis of the characters of particular kings, even Saul and David themselves. Obviously the book contains such character analysis, discharged with great artistry and nuance. But this analysis is a means rather than an end unto itself, a medium through which the author explores kingship more generally.

KINGSHIP AND PROPHECY

In order to appreciate the book of Samuel’s examination of kingship, it is critical to note that dynastic succession is an essential, even defining feature of the institution of kingship. This becomes clear when kingship

is contrasted with the leadership of the prophet. The prophet is a charismatic, spiritual individual who becomes worthy of this role by dint of virtue and capability. Prophecy is not bequeathed from parent to child; upon the death of each individual prophet, the next prophet must be sought out. As such, prophecy is an inherently unstable form of leadership, with discontinuity an inherent feature of the model. A primary feature (and bug) of the kingship model, by contrast, is its ostensible stability. The prince becomes king, not because of who he is but because of his lineage. With kingship, succession is more easily determined, allowing for the possibility of political stability.

Indeed, the reader of the book of Samuel will note that when explaining their request for a king, the people tell Samuel that they cannot rely on him any longer because he is old, and his sons are unfit to succeed him.² This raises the obvious question: If the people are concerned about unfit dynastic succession, would not installing a king as ruler exacerbate rather than resolve the problem? Would not the risk of receiving an unfit ruler be more likely under a monarch than a prophet?

The answer, too, is clear: The people understand that a prophet is a charismatic, spiritual leader, and the position is disconnected from lineage. A king, on the other hand, need not be a spiritual person, but must be of royal descent, unless he is the initiator of the dynasty itself.³ The people are less concerned with the potential of morally unsuitable royal heirs, because in this model, inheriting the position of one's father is not about moral suitability. It is about ensuring a smooth and stable transition of power. In short, kingship itself is a more stable institution – at least in theory – but stability may come at the expense of spirituality or virtue. Moreover, in reality, even royal dynastic succession may become intensely fraught and contested. In fact, the extenuated and difficult search for succession lies at the heart of the extended exploration of kingship which constitutes the book of Samuel.

2. See 1 Samuel 8.

3. Interestingly, in the Bible there is no particular garment marking its wearer as a prophet, unlike the priest or king, whose clothing marks his rank. The prophet does not require external indications of his status because it inheres in his personality.

In the present work, we engage with this exploration, tracing the narrative from the period of the rule of Samuel and Saul (part 1), to David's journey to the throne (part 2), to David's reign as king of Israel (part 3), and finally (part 4) to David's twilight years and the dual endings to his story.

CHARACTER AND COMPLEXITY

The book of Samuel, as I propose to read it, offers a sharp critique of several characters, including great individuals who do not appropriately restrain their power and sometimes even use it for evil. The book reminds us of the weighty and perhaps inevitable price of wielding political power. Although this critique is not always explicit, it is evident if we read between the lines with an attuned and sensitive ear. As I see it, the authenticity, moral depth, and literary stature of the book of Samuel emerge from the seemingly innocent way in which the story unfolds, largely without making its moral judgment explicit. It is noteworthy, in fact, that the book is named for the character of Samuel – a character who is deeply critical of the institution of kingship. With all its multivocality and nuance, the book fundamentally adopts Samuel's critical and wary approach toward kingship.

I therefore do not identify with those readings that try to eliminate or elide the complexities and contradictions that emerge from the text – readings that idealize the characters or try to make their behavior accord with more accepted standards. The author of the book of Samuel displays the freedom of thought of one who is unafraid to deviate from the expected and go against the grain.

The use and misuse of words reflects these complexities. Throughout the book, we encounter masters of the word, most prominently David himself, the great poet. David knows how to craft the most beautiful elegy and song. He also knows how to use words to move and manipulate his surroundings, how to speak with multiple meanings and deliberate ambiguities. The text continuously prompts its reader to wonder: Will David honor or defile the sanctity of his speech?

Relatedly, the phenomenon of oath-taking is central to the narrative throughout. In point of fact, fully half of the Bible's oaths are taken in the book of Samuel. Yet while many characters take oaths, only some keep

them. The challenge of keeping one's oath – one's sacred word – will confront many of our protagonists.

The story of Saul and the witch of Endor serves as another example of the author's fearlessness. The prophet Samuel rejects and alienates Saul. But the witch of Endor, who is an idolator worthy of being put to death according to the Torah's standards,⁴ takes Saul under her wing – even though it was Saul who eradicated the witches and idolators from the land. The witch of Endor is revealed to be a compassionate figure who draws Saul close, cares for him, and supports him in time of need.⁵

For many years I was puzzled by this story, until I realized that it encapsulates one of the deep meanings of the book of Samuel. The author of this biblical book did not hesitate to include this strange and unorthodox story in which an idolatrous witch is depicted in such a positive light, so long as the story served to embody what is true and what is right. It is my fervent hope that my readings of the book of Samuel will reflect the intentions of the book's author in coming to describe, with courage and integrity, "the rule of the king."

A methodological note: A central feature of biblical narrative is its use of intertexts, in which one text references and plays off another, assuming it as contextual backdrop for its own story. Often, biblical text A signals this relationship with another text B through both semantic and thematic parallels. Once the reader notices these parallels, he is then invited to interpret text A in comparison with B, noting similarities between the two. Just as critically, the comparison allows the reader to note differences between the texts. Throughout this book, I draw extensively on intertexts as I work to elucidate the narrative.

A final note: In writing this present work, I have assumed that the reader is familiar with the plot of the book of Samuel. One who is less familiar with the narrative would do well to first (re)read it before continuing forward into this present work.

4. See Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:11.

5. See Uriel Simon, "A Balanced Story: The Stern Prophet and the Kind Witch," *Proof-texts* 8, no. 2 (May 1988): 159–71. Simon explores the significance of the various roles played by Samuel and the witch of Endor in the story.

THE ATTITUDE TOWARD KINGSHIP IN THE TORAH

Before embarking on our study of the book of Samuel, we must first situate its treatment of kingship in light of the Torah's treatment. As we shall see, both the Torah and the book of Samuel recognize an existent model or institution of monarchy. In examining the Torah's attitude toward monarchy, we must distinguish between kingship in the non-Jewish world and the Torah's model of the ideal Jewish king articulated in the commandments laid out in Deuteronomy 18. The Torah's attitude toward kingship is not stated explicitly but is reflected by the Torah's many stories about kings. These stories portray a nuanced attitude. Alongside enthusiastic support for the idea of monarchy, we also find moments of deep fear and hesitancy about the institution, and even, at times, a complete rejection of kingship.

Many of the Torah's stories about kings portray the negative potential of human kingship. The first king who appears in the Torah, Nimrod, is a figure associated with might and warfare whose very name is associated with the word *mered*, meaning rebellion. Soon after, we encounter Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Avimelekh, the king of Gerar, who take (or attempt to take) by force the wife of the stranger who comes to their land.⁶ The story of the war of the kings described in chapter 13 of the book of Genesis paints a similar picture: The kings from across the river arrive, attacking and robbing everyone in their way. In the final story, the king of Sodom, whom Abraham rescues, also behaves fiercely and narcissistically. Instead of acknowledging Abraham's graciousness, he negotiates with him: "Give me the people, and take the possessions for yourself" (Gen. 14:21). Abraham refuses the offer: "I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich'" (14:23). Abraham knows that if he accedes to the deal, the king of Sodom will take all the credit for his wealth.

Later in the biblical narrative, there is ample evidence of tyranny among the kings of Israel, including among even the most righteous of them.⁷ In this book we will become intimately acquainted with the

6. Genesis 12:10–20, chapter 20, 26:6–12.

7. The kings of the ancient Near East were regarded as the emissaries of the gods on Earth, and some were even objects of worship. Scholars disagree about whether

problematic aspects of David's monarchy. These same features also typify the stories of King Solomon, which depict an idyllic period of prosperity and abundance. Solomon, in violation of the Torah's commandments, amassed silver and gold, horses and wives; his heart turned away from God, and ultimately the kingship was divided.⁸

One might conclude based on these examples that the Bible gives up hope of there being a righteous human king. Yet there are other examples that indicate that it need not be so. Immediately prior to the exchange between Abraham and the king of Sodom, the Torah narrates the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek, the king of Shalem. Melchizedek, whose name aptly means "king of justice," sets out to greet Abram when the latter is returning from battle. He offers Abram bread and wine and blesses him.⁹ In contrast to the tightfisted king of Sodom, who says to Abraham, "Give me," Melchizedek does not demand a thing but receives from Abraham nonetheless: "And he [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything" (Gen. 14:20).¹⁰

Evidence of the Torah's positive approach to monarchy appears in God's blessings to Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob:¹¹ God blesses the patriarchs and matriarchs not just with numerous descendants, but also with the promise that great and influential figures, including monarchs, will descend from them. This positive reference to kingship does not accord with a wholesale rejection of the institution. And so it seems that even though biblical kings are generally depicted in an unfavorable light, we

the Bible contains any traces of the notion of divine kingship; some argue that this notion is especially pronounced in the book of Psalms. See Yair Lorberbaum, *Pauper King: Kingship in Classical Jewish Literature* (Bar Ilan, 2008), 19–39; Yaakov Liver, "King," in *The Biblical Encyclopedia: A Treasury of Knowledge About the Bible and Its Time*, ed. Binyamin Mazur et al., vol. 4 (Yediot, 1963), 1088–1112.

8. 1 Kings 11.

9. Melchizedek's blessing demonstrates his sophisticated understanding of the significance of Abraham's victory. See Rabbi David Silber, *If for This Moment: Biblical Reflections on the Book of Esther* (Maggid Books, 2017), chapter 5 [Hebrew].

10. If there are nine kings in the narrative before his appearance (four versus five), then Melchizedek is the tenth, and the only one whom Abraham affirms as a bona fide monarch. One might say that from the Torah's perspective, (only) one-tenth of the kings are virtuous.

11. See Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11.

need not assume that the Bible is unaware of the tremendous blessing and potential inherent in the institution of monarchy.

Another biblical source in which royalty is depicted in a positive light is the Book of Ruth. The book concludes with a genealogical list which begins with Ruth and Boaz and ends with David, the son of Yishai. David's descent from Ruth is considered a reward for Ruth's loving-kindness.¹² This notion, too, is at odds with an approach which fundamentally rejects the idea of human monarchy.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Torah relates to kingship and royalty in a legal context:

If, after you have entered the land that your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you should say, "I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me," you shall be free to set a king over yourself, *one chosen by your God*. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kin. Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, "You must not go back that way again." And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall write a copy of this Torah for himself before the priests and the Levites. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere his God, to observe faithfully every word of this teaching as well as these laws. Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:14–20)

The king is commanded to conduct himself with modesty and fraternity. Toward that end, the Torah imposes instructions and stipulations that limit the king's power and serve to remind him to follow the right path. First, the king is prohibited from owning too many horses, amassing

12. Ruth is known as "the mother of royalty." See Midrash Zuta, Ruth (Buber) 1:1.

too much gold and silver, and having too many wives. Next, the king is commanded to write a copy of the Torah “before the priests and the Levites,” a book whose purpose is to serve as a constant reminder to adhere to the Torah’s commandments.

But what can we learn from this biblical passage about the Torah’s fundamental attitude toward the institution of kingship? On the one hand, from a syntactic perspective, the phrase “Be sure to set as king over yourself” is an imperative, which seems to suggest that appointing a king is a religious commandment. On the other hand, this imperative appears as part of a conditional statement: “If, after you have entered the land that your God has assigned to you...you should say, ‘I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me’...be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people.” This verse suggests that the Torah invests the people with the authority to set a king over themselves if they should wish to do so.¹³ Does framing the imperative to set up a king as part of a conditional statement imply that one might forgo the rule of a king, and that perhaps doing so is in fact desirable?¹⁴

A careful reading suggests otherwise. The Torah’s conditional language does not reflect opposition to the notion of kingship, but rather opposition to the notion of a king who acts like “all the nations.” Kingship is a reality; all the other nations have kings, and so why not Israel? However, the king of Israel is not to be a king “like all the other nations” but rather a different type of king. The Torah’s command is thus qualified: In light of the people’s request for a king “like all the other nations,” the Torah commands: “You shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by your God.”¹⁵ The king of Israel, unlike other kings, is chosen

13. See, for instance, Ibn Ezra’s commentary.

14. Nahmanides maintains, in light of the many opinions in rabbinic literature, that appointing a king is a religious commandment. He offers two solutions to reconcile the imperative and the conditional. First, he proposes that “and you shall say” is part of the imperative itself. In other words, this term should be understood as signifying not “if you should say,” but rather “when you should say.” Second, he argues that the Torah is hinting at a future in which the Jews will indeed give voice to the desire for a king. These do not seem to be straightforward readings of the text.

15. Rabbi Ḥayyim Ibn Attar offered a similar interpretation in *Or HaḤayyim*, his commentary on the Bible.

by God, and he is “one of your own people.” He is not above the law, and he is not the source of the law. The Torah commands the king to write a book of the Torah “before the priests and the Levites,” meaning that the king is subordinate to these individuals who are in charge of the observance and teaching of God’s Torah.¹⁶ This is a critical injunction. The king is the ruler, but he is not God; on the contrary, he is but a servant of God, bound by God’s Torah.

The verses in Deuteronomy about the king include another important point worthy of consideration. The prohibition against amassing many horses is stipulated with reference to a fear of the people returning to Egypt: “Or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses.” Why is Egypt mentioned in the context of the prohibition against amassing too many horses? In Egypt, the land of slaves, the government is an external power forced upon the people, and may not bear responsibility for their fate. The king of Israel, on the other hand, is supposed to be “one of your own people.” It is the people who set the king over themselves, and thus the existence of the king is not an expression of lack of sovereignty and lack of empowerment, but just the opposite: The king reflects the people’s role and responsibility in their own governance.

This point is honed in light of the broader context of the biblical verses about the king in the book of Deuteronomy. During the Israelites’ desert wanderings, God was always very close and very present. As the book of Exodus states, “And I will dwell among the Israelites and I will be their God” (Ex. 29:45).

In the book of Deuteronomy, on the other hand, God is depicted as more distant and removed. The Torah commands a pilgrimage to the place that God chooses (for instance, to offer sacrifices and eat meat, or to bring tithes and first fruits), but this place may be far away and it may

16. The Torah scroll that Moses wrote was passed to the priests for safekeeping (see Deut. 31:9). Some commentators maintain that the king would copy his own Torah scroll from this one. The priests are responsible for teaching Torah to Israel (see, for instance, Deut. 17:9–11, 33:10). The king’s subordination to the priests and the Levites is also alluded to in the prohibition against deviating to the right or to the left, which is also mentioned in the previous section about the judges, priests, and Levites: “You must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left” (Deut. 28:14).

require tremendous effort to reach it (see, for instance, Deut. 14:24). In contrast to the book of Exodus, which describes God's presence residing in the Tabernacle within the camp, the book of Deuteronomy depicts God looking down at the people from the heavens: "Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us" (Deut. 6:15). The commandment that the people must set a king over them is the clearest expression of the notion that the entry of the Jewish people into their land is bound up in their taking responsibility for their own lives.

THE ATTITUDE TOWARD KINGSHIP IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The attitude toward kingship in the book of Judges is a subject worthy of study in its own right. Throughout the period described in the book of Judges, the people were ruled not by kings, but by a series of charismatic leaders known as judges. These judges were not the heads of the entire nation, but they worked to save their respective tribes from the hands of external enemies. They were thus tribal leaders, as distinguished from the prospect of a king, who would function as a national leader.

The judges were different from the kings in another important way: A judge derived his power from the spirit of God that rested upon him, which enabled him to attract followers and to succeed in his mission. These are not characteristics that are passed down hereditarily. By contrast, and as mentioned above, kingship is fundamentally a dynastic institution – the crown is passed from father to son.

The book of Judges is regarded by some as the primary biblical expression of anti-monarchism.¹⁷ The book's opposition to the institution of monarchy, so it is claimed, is encapsulated in the words spoken by the judge Gideon. After his victory in the war against Midian, the people turn to him and ask him to reign over them:

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon: "Rule over us – you, your son, and your grandson as well; for you have saved us from the Midianites." But Gideon replied: "I will not rule over you myself,

17. See Lorberbaum, *Pauper King*, 14–19.

nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord alone shall rule over you.” (Judges 8:22–23)

Gideon’s response might be understood as reflecting the book of Judges’ position that human kingship is fundamentally incompatible with the kingdom of God. The king rules over everyone, and the crown is passed down from generation to generation. In this sense, the rule of the king is truly reminiscent of divine rule, which is eternal. We can therefore understand why, according to Gideon, the two kingdoms – the divine and the human – are in tension with one another.¹⁸

However, in my opinion this is a misreading of the book’s intent. Rather, the book of Judges primarily seeks to critique Gideon’s version of kingship, as is evident when Gideon’s words are examined contextually. First, the extent to which Gideon’s perspective on kingship accords with that of the rest of the book of Judges is unclear.¹⁹ The book of Judges ends with two stories that encapsulate its attitude toward the anarchy that resulted from a lack of kingship: The first one is commonly referred to as *pesel Mikha*, the idol of Micah (17:6–18:31); it is a story of mass idolatry. The second is the story of *pilegish beGiva*, the concubine in Givah (19:1–21:25), in which the indignation at a group rape spirals out of control and ultimately results in civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the other tribes of Israel. These two stories are bracketed by the same verse: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did

18. The prophet Hosea rebukes the people for their inordinate devotion to their heroes and their king: “You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity – [and] you shall eat the fruits of treachery – because you relied on your way, on your host of warriors. But the din of war shall arise in your own people. And all your fortresses shall be ravaged, as Beth-arbel was ravaged by Shalman on a day of battle, when mothers and babes were dashed to death together. This is what Bethel has done to you, for your horrible wickedness. At dawn shall Israel’s monarchy utterly perish” (Hos. 10:13–15).

19. Buber reads the parable of the bramble (Judges 9:7–15), delivered by Jotham following the coronation of Avimelekh, as staunchly anti-monarchic (see Buber, *The Kingdom of God* [Harper and Row, 1967]). But it is also possible to read this parable as referring not to monarchy more generally, but specifically to the reign of Avimelekh. The bramble, which unlike other trees has nothing that can benefit humans or God, is comparable to Avimelekh, who has nothing constructive to offer.

what was right in his eyes” (Judges 17:6, 21:25), which is also the last verse of the entire book. These stories strongly suggest that in the absence of monarchic rule, anarchy reigns and people do whatever they see fit.²⁰

Second, Gideon expresses opposition to monarchy when he tells the people, “The Lord alone shall rule over you,” but his actions undermine the force of his rhetoric. After Gideon declines to rule over the people, he asks the warriors to hand over the spoils of war. Gideon takes the gold and makes it into a vest for idolatrous worship: “Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his own town of Ofra. There all of Israel prostituted after it, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household” (Judges 8:27).

The criticism of Gideon’s actions is particularly evident against the backdrop of the story of the Israelites’ war of revenge against the Midianites in the book of Numbers. God commands Moses to “avenge the Israelite people on the Midianites” (Num. 31:2), since this nation caused the Israelites to profane themselves by whoring after Baal Peor (25:18). After the war concludes with the Israelites’ victory, the head of the army gives Moses a portion of the gold vessels that were taken as spoils to serve as a donation to the Tabernacle (see 31:54). A comparison with the story of Gideon is instructive: Gideon, like Moses and his army, fought against the Midianites and won. But what transpires next in the story of Gideon stands in stark contrast to what transpires next in the story of Moses’s revenge. The leaders of Moses’s army consecrate to God the golden vessels taken as spoils, whereas Gideon takes the gold for his own purposes and fashions a vest that leads people to engage in *zenut*, a term that refers in this context to idolatry but is also used to refer to prostitution in the story of the Midianites. Gideon’s behavior

20. It is also important to note that if we weigh Gideon’s criticism of the institution of monarchy against the text’s critique of the lack of monarchy, it is clear that the second critique carries more weight. The criticism of the lack of a king reflects the position of the author of the book, and is not merely voiced by one of the book’s characters, no matter how important that character may be. It is also noteworthy that in the central rabbinic prayer, the *Amida*, the petitioner both requests that God *alone* reign as King (blessing 11), and that He reinstate the Davidic dynasty (blessings 14 and 15). Clearly, for the composers of the *Amida*, there is no inherent contradiction between these two requests.

is especially problematic given that the Israelites' prostitution to this idolatrous nation was the very reason God called for revenge against Midian in the first place.²¹

Gideon declares, "The Lord alone shall rule over you," but evidently he himself is not free of the taint of idolatry. This critique of Gideon is bolstered by additional textual parallels. Consider, for instance, the text's description of the name Gideon gives to his son, Avimelekh. Gideon voices fierce opposition to a human king, but he gives his son a name that contains the Hebrew word for "king" (*melekh*).²² Moreover, Avimelekh is not just any king, but the name of the Philistine king from the book of Genesis, who is himself a morally problematic figure.²³ Second, the text's description of the naming of this son – "*Vayasem et shemo Avimelekh*," "And he established his name Avimelekh" – recalls a verse from the book of Deuteronomy about the Temple: "Look only to the site that your God will choose amid all your tribes as God's habitation, to establish the divine name there" (*lasim et shemo sham*) (Deut. 12:5). In light of our discussion above, it seems that instead of building a Temple to God, Gideon made his home into an idolatrous temple.

This depiction of Gideon's model of rulership – a form of kingship – does not reflect a negative attitude toward kingship in the book of Judges, but rather a negative attitude toward Gideon's quasi-idolatrous leadership. Gideon's rule stands in contrast to the vision of kingship described in Deuteronomy and to Hannah's vision of the righteous king who represents and reflects God's kingship, described in the opening of the book of Samuel.

21. The association of Gideon's actions after the war with prostitution is also alluded to by means of an interesting linguistic parallel. When Gideon asks the people for their golden jewelry, the people willingly oblige; the text relates that they "spread out a cloth, and everyone threw onto it the earring he had received as booty" (Judges 8:25). This reference to spreading out a cloth is echoed in the Torah's account of the husband who accuses his new wife of not being a virgin. In such a case, the bride's father declares his daughter to be innocent and goes on to "spread out a cloth before the elders of the town" as evidence of her virginity (Deut. 22:17).

22. Judges 8:31.

23. See chapter 13 of this book.

THE ATTITUDE TOWARD KINGSHIP IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL

A commonly held view is that in the book of Samuel, human kingship is regarded not just as undesirable, but as a rejection of God's kingship, tantamount to idolatry. After all, when the people ask for a king, God tells Samuel that anointing a human king is essentially a rejection of God:

And the Lord replied to Samuel, "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their King. Like everything else they have done ever since I brought them out of Egypt to this day – forsaking Me and worshipping other gods – so they are doing to you. Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the rule of the king who will govern them. (1 Sam. 8:7–9)

However, a careful reading of the book of Samuel reveals a more nuanced picture. Samuel is firmly and fundamentally opposed to appointing a king, and his critique is prominent in the book, but Samuel's view does not reflect the entire perspective of the book of Samuel itself. First, God commands Samuel three times to listen to the people and appoint a king over them (1 Sam. 8:7, 9, 22). Moreover, God sends Samuel to coronate two different kings. First Saul is coronated (ch. 9), and then, even after the failure of the first kingship, God proactively initiates the rule of another king, David (ch. 16), suggesting that monarchy is not so undesirable after all, at least not as God sees it.²⁴

Second, the notion that there is a need for a king to impose law and order in Israel appears not just in the book of Judges – "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25) – but also at the beginning of the book of Samuel, where God favorably receives the people's request for a king.²⁵

24. For more on Samuel's opposition to the appointment of a Jewish king, see chapter 2 of this book.

25. See chapter 1 of this book.

And finally, the need for a king is also evident when we contrast the book of Judges with the book of Samuel in terms of internecine conflict: Unlike the book of Judges, in which the other tribes fight against and nearly decimate Benjamin and his allies in Yavesh Gilad (Judges, ch. 20), in the book of Samuel, quite the opposite takes place, thanks to the first Jewish king, Saul, himself of the tribe of Benjamin. When he is coronated, Saul manages to harness all of the tribes to save the people of Yavesh Gilad, who are allied with the tribe of Benjamin, not just from the members of their own people, but also from an external enemy – Nahash the Ammonite (see 1 Sam. 11).²⁶ This contrast serves to highlight the importance of a king, who has the power to unite and protect all the rival factions within the nation.

There is therefore a dominant strain in the book of Samuel that is sympathetic to the idea of monarchy. Against this backdrop, I propose that God's harsh words to Samuel condemning the institution of monarchy – "For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king" – be read not as a sweeping and principled rejection of the institution of monarchy per se, but rather as an expression of God's concern about the potential deterioration of this institution. In other words, God is concerned lest the king of Israel become like the kings of all other nations. Indeed, the people's request for a king "like all other nations" can in fact be construed as a form of kingship which constitutes a rejection of God.

And indeed, many stories in the book of Samuel serve to demonstrate the dangers associated with human kingship. One of those dangers is the tremendous power of the ruler, as evident in Samuel's speech to the

26. The contrast between the civil war in the book of Judges and Saul's war to save the people of Yavesh Gilad is reflected in clear linguistic parallels between the book of Judges and the book of Samuel. In the book of Judges, the husband of the concubine raped by the members of the tribe of Benjamin cuts up her corpse into twelve pieces and sends them "throughout the territory of Israel" (Judges 19:29). When the other tribes see what has happened, they assemble "as one man" (20:1) to wage war on Benjamin. In the book of Samuel, Saul takes a yoke of oxen and cuts them into pieces, sending them by messenger "throughout the territory of Israel" (1 Sam. 11:7) with the threat that "thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel into battle." In response, the people set out in battle "as one man."

Introduction: The Attitude Toward Kingship

people about what to expect of a human king. Samuel presents the king, who is supposed to impose justice, as committing a long and detailed list of injustices. Above all, in the model of the sons of Eli, the king will seize everything belonging to the people for his own gain and aggrandizement, ironically in the name of justice:

He said, “This will be the rule of the king who will govern you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers. He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men, and your asses, and put them to work for him. He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves. (1 Sam. 8:11–17)

The second danger concerns the relationship between humanity and God. A king who does not view himself as subservient to God inevitably acts in a manner that is contemptuous of God. God gives voice to this danger in speaking to Samuel after the people’s request for a king:

And the Lord replied to Samuel, “Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king. Like everything else they have done ever since I brought them out of Egypt to this day – forsaking Me and worshipping other gods – so they are doing to you.” (1 Sam. 8:7–8; cf. 12:12)

But alongside stories that describe problematic monarchic rule – ranging from crass politicking to severe violence – there are other stories in which the king is clearly aware of how he ought to conduct himself. In these stories, the king recognizes that he is mortal, accepts the eternal

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kingdom of God, takes responsibility for his crimes and misdemeanors, and treats the members of his nation with a sense of fraternity and fellow feeling.

King David, the dominant character in the book of Samuel, serves as a prime example of this complexity. The stories about King David in the book of Samuel combine moments of rare spiritual grandeur with moments of moral depravity. The incident in which David's star first begins its ascent – the story of his brilliant victory over Goliath, the Philistine giant – is of course one of the prime examples of a moment of grandeur. This story presents David as a brave, wise man endowed with a deep, clear perception of the situation, imbued with faith in God and jealously defending the honor of God and the honor of God's people.²⁷

It is difficult not to be astounded, as well, by David's magnanimous responses when he is informed by the prophet Nathan that not he, but rather his son, will build the Temple (II Sam. 7), or by his sincere and heartfelt repentance in the story of the census (II Sam. 24).²⁸

David's greatness is underscored, too, by means of a series of parallels between his story and that of Abraham. For instance, the story of David's victory in the battle against the Amalekites who raided the city of Ziklag and took the women and children of David's men captive includes various linguistic parallels to the story of Abraham's victory over the four kings who captured the people of Sodom, including Abraham's nephew Lot.²⁹ In these moments King David is a truly grand and glorious figure, and we can understand why he is depicted in Jewish tradition as the ancestor of the Messiah.³⁰

At the same time, the book of Samuel also depicts problematic aspects of David's character. On more than one occasion David errs in judgment, falls prey to his own desires, or takes advantage of his own power. David can also be criticized for the years prior to his reign,

27. See the beginning of part 3 of this book.

28. See chapters 11 and 13 of this book.

29. See chapter 12 of this book.

30. David is a complex biblical character with many internal contradictions. The David of the book of Samuel differs from the David of the book of Chronicles, who in turn differs from the David of Psalms. In this book I will focus on the character of David in the book of Samuel.

during the period when he fled from Saul and wandered from place to place. The stories from this period suggest that David was determined to become king, even at the expense of harming others – including relatives and loved ones who came to his aid in difficult moments, such as Ahimelech the priest of Nob, his commander Yoav son of Tzeruya, his wife Michal, and his dear friend Jonathan son of Saul.³¹

People do not usually recognize their own faults. They tend to defend themselves against criticism and resist changing their ways. As the Talmud puts it, “*Adam karov etzel atzmo*,” “A person is closest to himself,”³² meaning that a person is likely to advocate for himself and overlook his own lapses. When it comes to people with power and authority, moral blindness can become a real danger. David, who hears from the prophet Nathan about the wicked rich man who seized the only lamb belonging to a certain poor man, seals the rich man’s fate without batting an eyelash: “The man who did this deserves to die!” (11 Sam. 12:5). He has no awareness that he himself is “the man who did this,” namely, the man who took Bathsheba for himself and sent her husband to his death. David passionately denounces the evil deeds of the rich man, revealing tremendous moral sensitivity, but his blindness about his own actions prevents him from recognizing his own far greater cruelty.

The real truth, the narrator of the book of Samuel seems to be telling us, is more likely to be spoken by the weak and the rejected, those who are excluded from the system of power and can therefore look upon that system with more clarity and identify its weaknesses and flaws. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is the perfect example. The book of Samuel opens with the story of Hannah, who comes with her family to the Tabernacle in Shiloh year after year to pray – amidst the fog of moral and spiritual darkness that surrounds the place – for a better future for herself and for the world. In a place in which “the word of God was not widespread” (1 Sam. 3:1), she seeks the revelation of divine justice. Hannah stands outside the centers of power and dominance. She is an outsider, and so

31. We will expand upon this discussion in part 2 of this book.

32. See, for instance, Yevamot 25b.

she is able to identify the failures in the system which those who are in power accept if not enable.³³

It is important to emphasize that this critique does not tell the entire story. Power can corrupt, but when it comes to the fundamental question about kingship, the book of Samuel offers a hopeful perspective: A reformed human monarchy is not impossible. At the beginning of the book of Samuel, Hannah stands in the Tabernacle in Shiloh and dreams about a king who will make the divine order manifest in the world; in the story of the census that concludes the book of Samuel – and concludes David's life as well, for the most part – we learn that Hannah's dream comes true. The story of the census is the story of a king who confesses his wrongdoings and is prepared to sacrifice himself for the sake of his subjects. In this story David imbues the world with the divine values of justice and mercy, and thus he merits to designate the site of the Temple, the site of justice and mercy, where God will see and be seen.

Exploration of kingship in all its aspects is thus the central theme that threads through the book of Samuel as well as my primary subject in this book. I do not offer here a continuous commentary on the chapters of the book of Samuel, and I have skipped over quite a few important episodes and themes. From my perspective, kingship is not just an important topic in the book of Samuel – it is the main issue which the book explores, the essential topic to which it returns again and again.

33. See chapter 1 of this book.

Part 1

The Days of Samuel and Saul

INTRODUCTION

In the early chapters of the book of Samuel, the primary institution of leadership is the priesthood. Samuel, the prophet, apprenticed to Eli the priest in Shiloh, is the link to the next institution of leadership – monarchy. It is Samuel who coronates Saul, the first king of Israel. Samuel is thus the bridge between political institutions. He is the priest-leader who inaugurates, with pronounced hesitation and misgiving, the institution of the kingship of Israel.

The book opens with the story of the birth of Samuel, who will eventually become judge and prophet and will coronate the first two Israelite kings, Saul and David. At the heart of the story of Samuel's birth, which spans the first two chapters of the biblical book, we encounter his mother Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. Hannah will be our focus in the first chapter of this section, for her tale introduces not only the story of her son, but also the core issue of the book, human kingship.

Hannah functions not just as Samuel's mother, but also as a significant character in her own right. She stands in bright contrast to the story's more unseemly characters, chief among them Eli's two corrupt sons. She

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also casts in relief the presentation of other more positively portrayed figures, such as her husband Elkanah and Eli the priest in Shiloh. Tellingly, Hannah is the only woman in the Bible who is described as praying for a child (in contrast to the matriarchs and the wife of Manoach, mother of Samson),¹ and her supplication in Shiloh was regarded by the Sages as a paradigm for Jewish prayer.² Her two prayers – the vow she takes in Shiloh (which is fulfilled when she brings her son to serve Eli after he is weaned), and the prayer she recites after he is born – are critically important: They give voice to her ability to apprehend the spiritual and moral decline around her, and to imagine a better future for herself and for the world. Just as critically, the world Hannah envisions is led by a king who would ensure that the divine attribute of justice is realized.

In the second chapter of this part, we will examine chapters 9–15 of the book of Samuel, which tell the story of Saul's monarchy. This story ends tragically and prematurely: In chapter 9, Samuel coronates Saul, and in chapter 15, Samuel announces that Saul's monarchy has been torn from him and passed to someone else.

Saul's sins cost him his throne, as per God's words to Samuel after the war against Amalek: "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from Me and has not carried out My commands" (1 Sam. 15:11). But this is not the whole story. Further examination reveals that there was another factor involved in the failure of Saul's monarchy. As I will argue, Samuel – Saul's partner in leading the people – played a key role in this failure. Samuel's extreme paternalism toward Saul and his deep-seated objection to the notion of human kingship – in contrast to God's explicit command – effectively clipped Saul's wings and weakened his administration. Here we encounter the flip side of the lesson we learn from Hannah's story: Power and authority can occlude our vision – even in the case of an individual like Samuel, a seer and a visionary who is compared in stature to none other than Moses himself.³

1. See Judges 13.

2. See Berakhot 31a: "R. Hamnuna said: How many significant laws can be derived from these verses of [the prayer of] Hannah!"

3. Psalms 99:6.

Chapter 1

Hannah in Shiloh

HANNAH AND ELKANAH

The story begins with a family:

There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Yeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninah; Peninah had children, but Hannah was childless. (1 Sam. 1:1–2)

There is fierce tension between Elkanah's two wives, Hannah and Peninah, and it comes to a head every year when the family makes its pilgrimage to Shiloh:

This man used to go up from his town year after year to worship (*lehishtahavot*, i.e., to prostrate) and to offer sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts at Shiloh; Hophni and Pinhas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord there. (1 Sam. 1:3)

Elkanah makes it a point to travel to Shiloh every year to bow down in worship and sacrifice at God's Tabernacle. Elkanah's behavior seems

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admirable at first blush, but a closer examination of the verse suggests otherwise. First, we are told that in Shiloh – the place where Elkanah makes it a point to come year after year – the ministering priests are “Hophni and Pinhas, the two sons of Eli.” We might have expected the text to foreground the presence of the father, who is the main character of Samuel, chapter 1; why instead is the focus here placed on his sons?

This reference to the sons undoubtedly foreshadows what we will subsequently learn about Eli’s sons:

Now Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they paid no heed to the Lord. Now it was the rule of the priests that when anyone brought a sacrifice, the priest’s boy would come along with a three-pronged fork while the meat was boiling, and he would thrust it into the cauldron, or the kettle, or the great pot, or the small cooking pot; and whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take away on it. This was the practice at Shiloh with all the Israelites who came there. [But now] even before the suet was turned into smoke, the priest’s boy would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Hand over some meat to roast for the priest; for he won’t take boiled meat from you, only raw.” And if the man said to him, “Let them first turn the suet into smoke, and then take as much as you want,” he would reply, “No, hand it over at once or I’ll take it by force.” The sin of the young men against the Lord was very great, for the men treated the Lord’s offerings impiously. (1 Sam. 2:12–17)

Eli’s sons run a corrupt operation in Shiloh, where they are supposed to be doing God’s work. As Moses Garsiel has demonstrated, the “rule of the priests” mentioned in the beginning of this passage – the rule of the priests whom the child, Samuel, serves – is an ironic reference, explicitly transgressing the “rule of the priests” originally referenced in Deuteronomy (18:3–5).¹ In contrast to the prescriptions in Deuteronomy, which emphasize that which is to be given to the priest, here the priest’s boy

1. See Moses Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels* (Rubin Mass, 1990).

comes and takes those gifts by force. And in contrast to the rule of the priests, which details specific portions of the animal that are reserved for those who serve in the Tabernacle – “the shoulder, the cheek, and the stomach” (Deut. 18:3) – here, “whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take away on it.” Finally, even though the Torah teaches that the priests may eat from the sacrifices only after the blood is sprinkled and the entrails are offered on the altar (12:27),² here the priest’s boy would take the meat “even before the suet was turned into smoke.” The text levels a harsh critique at Eli’s impious, scoundrel sons.³ Furthermore, it is not only the meat that they take by force, as the continuation of this chapter relates: “Now Eli was very old and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (1 Sam. 2:22).⁴

Eli’s corrupt sons were in charge of the operations in Shiloh, where Elkanah and his family made their annual pilgrimage. In other words, Elkanah makes an annual pilgrimage to a place that is thoroughly corrupt. His very presence contributes to Shiloh’s ongoing functioning, even if this is not his intent.

Elkanah’s commitment to making this annual pilgrimage stands in contrast to his wife’s spontaneous, heartfelt, devout prayer. This contrast is highlighted by the text’s description of his rote sacrifice and worship at Shiloh. Later in the book, in chapter 15, sacrifices and prostration will be mentioned again, this time in contrast to truly appropriate obedience and hearkening (*lishmoa*) to God, as Samuel stresses. In chapter 15, Saul does not properly fulfill God’s commandment to confiscate everything belonging to Amalek, and in response to Samuel’s questions he justifies his behavior by saying, “And the troops took from the spoil some sheep and oxen – the best of what had been proscribed – to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal” (1 Sam. 15:21). When Samuel rebukes him, Saul asks, “Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow down

2. See also Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Pesulei HaMukdashin* 18:7.

3. This is also true of the continuation of the man of God’s words to Eli in 11 Samuel 2:29.

4. There are many instructive contrasts between Samuel and Eli’s sons. See Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 39–41.

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in worship to the Lord” (15:25).⁵ Samuel’s harsh response speaks to the problem with sacrificing and worshipping God in this manner: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord’s command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams” (15:22).

It is obedience to God that matters. On a deeper level, merely performing sacrifices and making a public display of worship smacks of the idolatrous notion that God can be controlled by means of human behavior. This notion reflects a deep misunderstanding of the institution of sacrifice itself. Sacrifice is supposed to be a reinforcement of a connection with God, and its integrity and efficacy are conditional upon heeding God’s voice and performing God’s commandments.⁶

The book of Samuel thus uses the terms “sacrifice” and “worship” to connect Elkanah’s rote, uninspired behavior with Saul’s sinfulness.⁷ All this highlights the exceptionality of Elkanah’s wife Hannah, the only woman in the Bible who prays for children.

The verses that describe Elkanah’s pilgrimage to Shiloh “from year to year” (*miyamim yamima*) recall an additional, negative context. At the end of the book of Judges we learn about the brutal rape of the concubine in Givat Benjamin, which led to a bloody war between the tribes of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. After this war, the members of the tribes of Israel took an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to

5. This phrasing recurs in verses 30–31.

6. This misunderstanding of the connection to God is also a theme in the people’s war against the Philistines in chapter 4. The people of Israel are convinced that bringing the Ark of God to the camp will save them from the Philistines, but ultimately they are defeated and the Ark is captured. The failure of Saul’s monarchy is also related to a misunderstanding of the role and efficacy of rituals such as worship, sacrifice, and inquiring of the Urim and Thummim. On the symbolism of the Ark in the book of Samuel, see chapter 14 of this book. For more on the nature of Saul’s sin, see chapter 2 of this book.

7. Note how Elkanah remains devoted to his routine pilgrimage in 1 Samuel 1:23. He is perturbed that Hannah is not going to Shiloh at the regular time, though she is nursing, and he warns her to keep to her vow though there’s no indication that she wouldn’t. He departs, but Hannah nurses and raises her son, preparing to fulfill her vow.

the members of the tribe of Benjamin. This meant that the tribe would eventually die out, except that the elders found a solution:

They said, “The feast of the Lord held from year to year is now being held at Shiloh . . .” So they instructed the Benjaminites as follows: “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards. As soon as you see the girls of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the girls of Shiloh, and be off for the land of Benjamin.” (Judges 21:19–21)

The advice of the elders was to allow the members of the tribe of Benjamin to take women from the vineyards of Shiloh by force during the festival that takes place “from year to year” there. The elders based themselves on the misguided oath that the Israelites took not to “give” their daughters in marriage to the members of the tribe of Benjamin, reasoning that the oath did not prohibit the members of this tribe from “taking” wives by force.

Circumventing the oath in this manner was a means of restoring the tribe of Benjamin as part of the nation, but the text seems to be criticizing the elders’ solution. Following the description of the abduction of the women, we find the following verse, which concludes the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased” (Judges 21:25). This verse also appears earlier in Judges, in a context that is clearly negative: “Now the man Micah had a house of God; he had made an ephod and teraphim and he had inducted one of his sons to be his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did as he pleased” (17:5–6).

The ephod and teraphim are idolatrous paraphernalia. Circumventing the oath and seizing women are also indicative of the anarchy that characterizes the entire period of the book of Judges. The large-scale abduction of women – albeit a solution that prevented the extinction of the tribe of Benjamin – was a problematic episode made possible by the absence of a king, and it is part of what the Bible is criticizing. The rape of the concubine led to a tragic sequence of events, all of which bespeak failure and disorder: the misguided civil war which nearly exterminated

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the entire tribe of Benjamin; the murder of those who violated the oath of the tribes; and ultimately the circumvention of the oath by seizing the women of Shiloh, the site of the Tabernacle. It is worth noting that the abduction of the women of Shiloh was an act of force somewhat analogous to the brutal rape of the concubine, which triggered all the events that followed.

At the beginning of the book of Samuel, the description of the behavior of Eli's sons, who lay with the women who came to perform tasks at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, recalls the abduction of the women of Shiloh. The sons of Eli are effectively continuing the tradition of abducting women which took place in the context of the holiday celebrated "from year to year" in the vineyards of Shiloh. This is the depraved routine at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, where Elkanah makes a pilgrimage "from year to year."

Elkanah is a man of "from year to year" in another sense as well:

One such day, Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give portions to his wife Peninah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give a choice portion – because Hannah was his favorite and the Lord had closed her womb. Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the Lord had closed her womb. And so would he do. This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the Lord, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why are you crying and why aren't you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:4–8)

Elkanah showers his wife with love and gives her the largest portion of the sacrificial meat.⁸ He genuinely loves Hannah, but his love is counterbalanced by the behavior of her rival wife, Peninah. The text contrasts

8. The Hebrew term used to describe Hannah's portion – *mana aḥat apa'im* – is rare and difficult. Rashi, based on Midrash Shmuel (Buber, 1:8), explains that it is a reference to a choice portion given graciously. Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi, 1160–1235) comments that it was "a substantial portion to alleviate her anger and fury."

Elkanah's love with Peninah's enmity in two consecutive verses: Elkanah loves Hannah and "the Lord closed her womb," whereas Peninah taunts Hannah "because the Lord had closed her womb." Of course a portion of meat, no matter how large and how desirable, is no replacement for a son, and neither is Elkanah's love. He ostensibly gives Hannah a larger portion in an attempt to improve her situation, but in effect he only makes matters worse, because his extra gifts to Hannah lead Peninah to provoke her, so that ultimately she weeps and does not eat.⁹ Furthermore, it is not just that Elkanah fails to comfort his wife with his love; he is also unable to appreciate the enormity of her distress. The series of "why" questions he asks her in verse 8 are rhetorical, aimed at exhorting her to stop acting that way. It seems that he blames her for being unnecessarily recalcitrant, and perhaps also ungrateful; after all, isn't he better for her than ten sons?

These verses recount Elkanah's habitual behavior: Every year when the family makes a pilgrimage to Shiloh and Hannah weeps, Elkanah continues to respond in the same manner: "This happened year after year." Each year Elkanah entreats Hannah to give up and move on, to find joy in his love and resign herself to her infertility. Notably, Elkanah does not even pray for his wife. Perhaps this is because the language of prayer is foreign to him; he knows only the language of ritual and ceremony: making pilgrimage, bowing down in worship, and offering sacrifice.¹⁰

9. For a trenchant critique of Elkanah's words to Hannah, see Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Book of Samuel* (Van Gorcum, 1993), 29–31.

10. Worship and sacrifice also appear at the end of this story, this time in a more positive context that echoes the story of the binding of Isaac. (For a study of connections between the binding of Isaac and chapter 24, the concluding chapter of 11 Samuel, see chapter 13 of this book.) The end of chapter 1 describes the sacrifice of the bull that Hannah brought, as well as "bowing" and the "lad": "It was this lad I prayed for; and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. I, in turn, hereby lend him to the Lord. For as long as he lives he is lent to the Lord.' And they bowed down there before the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:28). In the story of the binding of Isaac, Abraham – on his way to sacrifice his son – instructs the two lads who accompany them: "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will bow down and we will return to you" (Gen. 22:5). It is worth noting that the identity of the worshipper at the end of the first chapter of 1 Samuel is not stated explicitly, though it is clear that this is not a reference to Elkanah, who is not mentioned at all in the closing verses of the chapter.

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HANNAH AND ELI THE PRIEST

Hannah, who is in “bitter spirits” (*marat nafeshi*; 1 Sam. 1:10), turns to God:

She made this vow: “O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will consecrate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.” As she kept on praying before the Lord, Eli watched her mouth. (1 Sam. 1:11–12)

We will return to Hannah’s vow, but first we will focus on the exchange between Eli and Hannah. From his vantage point at the entrance to the Sanctuary, Eli observes that “only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard” (1 Sam. 1:13), and he concludes that she is drunk:

Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the Lord. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.” “Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.” She answered, “You are most kind to your handmaid.” So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast. (1 Sam. 1:13–18)

Eli’s anxiety about safeguarding decorum in the Sanctuary leads him to misinterpret the condition of the woman standing before him. He

By contrast, the sacrifice and bowing of Elkanah are mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, where Elkanah stands in contrast to Eli’s corrupt sons. The sons of Eli are also referred to as lads: “The sin of the lads against the Lord was very great, for the men treated the Lord’s offerings impiously” (1 Sam. 2:17). This is an additional connection to the story of the binding of Isaac: Just as Abraham’s two lads serve to highlight, by means of contrast, the virtue of Abraham and Isaac, so too Eli’s two sons – the sinful lads – serve to highlight, by means of contrast, the virtue of Samuel.

watches Hannah's mouth, but he cannot see into her heart, which she is pouring out to God. And so he assumes she is drunk. Readers of this text, who already know that Hannah has taken a vow to consecrate her son to God and never to shave his hair, immediately sense the absurdity of Eli's accusation; after all, the nazirite consecrated to God is prohibited not just from cutting his hair, but also from drinking wine.¹¹

Hannah offers a penetrating and acerbic response to Eli: "I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the Lord." It is not wine that pours from her mouth, but rather her inner soul that she is pouring out before God. She asks Eli not to mistake her for a worthless woman – *bat bliyaal* – but the letters in *bliyaal* are a near-anagram of *bnei Eli*, the sons of Eli. Indeed, they are explicitly referred to as *bnei bliyaal* right after her prayer (1 Sam. 2:12). Essentially she is saying to Eli, "I am not like your sons, the sons of Eli, who are worthless."¹² Her response calls attention to Eli's blindness: Though he sees fit to rebuke the blameless Hannah, he fails to reproach his two sons, who are really to blame for dishonoring God.

Although Eli is criticized for failing to rebuke his sons (1 Sam. 3:13), he is otherwise portrayed in a very positive light. We might say that Eli is Samuel's spiritual father. His blessing to Hannah – "May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked (*shaalt*) of Him" (1:17) – contains the kernel of Samuel's name – "She named him Samuel, meaning 'I asked the Lord for him (*she'iltiv*)'" (1:20). Like parents who teach their children how to speak, Eli teaches Samuel how to ascertain when God is speaking to him (see 1 Sam. 3). Further evidence of Eli's righteousness lies in the fact that while the man of God announces to Eli that the members of his household will die prematurely (2:32–33), Eli himself dies "an old man" (4:18), a sign that he was spared the curse that befalls the subsequent generations of his family.

Eli is a good man, but his vision is limited. He is like the hermit in the hermitage who has lost touch with the outside world. In this sense, he resembles Isaac, who remained within the Land of Israel, and whose

11. Cf. Judges 13:4–7 for the parallel story of the heralding of the birth of Samson the nazirite.

12. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 36–37.

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eyes grew dim with age such that he nearly blessed the wrong son (Gen. 27:1). Like Eli, Isaac's physical blindness is also a sign of his flawed perception; neither man can see his sons for who they really are.

SHILOH AND EGYPT

When Hannah prays in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, Elkanah and Eli are unable to see her for who she is. She asks God, who is all-seeing, to look upon her suffering and pain. Her prayer to God, "O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon (*rao tireh*) the suffering of Your maidservant" (1 Sam. 1:11), echoes God's words to Moses during the revelation at the burning bush, where God assures Moses, "I have looked upon (*rao ra'iti*) the suffering of My people in Egypt" (Ex. 3:7–9). Both Hannah's vow at Shiloh and the revelation at the burning bush are foundational encounters that bring about a major transformation for the people of Israel, setting them on a new path. The leaders who arose from each of these encounters – Moses and Samuel¹³ – redeem the nation of Israel from both physical and spiritual straits.

When he stands before God at the burning bush, Moses is sent to redeem the Israelites from Egypt, but this redemption does not initiate freedom on its own. Rather, the Exodus from Egyptian bondage is bound up in and conditional upon the obligation to serve God. As God says to Moses at the burning bush, "And [God] said, 'I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, *you shall worship God* at this mountain'" (Ex. 3:12). The pinnacle of the divine worship into which the Israelites are entering is the establishment of a Tabernacle where the Divine Presence will dwell within the people of Israel: "You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, God, the Sanctuary, O my Lord, which Your hands established. God will

13. The book of Jeremiah (15:1) juxtaposes Moses and Samuel: "The Lord said to me, 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede with Me, I would not be won over to that people,' as does the book of Psalms (99:6): 'Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel, among those who call on His name.' There are many parallels between the story of Samuel and the story of Moses, some of which are noted in the Midrash. See also Amnon Bazak, *1 Samuel: A King in Israel* (Maggid, 2013), 48–49.

reign for ever and ever!” (15:17–18). If so, the book of Exodus describes a process of redemption that begins with Egyptian bondage – servitude to a human ruler – and ends (chs. 25–31, 35–40) in the establishment of the Tabernacle as a site of serving God, the culminating story of the book of Exodus.¹⁴

And yet, rather than serving as a site of divine worship and the apex of redemption, the Tabernacle in Shiloh is essentially Egypt. Just as God did not speak or appear during the years of exile in Egypt, so too in Shiloh, God’s silence resounds: “In those days the word of God was rare; prophecy was not widespread” (1 Sam. 3:1). In place of revelation, silence; in place of morality and worship, corruption and abuse of power.

But still, Shiloh is not enshrouded in total darkness; there is a flicker of light and a glimmer of hope. In fact, within the text we can see that there are striking parallels between God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush and to Samuel at Shiloh. At the burning bush, we find the following account:

A messenger of God appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, “I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?” When God saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: “Moses! Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.” (Ex. 3:2–4)

And here is the account of God’s revelation to Samuel in Shiloh:

In those days the word of the Lord was rare; prophecy [*hazon*, literally, “vision”] was not widespread. One day, Eli was asleep in his usual place; his eyes had begun to fail and he could barely see. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Temple of the Lord where the Ark of God was. The Lord

14. For more on the journey from servitude and redemption to the Tabernacle over the course of the book of Exodus, see Rabbi David Silber and Rachel Furst, *A Passover Haggadah: Go Forth and Learn* (JPS, 2015), 111–12.

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called out to Samuel, and he answered, “Here I am.” He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But he replied, “I didn’t call you; go back to sleep.” So he went back and lay down. Again the Lord called, “Samuel!” Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But he replied, “I didn’t call, my son; go back to sleep.” Now Samuel had not yet experienced the Lord; the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time, and he rose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the boy. And Eli said to Samuel, “Go lie down. If you are called again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.’”¹⁵ And Samuel went to his place and lay down. The Lord came, and stood there, and He called as before: “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.” (1 Sam. 3:1–10)

Just as God calls out “Moses, Moses” and Moses responds, “Here I am,” so too, God calls out to Samuel, and Samuel says, “Here I am.” And just as the small bush burns but is not consumed, so too, the “lamp of God has not gone out” and remains flickering in the Tabernacle.¹⁶

This glimmer of hope – the burning bush in the thicket of Shiloh – is carried forth and nurtured by Hannah. Unlike Elkanah, who comes to Shiloh bearing sacrifices that feed the corrupt industry run by Eli’s sons, Hannah comes to pray. Her hands are empty of sacrifice. Whereas Elkanah makes his pilgrimage routinely, “year after year,” Hannah gives her son to the Tabernacle and instead arrives bearing a coat that she made for her son:

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15. Eli here trains Samuel in how to be a prophet: to listen to God’s message and then to convey it to its intended audience, fully and fearlessly (1 Sam. 3:17). He is Samuel’s master teacher, and Samuel his true, spiritual son. Notably, Samuel does not initially distinguish between Eli’s voice and God’s; the two are conflated for him. This heightens the pathos of the scene where Samuel must inform his master Eli that his family’s fate is doomed.
 16. For an extensive detailing of the parallels between Moses and Samuel, see Yehuda Kiel, *Daat Mikra: I Shmuel* (5741) 108–9; Amnon Bazak, *Parallels Meet: Literary Parallels in the Book of Samuel* (5766), 24–37.

Samuel was engaged in the service of the Lord as an attendant, girded with a linen ephod. His mother would also make a little robe for him and bring it up to him year after year, when she made the pilgrimage with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. (1 Sam. 2:18–19)

Hannah's son is consecrated to God, and as such, his very existence heralds reparation and transformation.

In the Tabernacle in Shiloh, where “prophecy was not widespread,” Hannah asks to see God's presence. In the vow she makes to God, she asks God to look upon her suffering. Then after her son is born, she tells her husband Elkanah that she will wait until after the child is weaned, and then he will appear before God, “for when he has appeared before the Lord, he must remain there for good” (1 Sam. 1:22). The juxtaposition of these verses indicates that Hannah wishes to restore the Tabernacle to its original function as a site where God sees and humanity is seen: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, God” (Ex. 23:17).

Hannah prays for God to see her, and she herself is gifted with the ability to see. She perceives the rot festering in Shiloh and recognizes the urgent need for cleansing and repair. Her clear-eyed perspective is evident from her words to God after the birth of her son, which *prima facie* have little connection to birth at all:

My heart exults in the Lord;
I have triumphed through the Lord.
I gloat over my enemies;
I rejoice in Your deliverance.

There is no holy one like the Lord,
Truly, there is none beside You;
There is no rock like our God...

He guards the steps of His faithful,
But the wicked perish in darkness –
For not by strength shall man prevail.

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The foes of the Lord shall be shattered;
He will thunder against them in the heavens.

He will give power to His king,
And triumph to His anointed one. (1 Sam. 2:1–2, 9–10)

Hannah sings praises to God, who conducts the world in accordance with justice and righteousness. At first glance it is surprising that her words to God are identified as a prayer (“And Hannah prayed”). Typically, a prayer is a request, whereas Hannah speaks words of praise and thanksgiving. But the last part of the final verse of Hannah’s words contain a request, albeit one that is not personal: “He will give power to His king and triumph to His anointed one.” Hannah speaks of a king who will save the Jewish people, and she asks God to strengthen and champion that king. Presumably a king needs strength to realize the ways of God in the world – the ways of justice and righteousness she referred to earlier.

If so, Hannah makes a request of God, and does not just offer praise. She asks that God appoint a worthy king who will have the power and the force to act in accordance with God’s values – a new Moses who will shine light on the darkness enveloping Shiloh. It turns out that the vow she took to consecrate her son to God was a way of overcoming not merely her own barrenness, but also the spiritual barrenness of the people of Israel, by restoring vision and revelation.¹⁷ Hannah asks God for the opportunity to contribute to the repair of the Jewish people and the repair of the world.¹⁸

17. Hannah does not intend for her son to be king. On the contrary, she consecrates him as a nazirite – an ascetic who is disconnected from the past and from society. A nazirite is the opposite of a king, who represents the people and continues the dynastic line. Hannah’s son Samuel will in fact prove to be a strong opponent of monarchy.

18. The Talmud quotes R. Elazar as saying, “Hannah spoke impertinently to God on high” (Berakhot 31b). It is not clear which words Hannah spoke impertinently, but perhaps R. Elazar is referring to this brazen request at the end of her prayer of thanksgiving. Hannah is critiquing the corruption at Shiloh, which was a later incarnation of the Tabernacle whose establishment was commanded by God and inaugurated under Moses’s supervision in the book of Exodus. Hannah in effect promises that if God

Ultimately Hannah's prayer is answered. The book of Exodus and the book of Samuel describe a period of shadow and darkness, but finally, the light of redemption shines forth: The book of Exodus concludes with the erection of the Tabernacle, and the book of Samuel ends with the purchase of the threshing floor at Aravnah – the foundation of the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jebusite city – and the establishment of an altar there, where David offers sacrifices.¹⁹ In the story of the census (11 Sam. 24), the culminating story of the book of Samuel, which we will discuss at length in chapters 11 and 13 of this book, David is revealed to be a king who submits to God's will and realizes God's ways of righteousness in the world.

Why was it Hannah who managed to see what no one else could? How was she able to apprehend another, repaired world beyond the corruption that pervaded the routine operations at Shiloh? The answer, I propose, is that power, control, and self-interest are blinding. Participation in the mechanisms of control erodes our ability to distinguish between good and evil. Hannah, who was both a woman and barren, was far removed from the centers of power. From her vantage point on the outskirts, she had an unobstructed view of the Tabernacle and its operations.

This insight is also relevant to the relationship between Samuel and Saul, and it contributes to our understanding of why Saul's kingdom failed, which we will discuss in the following chapter.

will but grant her a son, she will raise him as a new Moses, who will establish a renewed holy site. This promise is ultimately realized at the end of the book named for her son Samuel, in 11 Samuel 24.

19. There are those who argue that the book of Samuel is really supposed to end with the second chapter of 1 Kings, where Solomon settles his scores with his and his father's enemies. That chapter concludes triumphantly, "Then the kingdom was secured in Solomon's hands" (1 Kings 2:46). See Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, ix–x (Norton, 2000), 363. But the book of Samuel as we know it concludes, as mentioned, with the purchase of the threshing floor at Aravnah, and thus the structure of the book resembles that of the book of Exodus: It begins in Shiloh, a spiritual Egypt, and concludes with the establishment of a sacred site of worship. For more on this notion, see chapter 11 of this book.