

Mardochee Pardieu

OT503 OA/OB – Reading the Old Testament

Spring 2021

4/20/2021

Research Paper

On this paper the reader will be able to revisit the interaction between Samuel and the Elders making their pitch to end the prophetic office that led Israel after centuries in that mode of government. This divine arrangement occurred when Israel originally entered a Covenant with God as His people starting with Moses to Joshua and to the other leaders until the last Judge as documented in the books of Joshua through I Samuel. This intriguing account offers some viable interests that challenge the reader into some inquiries to answer some pertinent questions regarding principles that govern the concept of Covenant. This interaction between Samuel and the Elders can be summarized in these words, *“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”* (I Sam 8:1-9).

The question that we will lead our investigation here is as follows. Is Israel’s asking for a king a violation of God’s Covenant with them? At face value there are some intrincating parts in this passage that deserve some worthy attention. And through the use of a combined of exegetical method that includes a historical criticism process with a cross-textual analysis we

will attempt to answer this question. Such an investigative work will help us fill the gaps that this question here insinuates and will help us settle some conflicting elements in the passage regarding covenant principles. Furthermore, in this investigative work the reader will be able to connect the dots of covenant relationship as we ask these implicative questions:

1. Why did it become a problem for Samuel when he was approached with the request of a king for Israel?
2. Did Samuel have any prior understanding of Covenant principles that led him to be disappointed with the elders representing Israel?
3. Did the Elders of Israel even understand the kingship concept of God in relation to Israel in their covenantal relationship already established?
4. If God had a problem with their response and request why didn't He communicate that to them well in advance, and why did He go on to choose and anoint a king for them afterwards?

As the passage suggests that both Samuel and God expressed a disappointment against Israel when they asked God for king just like the other nations (I Sam 8:5). Clearly this seems to trigger a disdain from God and Samuel, a staunch representative of God. The fact that God responded to Samuel's complaint on Israel's wishes in these terms, "*It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.*" (vs. 7). Such a strong reproof by God against Israel's initiative evidently puts an indictment on their heads in their repudiation of God's solemn leadership. Our literary criticism approach will help us understand the text by allowing us to assemble some contributing pieces to show that God has the right as a Covenant initiator and enforcer to express His sentiment while allowing Israel the freedom of choice in their Covenant relationship that He Himself has established with them. As Boyd

puts it, “It might be said that divine foreknowledge does not does not mean human necessity, for God is said, in human terms in Scripture, to repent of what would be an inevitable course of action in a specific set of circumstances or conditions, when man himself changes his course from a wrong to a right one.”¹

As expressed above the literary task employed and imposed concerned us to look at the “history in the text and of the text” (Hayes and Holladay, 2007). First, the history in the text helps us to infer a transition of the political conjuncture ending the leadership of the Judges into a monarchy. Secondly, the history of the text impels us to see beyond the circumstances describing a grievance of Yahweh toward Israel. Such processes will enable us here to trace back some significant trademarks in the Covenant Relationship that God has established with Israel. In addition, external sources that traced back the term, “covenant” to an Akkadian term, “baru” which can be translated as an obligation (Boda and McConville, 2012).

With this information that one can imply that it was an obligation for Israel to respect the leadership of God as their ultimate King. Further investigative revelations by these researchers explain the irrevocability of covenant obligations from Noah to Abraham to Moses where Israel was to remain under such obligations (Bautch and Knoppers, 2015). Such a strong view of covenantal adherence can indicate to an informed reader that a behavior such as the one exhibited by the Elders is a clear violation of the Covenant between God and Israel refusing something that they had no desire to retain. Although this can be a logical argument, but it does not allow us to make any conclusion yet. Further efforts which

¹, Frank M. Boyd, *Old Testament Studies: Book One Genesis Through Song of Solomaon*, (Missouri, Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1988), 116.

prompt us to apply an intertextuality comparison of this passage invites us to assess other possibilities.

One effort that brought us to exhume the possibility that God was expressing His sentiment instead of a violation by Israel is emphasized here by Boyd in these terms, “such a demand would come was clearly prophesied in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Yet the fulfillment thereof came about naturally.” (Boyd, 116). This crosstextual comparison gives weight to argue that God was projecting another reality with Israel. Clearly, on that text cited by Boyd, we see the pre-planned vision of God for Israel to have a King. In this passage God declared, *“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,” be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.” He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees 20 and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”* (Deut. 17:14-20, NIV).

These literary work whether effectuated with the help of historical and a crosstextual criticism help us to answer the pertinent questions posed earlier. To help us formulate the answers to these questions Hill and Walton opined this way, “The election of Israel as God’s chosen people was an act of grace not an act of Justice.”² This helps us establish that God was sympathizing to Samuel rather than demonstrating remorse. To this we can conclude in answering the four respective questions we asked earlier.

1. Why did it become a problem for Samuel when he was approached with the request of a king for Israel?

First, Samuel seemed to show that he was indignant of the fact that His sons failed to represent God in their responsibility in holding the prophetic office intact of any wrongdoing.

2. Did Samuel have any prior understanding of Covenant principles that led him to be disappointed with the elders representing Israel?

Secondly, Samuel projected the blame on Israel instead of acknowledging before God the injustice perpetrated by his own sons.

3. Did they even understand the kingship concept of God in relation to Israel in them covenantal relationship already established?

Thirdly, although they alluded their wishes to have a king in the same manner as the other nations, the reference in Deuteronomy 17 suggests that they had prior knowledge of God’s vision of a covenantal kingship for Israel.

4. If God had a problem with their response and request why didn’t He communicate that to them well in advance, and why did He go on to choose and anoint a king for them

², Andrew E., Hill and John H., Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*,^{3rd} ed. (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 730.

afterwards?

Fourthly, the reproof of God in His response to Samuel seems to delineate that He wanted to affirm His sovereignty in any Covenant regulations that He has for Israel in times past and in the future.

This exegetical analysis of this passage has allowed us here to dig into the historicity of the passage, but through the crosstextuality strategy employed here we were able to reconcile the presupposition that we felt reading the text at face value. Many other literary tools could have been utilized whether through a canonical or a rhetorical approach, this combined approach applied here was satisfactory to answer the leading question on this research. If we were to extrapolate over this approach it would push to elude some other aspects of God's Covenant with His people. As we reach an ending point here, a pertinent question that can be raised in future investigative work is the degree and nature of man's responsibility in keeping his obligation in the Covenant Relationship with God.

Bibliography

1. Andrew E., Hill and John H., Walton, A Survey of the Old Testament, 3rd ed. (Michigan,

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)

2. Bautch, Richard J., and Knoppers, Gary N., eds., *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015. Accessed April 20, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.
3. Boyd, Franck M., *Old Testament Studies: Book One Genesis Through Song of Solomon*, (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1988)
4. Boda, Mark J., and McConville, J. Gordon., *Dictionary of the Old Testament - Prophets : Prophets*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012. Accessed April 20, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.
5. Hayes, John H., and Holladay, Carl R., *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed., (London, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007)