

Too Much of a Good King: A Judges-Informed Assessment of Saul

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The following article explores the literary connection between King Saul of Israel with judges Jerubbaal, Barak, Jephthah, and Samson in accordance with Saul's comparison to them in the speech of 1 Samuel 12:8-11. When compared with the expectations set for Saul, readers find that he exceeds all expectations, breaks cycles of violence, greed, and tyranny, and acts faithfully to God throughout his kingship. Traditional views turn King Saul into a whipping boy for Davidic virtues, but this article argues that the narrative structure of 1 Samuel portrays Saul as a hero and his fall as a tragedy. In light of his surprising virtue, this article joins the call for a restructuring of thought regarding King Saul's rejection.

Keywords: Judges, First Samuel, Saul (King of Israel), literary criticism

Introduction

Sometimes a figure in a story, meant to act as an unobtrusive stepping stone for the plot, captures the attention of readers. King Saul is one such character. He appears to have inspired Jewish imaginations even in times when adoration of the Davidic dynasty was meant to unite the people.¹ The book of Esther offers a narrative which avenges Saul's failure to slay King Agag, one of the major embarrassments of his reign, and the writings of the apostle Paul even seem to indicate that Saul serves as a figurehead of sorts into the first century for Benjaminite Jews.² The first king of Israel continues to be a relatable and sympathetic icon for some scholars today.³

This abiding adoration for the rejected king appeals to a reconsideration of what brought about his downfall. Standard readings of 1 Samuel leap through the Saul narratives to get to the anointing of the boy David and his miraculous stone throw.

¹ Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary 9, ed. David A. Hubbard (Dallas: Word), 362-3.

² Ibid., 383-4; Philip R. Davies, "The Trouble with Benjamin," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honor of Graeme A. Auld*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 94-8.

³ Thomas R. Preston, "The Heroism of Saul: Patterns of Meaning in the Narrative of the Early Kingship," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 24 (October 1982): 28; Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 59.

However, when the reader pays close attention to the narrative structure of 1 Samuel, they find that Saul is the heart of the entire book.⁴ The claimed basis for Saul's rejection consists of two major episodes. In 1 Samuel 13:8-14, Saul offers sacrifices without Samuel, and in chapter 15, Samuel and Saul have a long emphatic exchange where Saul is accused of disobedience in the way he carries out war against the Amalekites. A third episode pointing to Saul's rejection by some commentators' count occurs in 1 Samuel 14, where Saul breaks an oath that would have led to the execution of his son.⁵

The proposed disobedience of Saul needs to be addressed briefly here in order to justify the current study against views which accept the reasons for Saul's rejection as stated by Samuel and YHWH. As David Jobling points out, the "failure" in 1 Samuel 13 has no precedent and no warning.⁶ The natural way to react is with confusion at what exactly Saul did wrong. In chapter 15, Saul's sparing of the best animals and the king despite the ban is difficult for us to assess. The exact parameters of חָרֵם (*herem*) shift throughout Scripture and other Ancient Near Eastern use.⁷ But, some senses of the word lend to an understanding of the destruction as equivalent to sacrifice.⁸ It is possible that Saul did not think of חָרֵם (*herem*) the same way that Samuel and YHWH wanted him to.⁹ He eventually apologizes for his actions, but not before arguing that he did nothing wrong for some time, which is quite incongruent with his foible in 1 Samuel 13. Since Saul never gives indication of deceptiveness in any of his stories, it is better to understand his defense as sincere and his excuse and apology as coming from his desire to serve YHWH even when he does not understand.¹⁰ The kinds of actions which bring Saul's downfall provoke curiosity regarding YHWH's relationship with David, whose dynasty is unshakable despite mistakes far more grievous than any of Saul's.¹¹

Terrence Fretheim offers that the difference between David and Saul's treatment by YHWH lies in the covenantal expectations of each upon ascending the throne.¹² This theory is helpful but ignores the positive characterizations of Saul and defenses of his rejection narratives. Gunn wrestles with the text to understand Saul's true failure, but

⁴ Preston, 28-30; W. Lee Humphreys, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9-31," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 3, no. 6 (1978): 18.

⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 110-11; Baldwin sums this trend up well offering an interpretation that whatever Saul might have chosen in this scenario would have been wrong, thus displaying the predisposition to find Saul guilty.

⁶ David Jobling, *1 Samuel*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 80, 84.

⁷ Arie Versluis, "Devotion and/or Destruction?: The Meaning and Function of חָרֵם in the Old Testament," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128, no. 2 (2016): 241.

⁸ Versluis, 236.

⁹ David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*, JSOR Supplement Series 14 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield 1989): 124.

¹⁰ Dawn Maria Sellars, "An Obedient Servant?: The Reign of King Saul (1 Samuel 13-15) Reassessed," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 3 (2011): 333.

¹¹ 2 Samuel 11, 2 Samuel 13, 2 Samuel 24.

¹² Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (October 1985): 601.

concludes, “Saul’s rejection is not intrinsically and inevitably the outcome of his actions. Rather, God, given the opportunity . . . chooses to find Saul guilty.”¹³ Jobling picks up this line of reasoning and accuses Samuel of deliberately sabotaging Saul’s kingship.¹⁴ His theory also converges with Fretheim when he proposes that the transitory nature of Saul’s kingship made his rejection inevitable.¹⁵

These scholars have each done remarkable work in their respective treatments but have perhaps underestimated how unexpected the rejection of Saul is from a literary standpoint in the final text of 1 Samuel. As Thomas R. Preston claims, “Samuel, Saul, and David are all intertwined in such a way that they follow the same basic pattern, foreshadowing and reflecting each other as the narrative progresses. And in this mirroring of lives, Saul emerges as the hero of the story.”¹⁶ Intertextuality within Saul’s narrative unlocks this appreciation of the story’s thoroughly positive portrayal of Israel’s first king. The book of Judges breathes an entirely different kind of life into Saul’s narratives and the book of 1 Samuel itself invites readers to make the comparison.

Sam Dragga notes the same intersection of themes in the narratives of the Judges and King Saul. In his assessment, Saul is not a praiseworthy figure, but guilty of cowardice and faithlessness.¹⁷ Dragga’s paper makes some fantastic literary connections, but he is in the company of scholars who make apologies for the clearly amoral actions of the Judges.¹⁸ Appreciation for the tale of King Saul demands a careful consideration of the tales of several charismatic heroes of Israel who came before him, and the way we evaluate those Judges is pivotal to our understanding of the intertextual meaning drawn between Saul and the leaders who preceded him. Those who see the book of Judges as an indictment of Israelite leadership, or at least of several of the key characters, read the book more honestly.¹⁹ I challenge the assumption that their success and the summary statement that they brought peace to Israel means they were exemplary or overall good people worthy of praise. The book of Judges details an ever-worsening cast of people who step up to rescue the nation of Israel and manage to succeed regardless of their own shortcomings and vices. YHWH accomplishes the victory despite the judges, not because of the judges. With this general understanding of Judges, one is prepared to approach a comparative study of these individuals with Saul. Before stepping into the book of Judges though, we must consider Samuel who acts as a natural figure for comparison since he is the leader just before Saul. From his speeches, we gain ample reason for continuing to compare Saul to several other judges.

¹³ Gunn, 27.

¹⁴ Jobling, 85.

¹⁵ Ibid., 252.

¹⁶ Preston, 28.

¹⁷Sam Dragga, “In the Shadow of the Judges: The Failure of Saul,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12, no. 38 (June 1987): 44.

¹⁸ This practice is typified in scholarship by Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2000).

Literary Subversion in the Speeches of Samuel

Samuel sets the expectation for Saul. Because Samuel was the anointer of Saul and previous leader of YHWH's people, the people of Israel and the reader of 1 Samuel will surely be on the lookout for contrasts between the styles and abilities of these two men. Samuel actively drives a dichotomy as he sabotages public opinion of the monarchy. When he is replaced, Samuel still has the trust of the people and uses that authority to instill dread regarding Israel's new king.²⁰

We notice a first glimpse of something wrong when in 1 Samuel 8:1-3 we find that his sons are recalcitrant rogues, eerily reminiscent of the sons of Eli before him. Strange enough on its own is the very position which Samuel's sons fill and the fact that he has placed them there.²¹ What exactly is their role and what right does Samuel have to elect his own sons to such an office?

The people follow up this revelation regarding Samuel's unjust sons with the infamous request that Israel have a human king. Samuel resists this appeal from the start, but at the behest of YHWH he grants their request following a grave warning regarding the character of kings and the fate of Israel should they follow through with this political move. YHWH says, "You shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."²² Samuel speaks of taxation, conscription, ownership, and crescendos his beratement of monarchy by equating living under a king with slavery (1 Sam. 8:17). We can digest this speech without questioning Samuel's character. After all, he is trying to talk his people out of a mistake. However, this will not be the last time that Samuel takes it upon himself to undermine the people's perception of kingship.

Following Saul's first victory and re-coronation, Samuel gives an address to the people. This begins with a justification of his time as leader in which he challenges the assembly of Israel to testify against him in any way. With the LORD and his anointed as witnesses, they refuse to speak against him (1 Sam. 12:3-5). From this position of power, Samuel then "judges" Israel. He reminds them of the ways in which YHWH rescued them from their troubles and he lists specifically four judges: Barak, Jerubbaal, Jephthah, and Samson.²³ He then declares that to ask for a king is to ask that YHWH's position be supplanted—an evil deed. To bring his speech to a dramatic close, Samuel calls for a rainstorm and declares that it will prove to the people their wickedness. In the face of such intimidating words and such a glorious miracle, the people declare, "Pray to the LORD your God for your servants, so that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves" (1 Sam. 12:19).

²⁰ Sellars, 323.

²¹ Antony F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003): 97.

²² Quotations from the biblical text are from the NRSV.

²³ 1 Sam. 12:11; there are some textual variants amongst the names on this list, but presumably Samuel refers to Barak in relation to Sisera, and Samson makes more sense here than Samuel referring to himself.

Samuel's response is peculiar. He exhorts them to continue following YHWH despite their evil choice and promises the continued support of himself and YHWH. But he also remarks, "And do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless" (1 Sam. 12:21). The most straightforward way of understanding this statement is as a warning against idolatry. Deuteronomistic History is exceptionally preoccupied with idolatry and proper worship, but placed here it seems a strange concern. Within the context of this speech and considering the ambiguity of the statement itself, could Samuel be calling Saul or the institution of monarchy a "useless thing?" At the very least, if Samuel is referring to idols when he mentions "useless things" then he implies that a king increases their risk of embracing idolatry.

The sum effect of this speech is a renewed fear of the people for YHWH and Samuel, and a conviction, or at least admittance, that asking for a king was inherently wicked (1 Sam. 12:18-19). It also offers a way for YHWH and/or Samuel to remove the king if the people ever rebel against YHWH or if the king proves to be a "useless thing" which cannot save Israel. The people of Israel must be questioning Saul's legitimacy, if not the need for his position at all. Dawn Sellars, among others, notes Saul's servile attitude toward his citizenry.²⁴ He has been forced into an uphill battle by the negative image painted by Samuel. Placing the speech strategically at the hinge of the pre-David period of Saul's narrative, the story now challenges readers to assess the man against whom this speech is aimed. What do we think of this Saul on whom "the desire of Israel is fixed" (1 Sam. 9:20)? Who is this man that receives a kingship he does not ask for then silently witnesses the people being turned against him by the one who chose him?

Samuel's speech itself offers a means by which we may assess Saul. By mentioning those four judges, the text invites readers to compare Saul to these charismatic predecessors and to see how he stacks up. Is he a hero like these great men of old, or is he unworthy of his calling? Of greatest value would be to find shortcomings with Saul through these comparisons in order to appreciate YHWH's rejection of Israel's first ruler.

Saul and Jerubbaal: Rehabilitation of Reluctant King Motif

Saul and Jerubbaal share some immediately clear similarities.²⁵ They both partake heavily in the "reluctant king" motif, and each present as agrarian in background. When Jerubbaal is called to deliver Israel, he disputes his capacity to accomplish such a feat, listing the weakness of his clan and his own humble position within the clan (Judg. 6:15). Similarly, when Saul is requested for a special feast and sleepover with Samuel, he protests, citing that he is of the least family of the least tribe of Israel (1 Sam. 9:21). They are each called while attempting odd agrarian tasks. Jerubbaal threshes secretly in a

²⁴ Sellars, 329; Also Campbell, 147.

²⁵ I will use the name Jerubbaal rather than Gideon since that is how he is remembered in 1 Samuel 12:11.

hidden place, and Saul seeks his father's lost she-donkeys (Judg. 6:11 and 1 Sam. 9:3, respectively).

Following their callings, both keep their supernatural encounters secret from their family until a dramatic encounter reveals their destiny to all. For Jerubbaal, he is unwilling to destroy the altar of Baal in daylight, revealing his secrecy and hesitation to speak of his calling (Judg. 6:27). Saul keeps the signs he experiences on the way home from his meeting with Samuel to himself, and when the fateful day for crowning the king arrives, he hides from the assembly in the baggage (1 Sam. 10:16, 22).

Another similarity between these two figures is the conflicting reports sprinkled throughout the text regarding their valor. Jerubbaal shows significant hesitation to oppose the Midianites. He tests YHWH twice with the fleece and YHWH still feels it is necessary to grant him the vision of his success from the mouth of his enemy (Judg. 6:36-40, 7:9-11). When Ephraim comes to him complaining that they were not called to battle, he strokes their ego to avoid a conflict, and he is ridiculed by the people of Succoth and Penuel (Judg. 8:2, 6). Yet, we first hear him addressed as "mighty warrior," the foreign kings Zebah and Zalmunna compliment him and his family for looking like kings, and eventually the Israelites will request that he become their ruler (Judg. 6:12, 8:18, 22).

In the same way, Saul is said to be the most handsome man in Israel and stands head and shoulders above everyone else: features which describe him, from a cultural perspective, as a suitable ruler (1 Sam. 9:2).²⁶ Despite this description, we see him act quite insecurely and humbly throughout his kingship.²⁷ There are also those who doubt his capability to be a worthy leader following his first coronation (1 Sam. 10:27). His father is stated to be a rich man, yet when Saul decides to visit the seer, he reveals that his pockets are empty and he must borrow money from his own servant to produce a gift (1 Sam. 9:1, 7-8).

These conflicting characterizations serve to draw readers closer and closer to each respective hero. With every seemingly incompatible report, the text challenges its audience to make an assessment for themselves. In addition, it is a sort of legitimization of the "reluctant king" motif. A humble king is good, but an incapable king is not, so the text must show both the character's own low self-esteem and validate their competence.²⁸ In the Jerubbaal narrative, the tension of the "reluctant king" motif culminates in the request by the people that he be made their king. When he rejects, readers breathe a sigh of relief since this refusal is clearly a show of virtue. Then relief quickly turns to dread as he takes a tax, establishes a cult, gathers a harem, and names one of his sons Abimelech, or "my father is king."²⁹ Most notably, Jerubbaal leads the people into idolatry in a scene reminiscent of the golden calf incident at Sinai (Judg. 8:24-27).

²⁶ Mark Leuchter, "The Rhetoric of Convention: The Foundational Saul Narratives (1 Samuel 9-11) Reconsidered," *The Journal of Religious History* 40, no. 1 (March 2016): 13.

²⁷ A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011): 124-25.

²⁸ Leuchter, 14.

²⁹ Schneider, 127, 130.

So the question becomes, does the same happen to Saul? Does he become prideful and narcissistic in opposition to the humility he once exhibited? We could point to some of his actions toward David, but by that time he is under the influence of YHWH's evil spirit and it becomes problematic to hold him entirely responsible for his actions. Largely, he does not seem to change much in his self-perception and never uses his position as king for his own advantage.³⁰

The last thing we must note when comparing Jerubbaal and Saul is the similar situation they find themselves in prior to an important battle. Dragga notes this connection between 1 Samuel 13, in which Saul begins to lose troops who are fearful of the upcoming conflict with the Philistines, and Judges 7, in which YHWH tells Jerubbaal to thin out the troops.³¹ The first wave of soldiers sent home in the story of Jerubbaal were those who were afraid, which reduces his force to a third of what it began as. He then is told to further reduce the forces by taking only those who lap up water from the stream like dogs. In the same way, Saul's army begins to leave him since they are trembling in fear of the far greater force of Philistines who possess iron chariots and ten times the manpower of Israel (1 Sam. 13:5-8). The torches and jars of Jerubbaal are also echoed in the story of Saul as the story explains how no blacksmiths could work in Israel so that they could not arm themselves (1 Sam. 13:19-20).

Saul waits for seven days for Samuel to appear and offer sacrifices on behalf of the forces, but when at the end of the time allotted Samuel has not come, Saul offers the sacrifice on his own. For his actions, Samuel berates Saul and announces that YHWH will not establish his line because of his rebellion against the commands of YHWH (1 Sam. 13:8-14). As Dragga reads these two stories side-by-side, he praises Jerubbaal for his courage in releasing soldiers at YHWH's command and claims that Saul is the image of a coward for not trusting that YHWH would take care of the fight.³² However, there is a key difference between these two stories. Namely, that Jerubbaal releases soldiers according to YHWH's command, while Saul loses his men because YHWH is silent. If faith in YHWH justifies Jerubbaal's otherwise senseless release of the troops he had just called to battle, then does faith in YHWH not justify Saul's actions? Faith in YHWH is what gave him the courage to stay in position to attack the enemy rather than flee with the deserters. Faith in YHWH is what drove him to wait to hear YHWH's plan rather than enact his own.

If we look at the actual action which Saul performs, this passage becomes perhaps even more baffling. Jerubbaal himself offers multiple burnt offerings to YHWH during his story with his own hands and these are both accepted and requested by YHWH. Furthermore, the exact same kinds of offerings are made by David in 2 Samuel 6:17 with no indication that anything was wrong.³³ Perhaps David offered them through a priest or maybe it was because he had the Ark of the Covenant. In 1 Samuel 14:3, we see that Saul

³⁰ Sellars, 335.

³¹ Dragga, 40.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ Auld, 141.

had access to both of those things as well. His only fault seems to stem from circumventing Samuel in an act of cultic leadership which should be well within his rights as king.³⁴ Finally, it should be noted here that the actual battle which follows this first rejection of Saul is filled with affirmations that YHWH is supporting Israel and even Saul and the son who has freshly been cast aside as heir (1 Sam. 12-15). Over the course of the battle, Saul's force grows from the meager 600 who were left after the offering to an astonishing 10,000 by the time the battle is over (1 Sam. 14:23).

There are a few more minor comparisons which deserve to be noted. After capturing Zebah and Zalmunna, Jerubbaal commands his son to execute the men, but he is too squeamish (Judg. 8:20). This story will later reverberate into 1 Samuel 15 when Samuel executes King Agag, but it deserves to be noted that Jonathan is a gallant, faithful, and brave son, a worthy prince. Saul also shows faith and reliance on YHWH equal to Jerubbaal, with far less testing of YHWH through signs. Overall, Saul's reluctance, though key to his characterization, is far less potent than the constant hesitation of Jerubbaal.³⁵

Saul then, proves to be far superior to Jerubbaal in faith, valor, and morality. The mention of Jerubbaal in 1 Samuel 12:11 was meant either as a high expectation which this new king cannot meet or to foreshadow that Saul would become corrupt and lead Israel to idolatry. Either way, Saul subverts the expectation and surprises readers with his virtue. Thus, the rejection of Saul in 1 Samuel 13 ought to come as a surprise. If Saul is succeeding thus far, then why is he being punished?

Saul and Barak: More Than a Lackey

Saul and Barak are heroes cut from the same cloth in that they are essentially beneath another figurehead. For Barak, this does not cause a significant issue, but detracts from his personal place in his own story. He will forever be a sidekick of the Deborah narrative. In contrast, Saul carves his own path and works from his own initiative. In addition, Saul is simply a more effective leader than Barak was. While this ought to commend him to readers, we are instead surprised by a second denunciation.

Barak and Saul mutually rely on a prophet/judge figure, Deborah and Samuel respectively. Most, if not all, kings seem to have prophets, but Samuel represents a peculiar relationship where the prophet does not serve or even offer advice, but rather is a peer or even rival of Saul. Similarly, besides Deborah and Samuel, no other judges have champions who deliver Israel alongside/for them. This similarity is emphasized by the impressive repetition of Samuel residing in or heading to his home in Ramah.³⁶ Deborah judges under an oak named after her which is said to be between Ramah and Bethel.

³⁴ Jobling, 80. It also deserves to be noted that nowhere is Samuel directly called a "priest." His place in cultic worship is therefore unclear.

³⁵ Leuchter, 14.

³⁶ 1 Samuel 1:19, 2:11, 7:17, 8:4, 15:34, 16:13, 19:18-23, 25:1, 28:3

Deborah takes an impressive role in the leadership of Israel in her narrative. This is underlined by the statements about her in the song of Deborah and Barak where she is called “the mother of Israel” (Judg. 5:7). Besides being a judge, she is also a prophet, one whom the people travel to and listen to. Judges 4 depicts a time of greater centralization than most periods in the book of Judges. Beyond even this, she is a “woman of fire” and willing to head into battle if pressed.³⁷ The way she is treated throughout the story portrays her as a vital part of Israel’s infrastructure and soul. Her place as a crucial leader echoes in the ears of Samuel, who we have seen struggling to maintain his position as the most important figurehead of his people.³⁸

As mentioned, Samuel dubiously elects his own sons to some sort of leadership role and potentially resists the institution of monarchy out of his own desire to remain leader. Once he anoints Saul, he gives the confounding double command, “Do all your hand finds to do,” and, “Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do” (1 Sam. 10:7-8). Saul is made king but remains under constant obligation to “wait” for Samuel before he can act.³⁹ This culminates in the first rejection of Saul in 1 Samuel 13 mentioned above. All indications point to a Samuel who is desperately clinging to what is left of his old authority by bullying the leader of the new regime.⁴⁰

So, Saul and Barak find commonality in being squeezed alongside larger-than-life YHWH representatives whom they must serve. In both stories, the deliverers are called out or chosen by the prophetic figure, but for their respective reasons are then treated as subordinate leaders. The contrast comes when we compare the reasons why they are treated as second-class leaders.

Barak, when told to march into battle, requests the presence of the female prophet/judge, Deborah. In fact, he refuses to go without her (Judg. 4:8). Some commentators claim this as an indication of spinelessness on the part of the men of Israel; they needed women to do the work which ought to be theirs.⁴¹ Susan Niditch argues that taking the Lord’s favored into battle is a wise decision and that there is no shame in requesting the presence of such an impressive woman.⁴² However, it is difficult to understand Deborah’s statement, “The road on which you are going will not lead to your glory,” as anything other than a rebuke (Judg. 4:9). Even if we assume that nothing was specifically wrong with his request, the fact that he made it still detracts from his courage or trust in YHWH and his prophet.

If we contrast that with the wars which Saul wages, we find that he often needed no explicit call to arms from Samuel (1 Sam. 11:5-7). Even when he was commanded to fight a specific battle, he was more than willing to lead the army with his own strength.

³⁷ Niditch and others form convincing arguments that “woman of fire” is a better translation than “wife of Lappidoth.” Niditch, 62.

³⁸ Jobling, 85.

³⁹ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85-86.

⁴¹ Schneider, 70.

⁴² Niditch, 65.

His desire to search YHWH's will before and during battles and the frequent mention of YHWH by Jonathan indicate that Saul's bravado was more than pride, he trusted that YHWH brought victory (1 Sam. 14:6, 18, 23). His conversations with Samuel indicate that Saul respected or at least feared him, yet he never needed to be escorted into battle by him.

Robin Baker argues that one of the primary ways the book of Judges evaluates the individual leaders discussed is on the basis of centralization.⁴³ Essentially, could they unite the tribes? She makes this claim based on the concept of "doubling" as a sign of preference. The first judge, Othniel, brings peace for only 20 years, but Ehud, who manages to unite all of Israel against their enemies, ushers a 40-year peace. Most of the other major judges bring 20 years of peace, indicating that they meet with partial success while Abimelech and Jephthah, who incite civil wars, only reign/judge for three and six years respectively. Based on this theory, the worth of a deliverer is largely based on their success at mustering and commanding the various tribes of Israel.

Every one of the judges against whom Saul is compared in Samuel's speech is unsuccessful at fully uniting the nation. Barak is a notable failure though, since in the song of Deborah several tribes are berated for staying behind rather than helping in the fight against Canaan (Judg. 5:16-17, 23). The first action which Saul takes as king is to call the tribes to war to rescue Jabesh Gilead, and he is wildly successful (1 Sam. 11:7). In chapters 13 and 14 of 1 Samuel, when he faces the Philistines we see him in a more dire situation, but once the tables begin to turn, tribes who had ignored or even turned against him return, and he ends up with an army of 10,000, equal in size to Barak's. The war against Amalek in 1 Samuel 15 seems the best fit for comparison since it was requested by Samuel and because of the positive mention of the Kenites, who also make an important appearance in Barak's narrative (1 Sam. 15:6, Judg. 4:11). Saul manages to muster 210,000 total troops, an impressive force compared to Barak's meager military. In addition, they are listed as being from Israel and Judah, implying a greater degree of centralization than if each clan was listed separately. The lines which separated the tribes are beginning to be blurred, and surely they have their king to thank. Finally, note that while Barak fails to capture the rival commander, Saul succeeds and even takes the enemy king hostage.

By pure comparison with Barak then, we would expect Saul to be rewarded and congratulated at the end of the war against Amalek. He has proved his own might, courage, and faith by waging war for YHWH without relying on Samuel. He has succeeded in summoning impressive armies of Israelites and united the stubbornly divisive tribes. Finally, he has proven his prowess by capturing an enemy king. But despite standing head and shoulders over even such a hero as Barak, the road Saul is on leads to another's glory as Samuel takes it upon himself to slay the enemy leader. Even worse is the second

⁴³ Robin Baker, "Double Trouble: Counting the Cost of Jephthah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 (2018): 38.

beratement which Saul receives from Samuel and the promise that his kingdom will be torn from him.

Saul and Jephthah: An Eye for Mercy and an Arm for Justice

According to Baker, whose theory was previously mentioned, Jephthah is the consummate scoundrel in Judges.⁴⁴ He was twice the reprobate that the wicked Abimelech was. The civil war he begins is brutal in scope and merciless in method (Judg. 12:5-6). If centralization and unity are vital to good leadership, then Jephthah stands in direct opposition to that ideal. In contrast, Saul carefully avoids civil war when his constituents threaten to punish those who had previously criticized him. It deserves to be noted that the people go to Samuel to ask who it was that spoke ill of the king, but before he can answer Saul steps in to calm the people (1 Sam. 11:13). Perhaps this is the narrative's way of pointing yet another finger at the jealous Samuel for being part of the problem. If so, Saul has taken steps to protect one of his greatest rivals. Beyond this, he even makes sure to spare the Kenites when he goes to war against Amalek since they showed kindness to Israel during their wandering (1 Sam. 15:6). Saul proves merciful and gracious while Jephthah commits atrocities against his kinsmen.

When Jephthah is called to go to war against Gilead's enemies, he begins by trying to logically explain his peoples' claim to the disputed land and conclude the conflict through diplomacy (Judg. 11:12-28). Most commentators view this act positively as either a practice of just war or as the means by which Jephthah receives YHWH's blessing as leader.⁴⁵ The act itself does echo just war concerns, but when compared to his treatment of the Ephraimites, his politeness is disproportionate, to say the least. Saul undertakes holy war and zealously opposes his adversaries. The Philistines will receive no request for truce; the Amalekites will see no goodwill. Saul correctly distinguishes between friend and foe by staying his hand against his people and their allies but treating the adversaries of YHWH with utter contempt.

The most poignant points of comparison between Jephthah and Saul are their mutually precarious oaths that require the death of their respective children. Jephthah, on the cusp of battle, vows to sacrifice whatever comes to meet him first on his victorious return (Judg. 11:30-31). His daughter is distraught but is accepting of her own sacrifice. Some have tried to explain this story away by claiming that Jephthah did not in fact kill her, but these arguments are merely wishful thinking.⁴⁶ The operative question for the present study is whether following through with his vow was righteous or wicked. The text

⁴⁴ Baker, 37.

⁴⁵ Niditch, 132-33; Niditch commends Jephthah for his Just War practices while the following speak of his legitimization on account of the diplomacy: Schneider, 173; Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, Word Biblical Commentary 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 286.

⁴⁶ Butler, 292.

is rather clear that the vow itself should not have been made, but once promised, is it valiant that he would follow through at the cost of his only child?

A surprising number of commentators flock to Jephthah's defense and justify his filicide.⁴⁷ The argument is essentially that making a vow to YHWH is a binding agreement and keeping his word was an act of manly and heroic personal sacrifice and faith. By giving up his only daughter to YHWH, he makes an incredible statement about fearing the Lord. This is a reprehensible understanding of this story. A rather simple ethical dilemma is before Jephthah. Make no mistake, whatever he chooses, he chooses disobedience. Either he disobeys through breaking his word to YHWH, or he disobeys by committing an abhorrent act in YHWH's name (Deut. 12:31, 18:10). Rather than honoring YHWH, Jephthah's choice is to honor himself by choosing his vow over the will and law of YHWH. Without engineering a speculative human-sacrifice practice in ancient Israel, the murder of his daughter is indefensible.⁴⁸

The proof of this, as Baker points out, is the slaughter of fellow Israelites which follows this tale.⁴⁹ Notice that each of the three civil wars described in the book of Judges is precipitated by extreme acts of violence by a man on their own families. Abimelech commits fratricide against his 70 brothers, the traveling Levite of Judges 19 offers his concubine to the mob to be brutalized in his stead, and here, Jephthah's daughter is burned to death (Judg. 9:5, 19:24, 11:39). The bloody chaos that ensues after each of these episodes is a clear indictment of those individual acts of brutality.

Saul's rash oath begins when the tide of battle turns in his favor. He curses any soldier who stops pursuing the Philistines in order to eat (1 Sam. 14:24). This backfires when Jonathan, who was not present when the curse was made, eats a handful of honey amid the chase. When Saul seeks YHWH's approval to continue the fight against the Philistines, YHWH is silent. This leads to an inquiry about who has done wrong. Unfortunately, Saul appears to assume that the wrongdoing was of greater proportion than Jonathan's simple mistake. He vows to kill the sinner (1 Sam. 14). When the lot falls on Jonathan, Saul shows remorse but willingness to kill his own son for the sake of lifting the curse and purifying the group. The people defend Jonathan and ransom him. Saul is convinced, or perhaps defeated, and heads home, ending the battle.

While Samuel doesn't arrive at precisely the wrong moment to tell Saul he has yet again wickedly ignored YHWH, there may still be a judgement of Saul's actions in the text. After all, if Saul had been able to continue his campaign, the Philistine threat would have been ended for good. With that outcome, Saul and his sons would not die in the fight

⁴⁷ Niditch, 133-34; Dragga, 41; Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, Anchor Bible 6a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 210; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 14.

⁴⁸ Schneider, 183; Soggin applies the story as "proof" of ancient Israelite human sacrifice practices. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 216-19.

⁴⁹ Baker, 43.

against them in 1 Samuel 31. So Saul, through his curse, vow, and failure to kill his son, seals his own fate by leaving the enemy alive. And yet, this story is flanked by two positive Saul narratives.

Following this anticlimactic finale to the Philistine campaign, we have a glowing summary of Saul's kingship (1 Sam. 14:47-52). While his retinue may be humble, his actions exhibit prowess and moderation: vital qualities for deliverers and kings. Prior to the Jonathan dilemma, we see that as a result of Saul's curse, the soldiers have gone practically mad with hunger. Readers may blame Saul for making a "rash vow," but the word *רָשָׁא*, sometimes translated "rash" (cf. NRSV), is more indicative of the distressed state of his people, perhaps prompting Saul to forcefully act.⁵⁰ Once victory is in sight, he becomes demanding so they will not lose the advantage. Sellars points out that this kind of oath is both normative of the situation and was possibly made to help the soldiers rather than strain them.⁵¹ The prohibition on eating was certainly a strategic failure, but Saul has hardly done anything wrong or even acted the fool. So, when his men begin to pounce on the plunder and devour animals raw to sate their hunger, Saul ought to be praised for bringing order and ensuring that the people follow YHWH's commands. When the people have lost control, Saul helps them regain it.

If we keep these two stories in mind when reading the trial of Jonathan, it affects our perspective. Here, Saul has lost control and is about to commit an act he will forever regret. In the chaos, the people grant him a way out so that he can regain his order and control. Altogether, this is the story of a king in an impressive, mutually respectful, and symbiotic relationship with his people—a man who is listened to, yet also listens to others. There are repercussions for Saul breaking his word, as there might also have been repercussions for killing his own son against the wishes of his men and YHWH. The fact that reports of victory rather than civil war follow this scene indicates that Saul chose the better of two bad options, unlike his counterpart.

Saul is portrayed as a king of mercy and fairness toward his own kingdom but of furious might upon those who threaten it. This is a sharp contrast against Jephthah who offers peace to enemies and slaughters his kin. This distinction is most apparent in the sparing of Saul's son. The episode shows a son willing to die and a father willing to sacrifice, who are ultimately reminded that mercy is the better option. Saul continues to overcome the expectation for failure and prove his worth as monarch.

Saul and Samson, Ready for Duty

Simcha Brooks conducted an interesting comparison of Saul with Samson in which she found several key connections between the two figures. First, she notes that the opening phrase of Samson's birth narrative compared with Samuel's birth narrative is an

⁵⁰ Sellars, 329.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 329-330.

exact match and a unique construction (Judg. 13:2; 1 Sam. 1:1).⁵² She argues that Samuel's birth narrative was originally Saul's, but later redaction applied the story to the favored prophet/judge. Other scholars have made similar points, but here we will simply note that even though it is now Samuel's birth story, it ushers us toward Saul and his rise.⁵³ The repetition of לָאֵשׁ and the themes in the prayer of Hannah set the reader up to witness the rise of a requested warrior-king.⁵⁴ One connection which Brooks fails to mention is that in 1 Samuel 10:3 the prophet tells Saul about some men he will meet on the road home. He explains that they will be carrying wine, bread, and a young goat. These three objects are also present in Samson's birth story: the wine is mentioned as prohibited for Samson and his mother, the kid is offered to the angel by Samson's father, and the angel refuses to eat their "food," which is כֶּמֶן, or literally, "bread" (Judg. 13:14-16).

Brooks continues by comparing the similar episodes where the Spirit of the Lord drove these two men to wrathful violence.⁵⁵ For Samson, when he is threatened by a lion, the Spirit of the Lord empowers him to dispatch the beast. Later, Samson is again filled with the Spirit, resulting in Samson's "hot anger" and the death of 30 Philistines (Judg. 14:19). In 1 Samuel 11:6, Saul's anger is "greatly kindled" and he cuts his oxen to pieces. Both Samson and Saul face Philistines as their primary adversary, and both commit suicide during one last conflict against these foes.

But for Brooks, the most important piece seems to be their mutual experience of betrayal. He goes so far as to claim that the story of Samson is actually a legend-riddle about Saul and David.⁵⁶ His belief is that David is depicted as Delilah and the betrayal which the narrative hints at is the revelation to the Philistines of Israel's strategic vulnerabilities. He claims that the loss of the battle in 1 Samuel 31 is due to the geographical location and tactics employed by the Philistines who conspicuously have the once-champion of Israel at their disposal.

As tantalizing as Brooks' hypothesis is, there is a significant difference between Samson and Saul. Both are called into a position of leadership for Israel to deliver them from their enemies and guide them. However, there is never an indication that Samson cares to take part in his calling or even wants to oppose the Philistines as long as they leave him alone. He has no patriotism and no sense of destiny. YHWH accomplishes his goal by essentially manipulating the situation and provoking Samson's anger against Israel's enemies. Judges 14:4 illuminates the lengths to which YHWH must go so that he can force Samson to accomplish his duty: "His father and mother did not know that this

⁵² Simcha Shalom Brooks, "Saul and the Samson Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21, no. 71 (September 1996): 20.

⁵³ P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 62; for a continued argument for the Saulide origins of the 1 Samuel 1-2 birth story see, Sara J. Milstein, "Saul the Levite and His Concubine: The 'Allusive' Quality of Judges 19," *Vetus Testamentum* 66, no. 1 (2016): 98-99.

⁵⁴ Auld, 34.

⁵⁵ Brooks, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

was from the LORD; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines.” Saul stands in stark contrast with this attitude. Though he is hesitant to accept the position which he is pushed into, he tries his utmost to be a king worthy of his people and of YHWH. He apologizes when he makes mistakes, leaps at the opportunity to rescue his people, and gives everything he has to be the man he was chosen to be. This cannot be overstated: YHWH forces Samson to fulfill his destiny because he tries to ignore it, but YHWH prevents Saul from fulfilling his destiny even though he tries to obey it.

Saul, Abimelech, and the Evil Spirit from YHWH: Cursed but Not Broken

Though Saul was Israel’s first YHWH-chosen king over the centralized nation, Jerubbaal was an experimental and regional monarch. One of his sons, born by a dubious relationship, chose to try and claim his throne following his death. Abimelech seeks the support of the city of Shechem and when he convinces them to support him, he then eliminates possible rivals by slaughtering his 70 brothers (Judg. 9:3-5). Saul and this megalomaniac have little in common, but what they do share is quite significant. They are each beset by a destructive spirit sent by YHWH (Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14).⁵⁷

For both characters, the evil spirit from YHWH is the schemer and primary cause of their downfall. The turning point for the fortunes of both Abimelech and Saul is when YHWH opposes them through this potent force. For Saul, its effect on his mental state and decision making causes all assessments of his character from that point on to be suspect. The means and outcome of this spirit’s influence in each tale are quite congruent. Both men are turned against previous allies and exhibit ruthless means of maintaining their reign. Also, for both men, they are opposed not only by YHWH but also a human opponent who plays a part in their disfavor with YHWH. For Abimelech, one of his brothers escapes his coup and curses Shechem and their new king (Judg. 9:7-21). For Saul, the old prophet/judge takes an active role in cursing and dooming him. Finally, both kings’ lives end in suicide to prevent further dishonor in their death (Judg. 9:52-4; 1 Sam. 31:3-4).

It ought not be overlooked that both Abimelech and Saul hold the office of king over YHWH’s people. It might be easy with the story of Abimelech to assume that the reason YHWH acts is because of his slaughter of his family. However, drawing a comparison between Saul and Abimelech, one would find the title of king is possibly the only thing they have in common. This leads to a conclusion that in these cases kingship is a necessary condition for YHWH to unleash this viciously effective divine agent. Perhaps the deceiving spirit of 1 Kings 22 deserves to be included here, further supporting this verdict. What we find then, is that becoming king over Israel is a dangerous undertaking. YHWH has reserved special means of destroying those who take up the mantle of

⁵⁷ For the purposes of this article I am considering the two spirits congruent, though Abimelech’s is called an evil spirit from Elohim and Saul’s from YHWH.

monarch. Again though, we find a key difference between Saul and these other kings: rather than inherit his throne or take it by force, he was requested. He was chosen.

Saul as Antagonist: Subverting Reflections of Evil

When Saul's affliction begins, his connections to the narratives of the four judges mentioned do not end, but they do radically shift. Rather than taking actions and being in situations comparable to the heroes of the stories, Saul suddenly shifts to appearing comparable to the antagonists. When in 1 Samuel 26 David sneaks into the camp of Saul to express his superiority and convince Saul to turn away, YHWH assists by making the sleep of Saul and his men deep enough to snooze through the invasion. Saul's position is reminiscent of the men of Midian who have Jerubbaal and his servant sneak into their camp to eavesdrop on a conversation. In both stories the hero is affirmed as being the better soldier and ethical example, but Saul's story subverts the expectation set by Jerubbaal's. Saul is not killed by the freshly validated David; he returns home peacefully.

As the fateful battle against Philistia draws near, Saul is desperate to hear from YHWH. After YHWH remains silent despite his constant seeking, Saul finally turns to a spiritist (1 Sam. 28:3-7). Those who practiced divination had largely been driven out by Saul, so she is rightfully wary and skeptical of his intentions. However, when the ghost of Samuel reiterates Saul's rejection, Saul becomes incredibly morose and loses all strength (1 Sam. 28:16-7). His situation echoes Sisera when he seeks shelter with Jael. Much like Jael, the medium gives sustenance to the weary king and restores strength to him and his servants in a motherly way (Judg. 4:19-21; 1 Sam. 28:21-5). Unlike the story of Sisera, Saul is not betrayed, an ending we might have further expected since the medium and Saul ought to be enemies. Furthermore, rather than the episode with the motherly figure coming at the tail end of a failed battle, it precedes it. This scene depicts how Saul managed to replenish his strength and heroism for his final valiant stand.⁵⁸

When Saul perceives that David is planning to usurp him, he expresses hostility and attempts to kill him. David is driven into exile where he travels about raiding for other nations with a band of warriors. Saul is thus painted as the siblings of Jephthah, who exile their brother to keep him from inheriting any of the family possessions. He reverses the expectation set by this story in that he never begs for the return of the hero when he is in peril. Saul handles his crisis without the exiled son. Over the course of David's time in court, he marries Saul's daughter, Michal. When Saul forces him into hiding however, Saul decides to marry his daughter to another man. The new husband, Palti, son of Laish, echoes back to the migration of Dan, the tribe of the recently deceased Samson.⁵⁹ Dan moves from southern Israel to the north by conquering and claiming the town of Laish (Judg. 18:27). Furthermore, Samson meets the same fate as David. When he leaves angry

⁵⁸ Preston, 36-7.

⁵⁹ Perhaps of note is the meaning of Palti's name "to escape" and Laish, "lion." Could this be a subtle statement that her separation from David was more of a fortunate and timely liberation?

from his wedding feast, his father-in-law marries the girl to another man (Judg. 15:1-2). Samson even brings a young goat as a gift for his wife's family, like the goat hair that Michal uses to cover David as he escapes (1 Sam. 19:13). Again, the story makes us expect death for Saul, specifically by being burned alive like Samson's father-in-law. Perhaps these allusions are here to create even more anticipation for the coming demise of King Saul.

Saul and the Israelite Civil War: Redeeming Benjamin, Reuniting Israel

The most radical reversal that Saul executes is that of the corruption of Benjamin. Some argue that the relationship goes in the reverse, that the story of the civil war in Judges is an indictment of Saul's kingship.⁶⁰ However, there remains at least a possibility that the Saul narratives were written to respond to the legend of the civil war, so the statement the text makes when read in synchronic order deserves to be explored. Notice that the first act of Saul involves sending the pieces of a bull to the leaders of Israel to shock them into following him into battle (1 Sam. 11:7). When the body parts of a brutalized woman are used to call Israel to war in Judges 19, Benjamin was the target. Now a Benjaminite is the herald. After Benjamin is nearly wiped out in Judges, the people regret the massacre and destroy Jabesh Gilead, leaving only the virgin girls alive as wives for the remaining Benjaminites to rebuild the tribe (Judg. 21:6-13). Saul's call to war is with the goal of rescuing Jabesh Gilead. At the end of Saul's life, it is men from Jabesh Gilead who pay him the final honor of retrieving his body from the Philistines and burying his family (1 Sam. 31:11-13). Saul reverses the moral bankruptcy of his ancestors, repays their victims, redeems his tribe, and reunites those who should be enemies. Is there any better demonstration of the worthiness of a king than this?

Conclusion

In Samuel's first speech, he creates the expectation that this king will be tyrannical and self-serving. This could not be further from the truth. He listens to the people's wishes and advice as he carefully navigates the untouched waters of ruling Israel. So, because Saul is supposed to be megalomaniacal, his humility and deference ought to be considered virtuous, reversing the expectation.⁶¹ Samuel's next speech warns that the king must fear YHWH, with the most emphasis on resisting idolatry. When Saul continues to rely on YHWH even after YHWH rejects and sabotages him, we have another reversal of a negative expectation.

⁶⁰ Milstein, 96; Leuchter, 11. The transmission history argued by this school of scholars seems mostly founded upon presumption for a late dating of the tribal designations and backgrounds. However, there are many more complex factors present when considering the sources underlying the Deuteronomic history.

⁶¹ Sellars, 320-22.

When we compare Saul with any of the judges, we find that he is equally capable of delivering the people and bringing peace. He is even more successful than any of the judges when it comes to centralization of the tribes. When compared with Jerubbaal we find that Saul does not succumb to greed by living in excess.⁶² He reverses the expectation placed on him through comparison with Barak by displaying initiative and self-reliance. When compared with Jephthah, we see that Saul's willingness to listen helps him avoid making the mistake of overzealousness. He also avoids the flaw of Samson in ignoring his calling and purpose. Also, with a son just as, if not more, virtuous than himself, Saul subverts the cycle of leaders with wicked sons and, in at least one area, supersedes every Israelite leader before and after him.

The findings of this article serve best as a stepping stone into deeper study of this narrative from new angles. I believe there are two especially fruitful ways to follow up on the current study. The intertextual and literary dynamics of Saul's narrative demand first that readers apply diachronic methods to unravel the purposes of the Saul narratives at their various theoretical stages. Surely, this reading was not the intention of a redactor attempting to propagandize David's reign. Here, one finds utility with historical critical and form critical methodology to clarify the multivalence present in the final text. Second, the reading proposed in this article demands theological review. Authors like Dunn and Jobling, following conclusions that the traditional rejection reading of Saul's kingship is insufficient, search for a better explanation of what occurred. Jobling uses Samuel as a scapegoat for Saul's tragedy, and Dunn focuses on the difficulties present in any transitional scenario as the underlying cause for Saul's rejection. Neither of these answers appear sufficient as they ignore the agency of YHWH in the narrative. If both Saul and David are chosen by YHWH, and one is rejected despite virtue while the other is glorified despite failure, one must ultimately demand an explanation from YHWH.

At the end of this expansive intertextual reading of Saul's kingship, belief in a wicked and recalcitrant Saul becomes untenable. Saul's life and death are presented as straightforward tragedy rather than the moralistic anecdote which traditional commentators would make them. From a synchronic perspective, the Hebrew Bible holds Saul up as precisely the answer to what the Israelites sought in asking for a king. Furthermore, Saul was precisely what Samuel did not believe a king could be according to his warning speeches. The rejection of Saul stands as one of the most unexpected acts of YHWH by Deuteronomistic measures, a baffling end to the life of a humble, potent, and valiant hero of YHWH's people. In 1 Samuel 2:10, Hannah prays, "The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed." Just as Saul subverts the negative expectations for his rule, YHWH subverts the positive expectations for his relationship with Saul. Readers are left dizzied, disappointed, and

⁶² The laws for kings in Deut. 17:14-20 are primarily concerned with moderation, a requirement which Saul is in scarce company for satisfying. Compare the laws with the summary of Saul's kingship in 1 Sam. 14:47-52.

despondent with nothing but a tumultuous Davidic line on the horizon. As with most deep and honest studies of the Hebrew Bible, as one draws close to the story of YHWH's relationship with Saul, one finds not an encouraging affirmation, but a crisis of faith.

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