

Criticizing Samuel, the Judge and the prophet

In this paper, I will examine 1Sam 8:1-22, which belongs to the Pre-Deuteronomist (Pre-Dtr).¹

1. Many scholars suggest their opinions for the history of Deuteronomistic history and they assert it differently and call its historian with various terms.

	Benzinger	Burney	Stade, Sanda	Eissfeldt	Jepsen	Smend	Cross
622 _{BCE} [↑]	R ¹	R ^D		Dt			Dtr ¹
597 _{BCE} [↑]	R ²		R(Stade)				
586 _{BCE} [↑]			R(Sanda)	Dt ²	R ¹ R ²	DtrG, DtrP DtrN	Dtr ²
539 _{BCE} [↑]		R ^{D2}		R			

(This chart is made according to R. D. Nelson, *The double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 14-28.)

Although many theories are suggested, all theories are based on the so-called Deuteronomic history or theology which went through the stage of oral transmission, and those historical events were collected anachronously by the scribes called Deuteronomistic historians or Deuteronomic school by the later generation (R. F. Person, *The Deuteronomic School History, social Setting, and Literature* (Studies in Biblical Literature 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 83-102). According to Amit, archaeological evidences show that in the 8th century BCE scribes worked dynamically inside and outside of the royal court in Israel (Y. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* (The Biblical Seminar 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 26-27). The major event in the 8th century BCE was the Assyrian invasion. During the Assyrian conquest (722 BCE), much of the population of the northern kingdom, Israel, moved to the southern kingdom, Judah. Along with the population came down the contemporary world-view into Judah. Those influxes gave impetus to Hezekiah's reform (R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: From the Beginnings to the End of the Exile* (trans. J. Bowden; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1992), 180). It is difficult to trace what theology Hezekiah's reform was based on, but it is clear that the historical shock that the Judaites received caused the reform (F. A. J. Nielsen, *The Tragedy in History: Herodotus and the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 251; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 107-114). In those days, preaching prophets appeared and scribes copied and collected wise sayings and earlier

This story is well-known as "the right of the king" or "the demand for a king".² I will analyze this text and aim to show that from the perspective of Pre-Dtr toward the prophet, Samuel, we can find some criticisms against him.

1. Sons of Samuel, Joel and Abijah, were the judges of Beersheba

The Book of Judges shows God as interfering directly at every stage of the history of Israel. Judges are charismatic leaders: military heroes, prophets, and decision makers. It is believed that they have God-given knowledge.³ Although they are leaders of the Israelites, the governing system, Judge, is different from that of monarchy. Unlike kings, judges lack the ability and authority to establish a sustainable bureaucracy. It means that their responsibility is to form short-term organizations such as an army marshaled to address immediate threats or needs.⁴

The Israelites' judgeship is not hereditary. This can be seen in the Book of Judges. For example, the story of Gideon describes negatively about kingship. After the battle against the

traditions. From Hezekiah's reform to Josiah's period, for about 100 years, those earlier traditions collected and copied become systemized into so-called Pre-Dtr sources (Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, 28-29).

2. R. W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 72-79. P. K. McCarter, *1 Samuel: a new Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 153-163. A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 96-97.

ש. בר-אפרת, שמואל א (מקרא לישראל ירושלים: מאגנס, תשנ"ז), 122.

3. S. Niditch, *Judge: a Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 1-3.

4. J. Kaplan, "1 Samuel 8:11-18 as 'A Mirror for Princess'," *JBL* 131[4] (2012): 625-642.

Midianites, the Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them. To make Gideon's family a ruling dynasty is effectively to make him a king.⁵ However Gideon denied their demand and proclaimed, "YHWH alone shall rule over you (JPS)" (Judg 8:23b). The Book of Judges expresses a negative viewpoint toward kingship indirectly.⁶ Contrary to Gideon, Samuel passed on his judgeship to his two sons, Joel and Abijah. Samuel is an extraordinary character in the Hebrew Bible. He is a judge, a priest, and a prophet. The priesthood could be inherited while judgeship and prophethood are not inheritable. Nonetheless Samuel passed his judgeship on his two sons: "He (Samuel) appointed his sons judges over Israel (JPS)" (1Sam 8:1b).

וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־בָּנָיו שֹׁפְטִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: (1Sam 8:1b)

Moreover, Samuel failed to educate his sons like Eli, the previous priest and judge (1Sam 2:11;

5. B. G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 262. Buber explains the story of Gideon and calls it "Gideon paradox." The Israelites asked Gideon hereditary rulership of the house of Gideon. Buber and other biblical scholars evaluate the rulership that it is actually a kingship. Although Gideon declined the demand of the Israelites, Gideon's sons tried to gain the hereditary rulership. cf. Martin Buber, *Kingship of God* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967), 59-65.

6. י. אמית, ספר שופנים: אמנות העריכה (ספריית האנציקלופדיה המקראית ו; ירושלים: ביאליק, תשנ"ב), 90-92. Amit suggests a fresh look to understand Gideon's refusal in Judg 8:22-23. The demand of kingship was caused by military reason because *איש ישראל* demanded Gideon dynasty after defeating the Midianites. According to Amit, Gideon refused the monarchical kingship because it was offered by *the men of Israel* *איש ישראל*. She suggests that in Judg 8 *איש ישראל* should be understood as a military term and they are military group, especially *the men of five tribes, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Ephraim*. Therefore, Gideon refused to rule over *איש ישראל* because only the army of five tribes demanded it. Amit explains, "Gideon refused the offer, for he knew that power not supported by general or at least majority agreement would lead to a struggle that might end in a bloody civil war." Y. Amit, *In Praise of Editing in the Hebrew Bible* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 39; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 122-130.

4:18).⁷ The fate of Eli's house was tragic (1Sam 4:11,18,19-22) and the evaluation of Eli's house is not positive in the Book of Samuel. The bad reputation is originated from his son's illegal and blasphemous behaviors but 1Sam 3:10-14 shows that the real problem is, "he (Eli) did not rebuke them" (1Sam 3:13bβ). Samuel already saw the tragedy of Eli's family but Samuel did as Eli did.⁸

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר זָקַן שְׁמוּאֵל וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־בָּנָיו שֹׁפְטִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: (1Sam 8:1)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הֲנֵה אַתָּה זְקֵנָה וּבָנֶיךָ לֹא הִלְכוּ בְדַרְכֶיךָ עִתָּה שִׁמְהֵלְנוּ מִלְּךָ לְשֹׁפְטֵנוּ כְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם: (1Sam 8:5)

Although there was no king in the period of judges, Samuel already played a role of a king.⁹ Pre-Dtr points out this problem. Pre-Dtr uses the term "to appoint" in Hebrew מ"ש in 1Sam 8:1: "When Samuel grew old, *he appointed* his sons judges over Israel (JPS)." Purposefully Pre-Dtr places the Hebrew root מ"ש in 1Sam 8:5, "and the people said to him, "You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore *appoint* a king for us, to govern us like all other nations

7. H. W. Hertzberg, *I&II Samuel* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 71. Tsumura also accepts that Eli was a judge but regarding his sons they were not judges but priests. However, Tsumura suggests that the narrator of the Book of Samuel accepted the story of Eli's two son and it is reminiscent of the sons of Samuel (cf. D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 245). Nonetheless, in spite of Tsumura's explanation, I think that Hophni and Phinehas are succeeded their father's both function. As to domestic policy, Eli was priest of YHWH at the central sanctuary at Shiloh. At the same time in the area of foreign policy, he was the leader in the conflict with the Philistines. The battle against Philistine in which Hophni and Phinehas were killed shows their leadership which seems like that of judges (cf. W. Dietrich, *The early Monarchy in Israel: the Tenth Century B.C.E.* (Biblical Encyclopedia 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 12-13).

8. K. Bodner, *1 Samuel: a Narrative Commentary* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 19; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 69-70. Dietrich, *The early Monarchy in Israel: the Tenth Century B.C.E.*, 15.

9. Gordon asserts that 1Sam 8:1-3 shows "little dynastic experiment." R. P. Gordon, *1&2 Samuel* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 109. D. Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 62-63.

(JPS)."" To use the same verbal root שי"מ is Pre-Dtr's intention.¹⁰ The judges were chosen by God for specific missions, and were criticized according to their behaviors. Now from the viewpoint of Pre-Dtr Samuel's behavior was that of a king and it should be criticized.¹¹

2. The matter was evil in Samuel's eye

According to English translation, 1Sam 8:6a α is translated "Samuel was displeased (JPS)" but its literal translation is "The matter was evil in *Samuel's* eye."

(1Sam 8:6a α) וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי שְׁמוּאֵל

The correction of the translation is very important because the literal interpretation clarifies that it is not YHWH but Samuel who does not like the Israelites' demand. The demand of the elders of the Israelites could be interpreted in two ways. The first way is the rejection of the God-given institution of judgeship and the second way is a personal betrayal against Samuel and his family.¹² As 1Sam 8:20 proves that the Israelites need a king "like all the nations" ככל הגוים. To establish monarchy was an international trend and continuation of the period of the judges was impossible because judgeship could be a long-term solution as the case of Samuel's sons clearly shows. In

10. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 245.

11. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, 43.

12. Bodner, *1 Samuel: a Narrative Commentary*, 71.

viewpoint of the elders of the Israelites judgeship is not a good system because the system was not stable.¹³ The solution was to establish a different type of leadership. The Israelites found it from the surrounding nations. That was king.¹⁴ Therefore, they rejected the institution of judgeship that symbolizes theocracy and demanded a human king. They were eager for a change in governing system from judgeship to kingship.¹⁵ However, Samuel considered the elders' demand as a personal betrayal and prayed to God, not for interceding on behalf of the Israelites, but to complain.¹⁶

Some danger in the ruling system of judges and one of them are that the Israelites would misinterpret the judge as a king (Gideon's case) or a judge would behave like YHWH (Samuel's case).¹⁷ In the case of 1Sam 8:6, Samuel was not pleased with the Israelites' demand of a king as could be seen in his prayer. Samuel was a judge but he emotionally reacted at the Israelites and behaved like God of Israel. Though similar story is found in Judg 8:22-23, Samuel's case is different from that of Gideon because the reason why the Israelites asked a king in Judg 8:22-23 is that they misunderstood the victory against the Midianite as their own achievement, especially Gideon's excellent strategy and gallantry. Obviously the Israelites failed to honor the true Savior, God of Israel.¹⁸ On the contrary, in 1Sam 8 the corruption of Samuel's sons motivates the demand of a king. Furthermore there is another

13. Regarding the stability, Amit points out two proves: (1) Elders' judgments are not authoritative any more. Here and there voices of dissent are found. (2) It is difficult for twelve tribes to call up every tribe in a battle.

14. Dietrich, *The early Monarchy in Israel: the Tenth Century B.C.E.*, 15.

15. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 250. Moreover, Amit clarifies between judgeship and kingship. According to her explanation monarchy assigned the central and crucial position to the king while judgeship is based on God's ruling and His kingship. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, 41.

16. P. D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: a Literary Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.

17. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, 42-43.

18. י. אמית, ספר שופנים: אמנות העריכה (ספריית האנציקלופדיה המקראית ו; ירושלים: ביאליק, תשנ"ב), 91-92.

.Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 263

practical cause. It is that the Israelites wanted to be like other nations (1Sam 8:20).¹⁹ Samuel did not accept their demand of kingship as the demand of a new political system and without an excuse for his sons' corruption before the Israelites Samuel prayed with a personal complaint.

Pre-Dtr exposes his attitude through this story. Samuel is the agent of YHWH. He delivers YHWH's messages to the Israelites and they accept his messages as YHWH's speech. A judge delivers the Israelites because he is sent by YHWH. However the deliverer is not the judge but YHWH. Although Samuel saw the Israelites' demand as being illegitimate, only YHWH judges what is good or bad. However, Samuel already makes judgement on the Isarelites' demand before asking YHWH .

3. Heed the demand of the people

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמְרוּ אֵלַי
כִּי לֹא אֶתְדָּף מֵאֶסוּ כִּי־אֶתִּי מֵאֶסוּ מִמֶּלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם: (1Sam 8:7)

If Samuel's prayer was to reject the Israelites' demand or punish them, YHWH's response was a surprising one. In 1Sam 8:7a, YHWH's response is negative to Samuel. YHWH responded to Samuel and commanded him, "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you (JPS)." According to the cycles of Judges, it is time to punish them and raise a new judge.²⁰ Instead of

19. T. W. Cartledge, *1&2 Samuel* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 7; Macon: Smyth&Helwys, 2001), 112.

20. Amit asserts that the editor of the Book of Judges has some cycles: (1) Three stages model: sin,

electing a new judge or punishing the Israelites, however, YHWH accepts the Israelites' demand. This response was more positive to the Israelites. Some scholars suggest that this is a silent struggle between Samuel and YHWH because as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Samuel ranked himself in the level of YHWH and he was outraged by the Israelites before asking YHWH's decision.²¹

Pre-Dtr explicates the reason after the conjunction, "because" בִּי.²² The Israelites reject YHWH (YHWH or YHWH's kingship) not Samuel (YHWH like person—personal betrayal). "It is ME they have rejected as their king (JPS)." It is a stronger reason for the Israelites to reject judgeship.²³ However in v.6 Samuel sits on the chair of YHWH and thinks that they refused Samuel himself. Pre-Dtr reveals Samuel's blasphemous attitude.

4. Samuel's oration of negative kingship

Samuel's oration regarding Israel kingship מִשְׁפֵּט הַמֶּלֶךְ is very negative. 1Sam 8:11-16 looks like the manual that explains what a king would do.²⁴ It seems that Samuel and Israelites' elders were aware of the norms of ancient Near Eastern kings (1Sam 8:20).²⁵ In Egypt a king himself was a god

punishment, and deliverance—Samson. (2) Four stages model: sin, punishment, salvation, and peace—Tola. (3) Five stages model: sin, punishment, crying out, deliverance, and peace—Othniel, Ehud, Debora and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah. Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (BibInt 38; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 35-45.

21. Dietrich, *The early Monarchy in Israel: the Tenth Century B.C.E.*, 31-32.

22. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 251.

23. Miscall, *1 Samuel: a Literary Reading*, 48.

24. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 254.

25. According to Mendelsohn, the role of kings described in 1Sam 8:11-18 is similar to the Canaanite pattern of

and in Mesopotamia a king was a god's agent or a priest.²⁶ If Samuel already knew about the role of kingship in ANE, it could be supposed that Samuel was afraid of losing his priesthood as well as leadership.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגְּדָה אֵת הַזְּקֵנִת וּבְנֵיָהּ לֹא הָלְכוּ בְּדַרְכֵיךָ עִתָּה שִׁמְהָ לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשֹׁטְנוּ כְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם: (1Sam 8:5)

The king whom the Israelites demand will rule over (שפ"ט) the Israelites. The root of 'rule over' שפ"ט shares the term 'judge' שופט. Therefore, Samuel bore in mind that the king of Israel would replace the place of judges. Nevertheless, it did not mean for Samuel that the Israelites simply wanted a king besides a judge because Samuel is not only a judge but also a priest. Henceforth, for Samuel it is possible to suppose that the demand of kings is depriving of his political leadership and sacral priesthood.²⁷ It is possible to suppose that the demand of kings is the denial of YHWH's kingship while from Samuel's viewpoint it is a depriving Samuel's political leadership and priesthood. In this light, the oration of Samuel could not be positive to kingship. A number of scholars suggest that 1Sam 8:11-18 represents the actual ideology of Samuel.²⁸

feudalistic kingship in which the king's subjects were regarded and treated as his slaves. Especially, he discusses the correlation between Ugaritic kingship of the 18th-13th BCE (cf. I. Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of Akkadian Documents from Ugarit," *BASOR* 143 (1956): 17-22). Later Leuchter also follows Mendelsohn's assertion. He also suggests that Samuel and the Israelites already knew the kingship that Hatti, Egypt and Ugarit showed (cf. Leuchter, Mark. "A King like all the Nations: The composition of I Sam 8,11-18." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117 (2005): 543-558).

26. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, 42.

27. Leuchter, *A King like all the Nations: The composition of I Sam 8,11-18*, 544. Jobling explains that Saul's military activity in 1Sam 11:1-11 is very much like that of a judge. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 66.

28. Leuchter, *A King like all the Nations: The composition of I Sam 8,11-18*, 544.

וְזַעַקְתֶּם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא מִלִּפְנֵי מַלְכְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתֶּם לָכֶם וְלֹא־יַעֲנֶנּוּ יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא: (1Sam 8:18)

Samuel's unfurled fury is shown in v.18. Samuel mentions the king whom the Israelites will choose בחרתם. Although the elders demanded to raise up a king (1Sam 8:5b), they had never chosen a king before. The ONE who anoints a king is YHWH. Contrary to Samuel's personal fury, 1Sam 10:24 proves that YHWH Himself chose Saul, the first king of Israel, whom Samuel anointed (1Sam 10:24; 9:16).

בָּעֵת | מָחָר אֲשַׁלַּח אֶלֶיךָ אִישׁ מֵאֶרֶץ בְּנִימִן וּמִשְׁחַחְתּוֹ לְנִגִּיד עַל־עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־עַמִּי מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים

כִּי רָאִיתִי אֶת־עַמִּי כִּי בָאָה צַעַקְתּוֹ אֵלַי: (1Sam 9:16)

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם הִרְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְבּוֹ יְהוָה כִּי אֵין כָּמֹהוּ בְּכָל־הָעָם

וַיִּרְעוּ כָל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ: פ (1Sam 10:24)

Moreover, Samuel addresses, "the LORD will not answer you on that day (JPS)." How does he know that YHWH will not answer? Did YHWH tell Samuel about the matter? YHWH clearly accepts the Isarelites' plea and HE chooses a king for them. Samuel, however, makes ambiguous the position of the king YHWH will choose.²⁹ Even Saul, the first king of Israel, did not live as Samuel had orated in 1Sam 8:11-18. Pre-Dtr reveals the human weakness of Samuel, to whom YHWH says, "*Heed their demands and appoint a king for them (JPS).*"

29. Dietrich, *The early Monarchy in Israel: the Tenth Century B.C.E.*, 18.

Conclusion

In the days of Samuel, he held the highest position in the society. The position of a prophet was higher than a king because YHWH reigned—HE was the real king of Israel—and YHWH showed His will through the prophet, even as HE appointed a human king.³⁰ However, it is clear that a prophet is not higher than YHWH and he is not YHWH Himself. Because of a prophet's higher position than any others, sometimes he makes a mistake to think himself as YHWH. Samuel erred seven times when he visited Jesse's house in order to anoint a new king (1Sam 16). In short, Pre-Dtr reveals Samuel's mistakes in 1Sam 8:1-22 in order to show that a prophet is utterly dependent on his sender, YHWH, without saying that the king of Israel is a mere man and circumscribed by prophets.

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30. Y. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* (The Biblical Seminar 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 46-47.

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