



I SAMUEL



DALE RALPH DAVIS





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LOOKING ON THE HEART

'The best expository commentary I have read in years.'

Eric Alexander



DALE RALPH DAVIS



CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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Preface

Writing a commentary on the Books of Samuel, 1 Samuel in particular, is like facing Goliath: such a massive bulk of questions and dilemmas stand in one's way. For example, one can't help but be intimidated by the spate of recent studies, both articles and monographs. One can hardly read everything and write something. Then there are numerous textual difficulties and an ongoing discussion over the corruption of the traditional Hebrew text and whether the fragments of Cave 4 Qumran show a more excellent way. Or how is one to evaluate supposed sources and complexes (Shiloh traditions, the Ark Narrative, the Saul Cycle, the History of David's Rise)? How many tentacles does the Deuteronomistic octopus—that ubiquitous mascot of current Old Testament studies—have wrapped around the Samuel materials? And how ought one to evaluate historical issues like the rise of kingship in Israel and the seemingly conflicting attitudes toward it? Maybe Goliath has swiped David's stones and is pelting students with them!

However, I feel compelled to ignore direct and extended discussion of these matters. Not because I am ignorant of them or want to demean scholarship. (In fact, I used to become exasperated with students who refused to wrestle with such problems.) But I have my reasons: 1 Samuel is a long book and I do not want to bog down in such details; the reader can find discussion of critical issues in the introductions of many





commentaries, in books on Old Testament introduction, or in articles in standard Bible encyclopedias—no need to repeat it all here; and since I have had to spend so much time in the past focusing on historical and critical questions, I have the right to have some fun. That is, this time I want to eat the cake, not look at the raw eggs. Hence *Looking on the Heart* concentrates on the literary quality of the narrative and, especially, on the theological witness of the text.

I might say that I regard the work as a theological (or, if you prefer, an expositional) commentary. It is not a devotional or a homiletical commentary. I have cast the exposition in homiletical form because I think it helps digestion and coherence. But these expositions are not sermons even though illustration, application, and exhortation appear. I believe the commentator, no less than the preacher, has the right and the duty to do something with the truth and life claims of the text. I will plead guilty to having preached many 1 Samuel passages, but that was often done in a different form than appears in this commentary. I am grateful for the encouraging response to my previous volumes on Joshua and Judges—I have discovered that the Lord's people from Idaho to New Zealand delight in his word!

I assume the reader will have Bible in hand as he or she uses this commentary. I have made use of a number of English versions; if no version is specified, the translation of the biblical text is my own.

This volume must be dedicated to our three sons, Luke, Seth, and Joel, with thanks for the entertainment and education they have given me and in prayer that they press on in the faith each has professed. You then, my sons, keep on being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1).

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Abbreviations

BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IDB/S	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/Supplementary Volume
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia





JB	Jerusalem Bible
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint
MLB	Modern Language Bible (New Berkeley Version)
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures
According	to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TEV	Today's English Version
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
ZPEB	Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible







Introduction

Where Shall We Cause Division?

It was a whole chicken; and it was in the early years of our marriage. My wife was an excellent cook and had frequently baked or fried chicken, but always chicken that had already been chopped into its respective pieces. She was perplexed. Was there an orthodox way, known to those in the know, by which a chicken ought to be dismembered? So Barbara left the Presbyterian manse to inquire of our Baptist neighbor next door. Mrs. Jenny was a delightful soul, a veteran of many seasons on the farm. Her tear ducts worked overtime, so that she seemed to be crying even when not sad. And she was not sad but highly amused that a neophyte cook would seriously inquire about the proper way to hack up a whole chicken.

But biblical materials matter more than chickens, and if a biblical writer (or editor) cuts his materials at particular points or joints, we should note and respect that. Although our focus is on 1 Samuel, we must, momentarily, look at the “whole chicken,” 1–2 Samuel, since all this material was originally one book.

The author or editor of 1–2 Samuel has placed four summary sections throughout this massive amount of material. These summaries are his division markers, the indicators for the overall structure of 1–2 Samuel.¹

1. I have not been able to trace the recognition of these summaries back beyond Thenius; see C. F. D. Erdmann, *The Books of Samuel*, Lange's Commentary on





Textual Block	Primary Focus	Summary Section
1 Samuel 1–7	Samuel	1 Sam. 7:15–17
1 Samuel 8–14	Saul	1 Sam. 14:47–52
1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 8	David/I	2 Sam. 8:15–18
2 Samuel 9–20	David/II	2 Sam. 20:23–26
2 Samuel 21–24	Kingdom	

Hence, in the case of 1 Samuel, our major divisions come at the end of chapters 7 and 14. Following these divisions I propose a general outline for the book:

- I. A Prophet from God's Grace, 1–7
- II. A King in God's Place, 8–14
- III. A Man after God's Heart, 15–31

Enough of chickens, summaries, and outlines. There's a woman weeping in Shiloh. We need to get there and find out what that's all about.²



the Holy Scriptures, in vol. 3, *Samuel–Kings* (1877; reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 18–20. Brevard S. Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 267, 271–72) recognizes something of their structural importance, but H. M. Wolf (“Samuel, 1 and 2,” *ZPEB*, 5:254–64) is the only one I have found who allows this structure to govern his use of the material. There are, incidentally, some nice correspondences in 1–2 Samuel as a whole; e.g., the house of God at Shiloh at the beginning (1 Sam. 1) matched by the future site of the house of God in Jerusalem at the end (2 Sam. 24; cf. 1 Chron. 21:1–22:1); and a weighty kingdom passage near the beginning (1 Sam. 2:1–10) and near the end (2 Sam. 23:1–7).

2. We know neither the date nor author(s) of 1 and 2 Samuel. Some scholars hold to a very complex compositional history that places anything like the present form of the text into the Babylonian exile or beyond (see Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1968], 217–26). Others would hold that, excepting minor alterations (like the note of 1 Sam. 27:6b?), “the books seem to date close to the end of David's reign” (William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 229). See also Wolf, “Samuel, 1 and 2,” 261.

