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**Mark Leuchter, “Something Old, Something Older:  
Reconsidering 1 Sam 2:27-36.”**

# Something Old, Something Older:

## Reconsidering 1 Sam. 2:27-36

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### I

- 1.1. In a recent article, Gary Rendsburg offered a response to an earlier analysis of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 made by Marc Brettler.<sup>1</sup> Based on terminology identified as Davidic and Zadokite in theme, Brettler suggested that the passage was an exilic composition penned by the Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH).<sup>2</sup> Rendsburg's analysis, on the other hand, pointed out linguistic features characteristic of “Israelian Hebrew” (IH), suggesting that the passage was an early text from Ephraimite circles.<sup>3</sup> Further, Rendsburg pointed out the broader context of 1 Sam. 1-2, i.e., its concern with the Elide priestly line and the Shiloh sanctuary, and that the passage's terminology was consistent with this literary setting.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.2. Rendsburg's analysis of IH constructs supports an earlier northern origin for the text, but Brettler's identification of the text's relation to Davidic/Judean contexts is difficult to ignore. While Rendsburg has made the case that the term **וּבַחֵר** (v. 28) is IH in form, its function within the broader verse seems to relate to Davidic ideology with the theme of a unified tribal polity.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the **בֵּית** terminology coupled with the phrase “shall walk before me forever” (v. 30) relates to similar terminology in 2 Sam.7, as Brettler points out.<sup>6</sup> The signs of later composition reappear in v. 31 with the term **זִקְנָן**, which creates a bridge from 1

Sam. 2:22 to 4:18. This latter passage is part of the originally independent ark narrative that was worked into its current position in the text by a later redactor.<sup>7</sup> In addition to integrating the ark narrative, the זקן terminology ties the passing of Eli's authority to other significant moments in the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr) where authority figures were past their prime and fit for succession.<sup>8</sup>

- 1.3. These Dtr terminological/editorial considerations, however, do not obscure the IH features present in the text as noted by Rendsburg. The terms and their constructs are particular not only to earlier periods but to dialects that persisted exclusively in the north even in later times.<sup>9</sup> The presence of the IH material strongly points to a written text of Ephraimite origin that pre-dates later Judean scribal activity, but the working of the ark narrative into the passage as well as the themes relating to a United Monarchy strongly suggest a Judean hand. We are thus faced with evidence that supports the divergent conclusions of both Rendsburg and Brettler, which leaves the question of the passage's dating unresolved. A third position, however, may offer a solution to the problem: the text of 1 Sam. 2:27-36, in its current form, is the result of two compositional and editorial stages.

## II

- 2.1. The linchpin for the above proposal is verse 35 -- "And I shall raise [up] for myself (והקימתי) a faithful priest (כהן נאמן) who shall do[that which is] in my heart and in my soul (בלבבי ונפשי); and I shall build for him a faithful house (ובניתי לו בית נאמן), and he shall walk before my anointed (משיחי) always."

This verse contains an assortment of terms that are both expressly Deuteronomic

(בלבבי ונפשי) and Davidic (ובניתי לו בית; משיחי) in nature.<sup>10</sup> The proclamation of the anonymous **איש אלהים** thus not only predicts the Zadokite priesthood that accompanied the Davidic Monarchy but also the Deuteronomic reform under Josiah, which fulfilled the Davidic covenant from DtrH's point of view.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the passage pre-supposes a Dtr redaction, as Brettler suggested. The retention of IH constructs (such as **ובחר** in v. 28) would not necessarily be anachronistic in a later period; older northern terminology that suited Josianic purposes would likely have been embraced and put to use by Judean scribes in the 7th century, and the stylistic continuity between Josianic and Exilic literature would allow such terms to persist well into the 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>12</sup>

- 2.2.** It is the later reliance upon older sources, however, that lends credence to Rendsburg's position concerning the text's early Ephraimite origins. Indeed, we find additional terms in verse 35 that reveal the passage's original shape and meaning. The verse opens with the phrase **והקימתי**, “and I shall raise [up] for myself”, which resonates with the language of Deut. 18:15-18 concerning Mosaic prophets and might therefore lead one to suspect a later origin. However, given the antiquity of the Mosaic ties to Shiloh, the term is quite at home in a text of northern origin depicting an episode taking place at the sanctuary, which, as Rendsburg notes, is a significant feature pointing to the authorship of the passage.<sup>13</sup> The term **והקימתי** may also relate to an early **דבר** theology among the tradition circles at Shiloh retained by the authors of Deut. 18:15-22 – Samuel's father Elqanah conceives of the **דבר** as an historical reflex waiting to be expressed in 1 Sam. 1:23, pertaining

to the realization of Hannah's promise, not YHWH's.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the term figures significantly into Samuel's activity at the sanctuary in 1 Sam. 3:1, 11, 17-20 and especially 3:21.

**2.3.** This concept of the **דבר** as an historical force is found in later passages related to figures associated with Shiloh. We find the same terminology at work in 1 Sam. 15:13, where Saul mistakenly believes that he has realized YHWH's historical intentions (**הקימתי את דבר יהוה**) through his incomplete war against the Amaleqites as he greets Samuel. Further, in 1 Kgs. 12:24, Shemaiah the **איש אלהים** proclaims that the secession of the northern tribes is a divine **דבר**—the term **איש אלהים** suggests a typological association with the anonymous **איש אלהים** of our passage as well as Samuel himself.<sup>15</sup> We should note also that the vast majority of prophets associated with the **דבר** as the basis for their prophetic oracles are of Ephraimite origin, follow speech patterns similar to that of the anonymous **איש אלהים**, and are in some cases overtly connected with Mosaic tradition.<sup>16</sup> Those prophets of Judean origin associated with the **דבר** may have either been influenced by northern tradition in the wake of 721 BCE or may have had their work brought in line with Deuteronomic ideology via a later redaction<sup>17</sup>.

**2.4.** Another important term surfaces in verse 35 with Mosaic overtones: **נאמן**, “faithful”. This is tied to Num. 12:7, part of a brief archaic text that qualifies Moses as superior to all other intermediaries. While the aforementioned verse pertains to

Moses as a prophet, there is no reason to deny its applicability to Mosaic priestly conduct as well<sup>18</sup>. We should note that like 1 Sam. 2:35, Num. 12:7 pairs the term נֶאֱמָן with the בֵּית terminology (בְּכָל בֵּית נֶאֱמָן הוּא) suggesting a common tradition behind the two passages. DtrH could easily apply these terms to a priesthood affiliated exclusively with the Davidic house, but the connection with Num. 12:7 suggests that they initially pertained to the rise of a priestly line to replace the corrupt Elides at Shiloh. Indeed, Cross demonstrated that the rivalry between the Mushite and Aaronide priestly houses is a persistent theme in the Pentateuchal narratives, and 1 Sam. 2:27-36 suggests tensions internal to the Mushite house itself.<sup>19</sup> The early layer of the text thus seems to relate more to a Shiloh-Mushite issue than one pertaining to Jerusalem or the Zadokites.

**2.5.** Verse 35 therefore identifies a priestly figure to replace Eli, but one with distinctively Mosaic characteristics. Considering the circumstances of the larger narrative and the overt Mosaic references in verse 35, the original form of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 seems to be pointing to one figure as Eli's replacement: Samuel. It is Samuel who engages in expressly Mosaic activity in 1 Sam. 7:5-12 (which shares language with the old JE Sinai traditions)<sup>20</sup> and it is Samuel who establishes a priestly house of his own via his sons in Beer Shevah, however short lived it may have been.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Samuel engages in juridical and cultic activity of decidedly Mosaic dimensions, so much so that he is known to be an אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים, an intercessor like the anonymous speaker in 2:27-36 who makes YHWH's will a matter of public policy.<sup>22</sup> Even the reality of kingship is presented as the result of Samuel's intercessory activity in 1 Sam. 8-12; indeed his priestly and prophetic

functions run in parallel during the early days of the Monarchy as a counterbalance to the authority of the king.<sup>23</sup>

### III

**3.1.** The current form of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 therefore evidences two primary stages: an initial Ephraimite composition that established Samuel as the primary religious figure at Shiloh, and a later Dtr layer that transformed the earlier material to pertain to the rise of the Zadokites (as per 1 Kgs. 2:26-27). The retention of the older text was crucial for the legitimacy of its transformation: kingship and the Zadokite priesthood that accompanied it were both ultimately subordinate to Mosaic tradition, the legitimizing force behind Dtr theology.<sup>24</sup> DtrH shared Elqanah's understanding of YHWH establishing his **רַבֵּר**, but applied that understanding through a retrospective filter. The **רַבֵּר** conveyed by the anonymous **אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים** of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 was indeed established, but in a more comprehensive manner than had initially been expressed. As such, the Scriptural shape of the message had to benefit from the same fullness of expression.

**3.2.** It is worth noting that 1 Sam. 3:11-18 contains a prophetic revelation strikingly similar in purpose to that of 2:27-36 in its pre-Dtr form. The text tells us that Samuel reported the contents of the revelation to Eli (v. 18), but it does not narrate this event. Given the gravity of the revelation, this is a rather curious absence. That Samuel voices in report what was already expressed in detail (in the previous chapter) is also suspicious. We are faced with a thematic doublet of sorts, though the doublet is offset by a lack of articulation in the second case: we learn that

Samuel spoke, but we do not hear his words. Moreover, the doublet is atypical – while doublets typically found in narrative passages suggest editorial activity, they also suggest divergent compositional voices and perspectives.<sup>25</sup> Such is not the case with 1 Sam. 3:11-18, which offers no significantly different point of view from the polemic of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 (on the pre-Dtr level). The difference between the two, in terms of theme and theology, is virtually non-existent. We are thus left with the question: why two episodes with two oracles that, originally, did not really differ from each other except in detail and articulation?

- 3.3.** A possible answer may reside in the authority of early traditions and the concerns of later tradents. Like most of the Dtr narrative, 1 Sam. 2:27-36 was not freely penned by DtrH but was firmly founded upon traditional sources that could not be abrogated. This, plus the fact that the **איש אלהים** of 2:27-36 is anonymous (in a narrative replete with personal names at every turn) suggests that in its pre-Dtr form, the oracle of 2:27-36 was actually voiced by Samuel himself in the narrative; the anonymous **איש אלהים** serves as a rhetorical surrogate for Samuel created by DtrH<sup>26</sup>. Such a move would allow the basic content of the pre-Dtr text as well as the narrative context surrounding it to be preserved yet adapted to suit broader historical considerations. If the pre-Dtr material in 2:27-36 was initially part of the narrative now found in 1 Sam. 3, then we would have before us a rather complete model of Mosaic figurehood, from internal insight to external proclamation. The placement of Samuel's oracle into the mouth of a rhetorical literary figure, cast in the image of the person who first spoke it, allowed for both early tradition and later meaning to find an equal voice in the text.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> G.A. Rendsburg, "Some False Leads In The Identification Of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Case of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27-36" *JBL* 121/1 (2002): 23-36; M. Brettler, "The Composition of 1 Samuel 1-2" *JBL* 116/4 (1997): 601-611.

<sup>2</sup> Rendsburg, "False Leads" 37-45.

<sup>2</sup> Rendsburg, "False Leads" 45.

<sup>2</sup> Brettler, "1 Samuel 1-2," 610-611.

<sup>3</sup> Rendsburg, "False Leads," 37-45.

<sup>4</sup> Rendsburg, "False Leads," 45.

<sup>5</sup> Rendsburg, "False Leads," 37. The reference to Israel as a fully developed tribal system indicates a state administration with demarcated borders as opposed to the broader terms associated with regions defined only by general geographical references typical of pre-Monarchic Israel. See B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 272-273, 293-294. Further, these tribes are "given" as a possession, a notion far more in line with Monarchic ideology than that of an egalitarian tribal league, and echoing the language of 2 Sam. 7:7.

<sup>6</sup> Brettler, "1 Samuel 1-2." 610-611 (n.39 and 43).

<sup>7</sup> Halpern sees the ark narrative as a decidedly Davidic literary work that projects Egyptian-influenced religious iconography into the Israelite shrine at Shiloh (Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 289-294); 1 Sam. 6:6 reflects an overt attempt at paralleling the account with earlier Israelite Exodus traditions that would have been at home among the Mosaic circles therein. However, if the ark narrative is Davidic, and David's origins are alien to Ephraimite contexts (*op cit.*, 263-276) then it is by definition a work incongruous

with the IH of the broader Samuel narratives as identified by Rendsburg. Its present literary position facilitates DtrH's understanding of the Davidic monarchy as the legitimate purpose of the era initiated by Samuel, and thus the Zadokites as the fulfillment of the oracle in 1 Sam. 2:27-36.

<sup>8</sup> See Gen. 24:1-9, where a typically proactive Abraham relegates the important mission of finding a wife for Isaac to his servant. A more dramatic example may be found in 1 Kgs. 1:1-4, where the enfeebled David is unable to engage in sexual relations, legitimizing Adonijah's claim to succession. The term is applied to the narrative of 1 Sam. 8 as well, though it is clear from the shape of the text that while the people (notably, the “elders”) say that Samuel's time has passed, Samuel's ongoing activity in the ensuing chapters suggests the misguided nature of such a perception. Note, however, the lack of the  $\text{קָרָא}$  terminology in Deut. 34:7, suggesting the ongoing applicability of Mosaic authority in the eyes of DtrH.

<sup>9</sup> Rendsburg, “False Leads,” 39.

<sup>10</sup> For the Deuteronomic connection, see Deut. 6:5 and 2 Kgs. 23:25; for the Davidic, see 1 Sam. 24:6 and 2 Sam 7:5-17.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview see M. A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-20.

<sup>12</sup> Rendsburg himself notes the presence of earlier forms in later literature (“False Leads”, 38) though earlier materials were not simply retained but often transformed in the later literature of the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. See B. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of*

*Legal Innovation* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) for a thorough analysis of these methods.

<sup>13</sup>See F.M. Cross, “The Priestly Houses of Early Israel” in *Canaanite Myth Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 195-215, for a study of the Mushite priesthood and Moses' ties to Shiloh.

<sup>14</sup> Brettler draws attention to Elqanah's statement concerning YHWH's דָּבָר in 1 Sam. 1:23 (Brettler, “1 Samuel 1-2”, 606), though the statement identifies the דָּבָר not in terms of articulated speech but as an historical reflex. The דָּבָר referred to by Elqanah suggests a force, in keeping with its etymology, that “stands behind” what would be expressed on the stage of history. In this case, YHWH's דָּבָר would find expression through the turning of Hannah's promise into historical reality.

<sup>15</sup> See 1 Sam. 9:6.

<sup>16</sup> Such is certainly the case with Elijah, who speaks the divine דָּבָר in 1 Kgs. 18:24 and immediately thereafter makes a pilgrimage to Sinai itself (1 Kgs. 19:8-18).

<sup>17</sup> Sweeney, *King Josiah*, 185-207, 234-255, 273-286, 301-310.

<sup>18</sup> Ps. 99:6a identifies Moses as a priest: מֹשֶׁה [וְאַהֲרֹן] בְּכֹהֲנָיו. מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן disrupts the symmetry and meter of the broader verse – which connects Moses' activity in Ex 19:19 to Samuel's activity in 1 Sam. 7:10 via the term יַעֲנֵם – and is likely a later insertion by a Zadokite redactor.

<sup>19</sup> See Cross, *CMHE*, 198-206. See also Judg. 18:31 for an implied broader rivalry between the Mosaic priesthods at Dan and Shiloh.

<sup>20</sup> See above re: Ps 99:6a. The identification of Moses' activity as priestly points to a pre-Josianic (late 7th century) dating of the Psalm, since the Deuteronomic Torah classifies Mosaic prophetic behavior as distinct from Levitical priestly behavior (Deut. 18:1-8, 15-22). This suggests an earlier period for the origin of the Samuel/Moses narratives referred to in the Psalm, when Mosaic priesthood incorporated features that would later be classified as distinctly prophetic in typology. The pre-Dtr layer of 1 Sam. 2:27-36 may therefore be dated to an even earlier period if it was composed alongside of 1 Sam. 7:5-12, which by necessity must pre-date Ps. 99 if it is the source of the reference.

<sup>21</sup> Deut. 16:18 identifies the city gates as the location for local judges, and it is here where the Levites of Deut. 18:1-8 are said to reside. These Deuteronomic passages may retain echoes of a past where Mosaic/Levitical activity involved both juridical and priestly responsibilities; the Deuteronomic material separates the two into Levitical-priestly and Mosaic-prophetic categories, obscuring the original dynamic (see above). 1 Sam. 8:1-3 implies this dynamic, with hereditary priesthood from Samuel's newly established priestly line carrying juridical responsibilities for his sons, though by the beginning of Saul's reign, they no longer hold these posts (as per 1 Sam. 12:2).

<sup>22</sup> 1 Sam. 7:9-12.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Sam. 13:10-15; 15:1-3, 26-33.

<sup>24</sup> We should note that the later redaction employs terms that also relate to Moses, the Deuteronomic (**בלבבי ובנפשי**) in verse 35. DtrH thus hits two birds with one stone: he preserves the original Mosaic dimensions of the early passage but manages to tie them to the Josianic period and a Davidic-Zadokite context by association.

<sup>25</sup> See N. Na'aman, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Story of King Saul and Its Historical Significance" *CBQ* 54 (1992), 641-42 for a discussion of such an example in 1 Sam. 10:12. Na'aman is correct in identifying v. 12b as a Dtr insertion/commentary, however this is based on the original literary setting of the aphorism in v. 11, which likely supported Saul's claims to leadership based on charismatic authority. In the eyes of DtrH, charismatic states were no grounds for legitimate prophecy – such was the exclusive domain of the experience with the divine **דבר** in distinction to the divine **רוח**, as virtually every legitimate prophet in Dtr acts under the inspiration of the former (see above re: the connection of the term to the theology of Shiloh). The mutual exclusion of these prophetic types likely precedes DtrH (see Hos. 9:7-9), and was used to reshape the tradition in 1 Sam. 10:10-12 as a negative statement on Saul's legitimacy, coupled with the repetition of the aphorism in 19:24.

<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with the verses elsewhere that identify Samuel as an **איש אלהים**, (1 Sam. 9:6-7,10) which are part of the pre-Dtr narrative (see Na'aman, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Story of King Saul", 640. The typology of the **איש אלהים** was already well-established by the exilic period, and its connection to Mosaic tradition (see Ps. 90:1) would have led DtrH to employ it in casting his stand-in for Samuel.