

The Hem of the Garment as a Covenant Sign

A Structural Element in 1Samuel

(Read at the NW Regional Evangelical Theological Society)

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I. Introduction

Twice in the book of Samuel¹ the hem of the garment figures significantly into the narrative (1Samuel 15:27ff; 24:5ff). Recognizing the hem as functioning in a covenantal sense allows not only a better understanding of the two texts themselves, but also allows the interpreter to see how the hem motif is used structurally in the Samuel narrative.

II. The “Hem” in the Ancient Near East

A study of the texts from various cultures and periods in the ANE reveals that the hem of the garment played a significant role in the legal and cultic life of the society. It often occurs in the context of oath-making and therefore in covenants and agreements.

The primary Sumerian ideogram for the “hem” is TUG.SIG. The Babylonian renders the word either by *sisiktu* or *ulinnu*, occasionally by *ziqu*. In an Assyrian list of synonyms, the word *etapatu* is equated with *sisiktu*. “They may be regarded as practically interchangeable in meaning.”²

In a vassal treaty between Esarhaddon and Ramataya, the following lines are found in the section of stipulations which precede the curses:

If you smear your face, your hands, or your throats with red paste which (is like) *sapuhru* in the eyes of the gods, or tie it to the hem of your garments in order to avert the consequences of the oath—³

It is obvious in the text that the hem had some significance in the oath ceremony of the covenant, as did the face, hands and throat (perhaps bound up in the dramatic slaughter of the covenant animal). By some sort of magic attached to the hem, the oath which related to these objects is overturned and the curses avoided.

In contrast, the mother of Nabonidus shows her loyalty to the king (her son) in these words:

Out of his love for me who worships him and have laid hold to the hem of his garment, Sin, the king of all gods, did what he had not done before, had not granted to anybody else, he gave me (a woman) an exalted position and a famous name in the country.⁴

Thus, to tie an object to the hem is to attempt to defeat the oath, while to lay hold of the hem is to display one’s loyalty to the covenant.

That the terminology “to take hold of the hem” may functionally be equivalent to “swear an oath” in a covenant sense is borne out in a letter by Shamshi-Adad, king of Assyria⁵ written to Kuwari, his vassal in

1. It is quite certain that the division into 1 and 2Samuel is arbitrary and not original. Thus “Samuel Narrative” will be used in this paper to mean the combined materials of the canonical books.

2. Ferris J. Stephens, “The Ancient Significance of TIVV,” *JBL* 50(1931), 61.

3. James B. Pritchard ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, 1972), 62 (=ANET 534-541). NB: first entries in notes from Pritchard refer to the condensed version, designated ANE. The designation ANET denotes the complete edition.

4. ANE, 106 (=ANET 560-562).

5. Shamshi-Adad (1814 BCE) ousted Yahdum-Lim of Mari who came to power in 1810 BCE.

Shemshara. In the letter he speaks of Yashub-Addu, a rebellious vassal who has the bad habit of swearing an oath of allegiance to a king, and then promptly rebelling against him, while making an alliance with an enemy.

When he became an ally, he swore an oath to me in the temple of Adad of Arrapha. Again, on the bank of the (Lower) Zab, in A'innum, he swore an oath to me; moreover, I swore an oath to him. Twice he swore an oath to me. From the time he took the hem of my garment, I never collected any silver, oxen, sheep, or grain from his land; I did not seize a single town in his land. (Nevertheless), having now become my enemy, he has been following the man of Kakmu.⁶

The hem of the garment enters into marriage contracts as well. In one such document from the Old Babylonian period, the bride-price is bound up in the hem of the bride.⁷ In other marriage contracts from the same period, to “cut the hem” (*sissiktam bataqum*) signifies “divorce.”⁸ Brauner’s contention that the hem functions more as a dramatization of the marriage contract rather than as a legal necessity is not borne out in the texts.⁹ “To cut the hem” is equivalent, legal terminology for “divorce” and is part of the marriage contract proper, specifically dealing with the repayment of money and goods.¹⁰

This legal aspect of the “hem” may also be noted in its being used as a substitute for a seal. Stephens notes that examples of business documents have been published stating that the hem was actually used to impress a design upon the tablet in the place of the normal seal.¹¹ Other tablets from Cappadocia have been published in which the *ziqu* of one person was to be held by another for business purposes.¹² It appears as though the hem actually became the possession of the one who received the transaction.

In another business transaction from Cappadocia, a man pays a debt, not to the creditor, but to an associate of the creditor. The document is drawn up to assure the release of the debt and as proof that the debtor actually did give the money to the third party.

Al-tabu seized the *ziqu* of Ashur-rabu. Thus (spoke) Al-tabu: ‘the 1/3 mina 1 1/2 shekels of silver which you owe to Ashur-lamasi, my money lender, pay the silver to me.’ Ashur-rabu paid to Al-tabu the 1/3 mina 1 1/2 shekels of silver. Thus (spoke) Ashur-rabu: ‘Have you received the 1/3 mina 1 1/2 shekels of silver belonging to Ashur-lamasi they money lender?’ Thus (spoke) Al-tabu: ‘I have received (it).’¹³

The “seizing of the hem” is in the context of a legal transaction and appears to function as a kind of oath.

The hem did not function only in legal contexts, however. A good many examples from the ancient world show that the hem was viewed mystically as representing the whole person.¹⁴ Many have assumed that the Akkadian letters from the Mari archives dealing with divine revelation evidence the use of the

6. ANE, 189 (=ANET, 628).

7. ANE, 75 (=ANET 542-547). cf. Ezek. 5:3 — it is not certain if this bears similar meaning, but the symbolism is almost identical. Note the sealing of prophecy with hair and hem in Mari texts below.

8. Samuel Greengus, “The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,” *JAOS* 89.3(1969), 515.

9. Ronald A. Brauner, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ and 1Samuel 15:27,” *JANES* 6(1974), 36, n.9.

10. Stephens, Op. cit., 63-4.

11. See A. T. Clay, *Letters and Transactions from Cappadocia* as noted in Stephens, Op. cit., 64.

12. Stephens, *Ibid.*, 63.

13. Quoted from Stephens, Op. cit., 62-3. He interprets this as an example of the supposed mystical significance of the hem. That is, when the hem was seized, Ashur-rabu had no recourse but to pay the debt, as though one’s freedom was bound up in the hem. It appears more likely, however, that the seizing of the hem by the creditor’s assistant is an act of swearing by oath that the transaction did in fact take place, analogous to our former custom of swearing by raising one hand and placing the other on a Bible.

14. It is difficult to substantiate why the hem was viewed as possessing mystical powers. One suggestion is that since the hem surrounded the person, it was seen to represent the wearer in a mystical way.

hem in this mystical way.¹⁵ In several of these, the priest or priestess seals the revelation with “my hair and fringe.”¹⁶ As Brauner notes, however, these articles do not specifically enter into the mystic’s function as an ecstatic, but rather assure that the prophecy has been given fully with nothing more to be added.¹⁷ In this sense, the hair and the fringe act again in a kind of oath setting, viewed as the very presence of the priest or priestess promising righteous activity.¹⁸

Stephens concludes that those texts which speak of “seizing the hem of a god” indicate a magical act on behalf of the worshipper. The text given for support of this is an incantation text of Sumerian-Babylonian origin:

O king of heaven and earth, I have sought after thee; I have turned to thee; like the *sisiktu* of my god and my goddess, thy great *sisiktu* I have seized; because it is in thy province to give judgment, to announce decisions, and to establish well-being.¹⁹

However, it is equally possible that the “seizing of the hem” in this text likewise stands for “loyalty,” as indicated by the former lines. The same may be said of the Nebuchadnezzar text where he says,

Because I seized the *sisiktu* of Marduk my lord, he loved me, and entrusted me with the renewing of shrines and the rebuilding of ruins.²⁰

Here again, to “seize the hem” is symbolic language for “be loyal to.”²¹

There are texts, however, that do indicate a kind of mystical power attached to the “hem.” A ritual text dealing with dream interpretation illustrates this:

...in front of the ‘Lamp’ he shall ... a bundle of reeds ... the hem of the right side of his (garment) he shall cut off and hold it in front of the ‘Lamp’. He shall say as follows: ‘You are the judge, judge (now) my case: This dream which during the first or the middle or the last watch of the night was brought to me and which you know but I do not know—if (its content predicts something) pleasant, may its pleasantness not escape me—if (it predicts something) evil, may its evil not catch me—(but) verily (this dream) be not mine! Like this reed is plucked (from the bundle) [and] will not return to its (original) place and this hem was cu[t] from my garment [and] will not return to [my] garment after it has been cut off, this dream which [was brought] to me in the first or the middle or the last watch of the night shall verily be not mine!’²²

15. D. Conrad, “Samuel und die Mari-‘Propheten,’” in W. Voight, ed., *XVII Deutscher Orientalistentag, ZDMG Supplement 1*, (Wiesbaden, 1969), 1:273-80.

16. ANE, 182f (=ANET, 623ff).

17. Brauner, *Op. cit.*, 37, n.9. Note the similarity to Ezek 5:3.

18. Note in this regard the text “w” of ANE, 185: “I hereby give you my hair and fringe. Let them declare (me) free (of legal claims).” Apparently the priestess does not want to be held responsible for the outcome of the revelation.

19. Stephens, *Op. cit.*, 51.

20. Quoted from Stephens, *Op. cit.*, 62.

21. Note the reoccurring theme in the Royal Grant Treaties, that the Suzerain was moved in favor toward the vassal because of the vassal’s loyalty and faithfulness (note for instance, Postgate, *Neo-Assyrian Royal Grants and Decrees*, text no. 32, p. 67) The statement that Marduk “loved me” seems best understood in a covenant sense, as borne out by the fact that responsibility was entrusted to Nebuchadnezzar (on “love” in a covenant sense, note W.L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ*, 25(1965), 77-87; McCarthy, “Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship Between Israel and YHWH,” *CBQ* 25(1965), 144-47; Larry Walkter, “Love in the Old Testament: Some Lexical Observations,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenny), Gerald F. Hawthorne, ed., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 277ff.

22. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society), N.S., Vol 46, part 3(1956), 298.

Apparently the hem is viewed as representing mystically the personality of the wearer, and thus any evil attached to the person via the dream is loosed when the hem is cut.²³

In summary, the hem of the garment in the ANE appears to have been viewed as symbolically representing the person wearing the garment. For this reason, to lay hold of the hem is to effect a relationship with the person. From this notion, the hem is used in oath-taking and covenant. This idea is likewise borne out in the use of the hem as an instrument to seal a document or letter. “To grasp the hem” or to “hold the hem” is to signify loyalty and submission to the agreement or covenant. Conversely, to “cut” or “alter” the hem is to sever relationships (as in “divorce”) and to forsake the agreement or covenant.²⁴

III. The Hem as a Structural Element in 1Samuel

Like the fishing line of a six year-old, the Samuel narrative lies tangled on the bottom of the critic’s boat. Indeed, the apparent contradictions and duplications have led most if not all to assume conflicting sources in the compilation process.²⁵

The early theory of Eichhorn positing the existence of discrete strands²⁶ was replaced by others (especially Wellhausen) with the theory of two particular strands, namely, an early and a late stratum.²⁷ Still others tried to identify Pentateuchal sources in the Samuel narrative, an indication of how bound Old Testament scholarship was to the older theories.²⁸ Rost advocated the composite nature of the older materials in Samuel, using stylistic and thematic arguments to isolate distinct and originally independent narrative sources within the early stratum.²⁹ He identified an old history of the succession to David (2Sam 9-20, 1Ki 1-2) and an even more ancient “ark narrative” (1Sam. 4:1b-7:1, 2Sam 6). Though modified by other scholars, Rost’s work has been foundational for most recent studies in Samuel. Martin Noth’s *The Deuteronomistic History* (1943), which attempted to establish a deuteronomistic history extending from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, has affected the thinking of most scholars regarding the late strata of

23. In another text listed in Oppenheim, *Ibid.*, the hem is wrapped around the bundle of reeds and burned. It is interesting to note in passing that the woman with the issue of blood in Lk. 8:44 touched the fringe of Messiah’s garment (του κρασπεδου του ιματιου αυτου). Whether or not she felt the tassel itself had magical powers, or if she considered the hem to represent the true person of Messiah is not indicated exegetically. It is worth noting, however, that even in the 1st century CE the hem of the robe had a particular significance. (The idea noted in Schneider, *TDNT*, 3:904, that the tassel was simply the easiest way to touch the garment without being detected does not give any reason for the touching in the first place. Apparently, the woman believed that physical contact with the hem or tassel would effect the desired healing.)

24. The conclusion of Brauner (*JANES* 6(1974), 35-8) that ‘to grasp the hem’ “has, among others, the significance of ‘supplication, importuning, submission’” is not substantiated by the data. It is clear from the texts which he uses to support this claim, that the supplicant intended the terminology of “grasping the hem” to verify his loyalty to the god. It therefore was upon the basis of his loyalty/faithfulness that he requested the god to act on his behalf.

25. Note P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1Samuel, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1980), 12. See also J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), 340-1.

26. J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das alte Testament* (Göttingen: 1823-24, 4th ed.)

27. See an outline of Wellhausen’s theory on Samuel in Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Phil: Fortress Press, 1979), 298.

28. Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* KHC VIII (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1902); note the comments of McCarter, *Op. cit.*, 13.

29. Leonard Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* BWANT III, 6 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1926. [Reprinted in *Das kleine Credo und andere Studien zum alten Testament* (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1965, pp. 119-253]. For a thorough discussion and defense of Rost’s main thesis, see Tomoo Ishida, “Solomon’s Succession to the Throne of David” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon* (Eisenbrauns, 1982), 175-87.

Samuel.³⁰ In short, the difficulties represented in the Samuel narrative have been answered by critical scholarship as expected: the best way to untangle the fishing line is with a knife.

It is evident, however, that there is very little wide-spread agreement about where the cutting should begin and end. Ackroyd concludes that “questions concerning the unity and diversity within the Deuteronomistic work remain open.”³¹ In a similar vein, de Vaux considers a chronology of Samuel an impossibility.³²

Evangelical scholarship has likewise attempted to give answers to the obvious problems in the Samuel narrative. A compiling process is assumed by Archer.³³ Nearly all agree that written sources were used by the compiler, and that David formed the primary theme or reason for the history.³⁴ Harrison, following Albright³⁵ attempts to give answers to the discrepancies, rather than submit a scheme for the structure of the Samuel narrative.³⁶ He is willing to admit that no overarching structure is discernible.³⁷

Still, in spite of the fact that structure plays an important part in the interpretative process, evangelicals have given very few satisfactory explanations for the present form of the Samuel narrative.³⁸ Explanations based upon redaction criticism have likewise not satisfied. Could the compiler(s)/redactor(s) have been so naive as to have missed such obvious “contradictions,” or think they would go unquestioned by the readers? For example, kingship is frowned upon in one chapter, only to be praised in the next (1Sam. 7:2-8:22; cp. 1Sam. 9:1-10:16); Saul knows and loves David, only to be unacquainted with him in the following pericope (1Sam 16:14-23; cp. 1Sam 17:55-58); in one chapter, Saul is quite aware of David’s escape from his attempts to harm him but is represented as wondering why David is not at the dinner table in the next chapter (1Sam 19:18ff, cp. 20:5ff). Even these few examples highlight the obvious tensions in the narrative. One must postulate, if he presumes the Divine origins of Scripture, that these tensions are purposed. And further, that the compiler(s), borne along by the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:21), intended for these tensions and apparent contradictions to evoke in the reader the questions which would lead him to the purpose and theme of the work.³⁹

30. Martin Noth, *the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: 1981), 54ff. (This *JSOT* Supplement No. 15 is the English translation of the original German edition, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 1943). See the profitable comments on Noth in Childs, *Op. cit.*, 269. Ackroyd (“The Historical Literature” in Douglas Knight, ed. *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters* (Phil: Fortress Pres, 1985), 303, dismisses Noth’s single-stage view as “too simplified.”

31. Ackroyd, *Ibid.*, 304.

32. *Ibid.*, 301. (This is a note in a manuscript apparently privileged to Ackroyd).

33. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 291.

34. cf. Keil, Delitzsch, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), 12.

35. W. F. Albright, *Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement*, pp. 13f.

36. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 699ff.

37. “. . . the traditions involving the earlier periods in the lives of Saul and David are complex, and do not lend themselves to facile analysis.” Harrison, *Ibid.*, 699.

38. Perhaps one of the best evangelical explanations of the structure of the Samuel narrative is to be found in John A. Martin, “The Structure of 1 and 2Samuel,” *BibSac* 141 (Jan-Mar, 1984), 28-42. [Part one of a four part series on the Samuel narratives.] Martin takes “fertility” as the key around which the narrative is structured, seeing it as covenant blessing for those who obey and infertility as a covenant curse for disobedience. This is a valid thought, though viewed by the present author as somewhat restricted. It would appear that the idea of “dynasty,” obviously tied into the concept of “fertility,” is more at the center of the narrative. One can see, however, how the two are very much related in the story itself.

39. The explanations of Archer (*Op. cit.*, 292) and Harrison (*Ibid.*, 702) as to the double introduction of David to Saul, one in chapter 16 and the other in 17, are entirely unsatisfactory. To explain this by saying that in the first instance that Saul desired to know David’s lineage, is to skip over the text at 16:19 where Saul specifically sends messengers to Jesse requesting the presence of his son. Further, that Abner should be unaware of David’s family ties is likewise strange, especially if David, according to 16:21, functioned as Saul’s armor-bearer. These two texts are

But what is the theme and purpose of the Samuel narrative? It is suggested here that the narrative in its canonical form is structured around the key idea of HaShem's presence in Israel, a presence which is predicated upon covenant obedience and offers protection for the covenant community. This two-fold aspect of the Divine presence in covenant obligation and protection is mediated respectively via the priest and king of HaShem. Thus, in the Samuel narrative, the complications in the story result from disobeying the covenant of HaShem, while the resolutions flow out of HaShem's compassion in appointing His priest and king.

As the narrative introduces the complications and seeks resolutions, the reader is prompted to look for God's priest and king. The compiler's purpose, however, is to reveal God's view of priesthood and kingship as contrasted with those of the pagan nations. This contrast is worked out by juxtaposing the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David.⁴⁰

Samuel is God's spokesman—a charismatic leader after the pattern of the judges.⁴¹ Saul, conversely, is the people's choice—a king who fits the pattern of the nations.⁴² David, youngest and least known, is chosen by God and endowed with His power and given success. In each case, the main characters play out the theme, contrasting the ways of God and man.

The idea of kingship is not something newly conceived in the Samuel narrative. God had earlier revealed both His intention to give Israel a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 49:9) and the manner in which this king was to rule (Deut 17:14-20).⁴³ What becomes apparent in the Samuel narrative is that the true sense of kingship (that of יהוה) stands over against a false view (man's) and that these are mutually exclusive.

But if David as king is God's message of kingship, the covenant with David outlines the method of HaShem. The Divine purpose of kingship was (and is) more than "rule" and "leadership." God's king is His instrument of blessing in accordance with the covenant made with Abraham. The redemptive essence of the promise is to be realized in God's king.

Even David recognized this as he contemplated the covenant God had made with him. The covenant, promising the maintenance of the Davidic dynasty, is clearly seen by David as something more. It encompasses all nations, functioning as "the charter for mankind," that is, the means by which the Torah would

obviously juxtaposed for the very purpose of emphasizing this "discrepancy" in the mind of the readers. Eugene Merrill [*Kingdom of Priests: A History of OT Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 212] explains the discrepancy of the double introduction of David to Saul on the grounds that sufficient time had elapsed between David's appearance in Saul's court and the Goliath event to allow the adolescent David to change, obscuring his recognition. Merrill adds that Saul was likewise suffering from mental and emotional disturbances, which would have accounted for his loss of memory. These explanations are weak at best.

40. Though disagreeing with the source-critical stance of Eichrodt, [*Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Phil: Westminster Press, 1961), 1:442ff] his comments on the difference between the Ancient Near Eastern kingship and the kingship under the theocracy are valuable. Also see not 51 below for further discussion and bibliography on this issue.

41. Note how the narrative emphasizes Samuel's divine appointment, both in Hannah's specific request and dedication of Samuel, as well as in God's direct speaking to Samuel (1Sam. 1-3). 1Sam. 3:19 is specific in this regard: Samuel was divinely appointed to do God's bidding.

42. 1Sam 9:2 is contrastive. On the one hand, whenever a physical description is made of Samuel, it is always with the added "before the Lord" or similar verbiage (1Sam. 2:21, 26; 3:19). In contrast, the physical description of Saul is put as "among the sons of Israel" (1Sam. 9:2). This sets the stage for the yet-to-come physical description of David (1Sam 16:12) and the key point of the text, that "He (YHWH) sees not as man sees, for man sees the appearance, but YHWH looks at the heart" (1Sam. 16:7). The lives of these main characters are thus compacted in the narrative in order to contrast man's view with God's. Enthronement will not be based upon man's abilities or appearance, but squarely upon Divine election.

43. See the profitable comments in Merrill, *Ibid.*, 190; note also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 144-49; Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 108-9; Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Biblical Idea of Statehood," in *The Bible World*, Gary Randsburg, et. al. eds., (New York: KTAV, 1980), 239.

come to all peoples.⁴⁴ Indeed, the Shilo of the ancient prophecy of Jacob (Gen 49:9) is seen in this David, who comes first to the court of Israel to console the king, but whose coming signals to the reader that God's plan for the peace of Israel as well as for all the nations is vested in the king He will install.

Our compiler uses the common narrative patterns of complication and resolution to unfold the theme of his work.⁴⁵ Opening with an introduction to Samuel via Hannah's plight and prayer for a son, Samuel is shown to be chosen from the beginning. He receives revelation from God as a lad during an era when revelation in Israel was sparse (1Sam 3:1) as confirmation of God's hand upon him. God's first revelation to Samuel confirms the former oracle delivered by a "man of God" (2:27ff) against Eli's priestly dynasty. The oracle of woe, however, contains the promise of God's chosen priest, characterized as "doing what is in My heart and in My soul," and whose dynasty would be an enduring one (2:35).⁴⁶

At this point, the reader is certain that the promised priest is Samuel.⁴⁷ Apparently the complication with Eli's sons has been resolved by the transferring of the priesthood to Samuel. The surprise comes, however, when the pericope ends with Samuel as "prophet" (3:19-4:1a), leaving the reader in suspense.⁴⁸

The narrative continues by centering upon (1) the defeat of Israel at the hands of her enemies (4:1-4) which (2) increases the need for someone (a priest) to intercede to יהוה on Israel's behalf, and (3) with the lack of such a priest, the use of the ark (4:5ff) as an attempt to bring יהוה to fight for Israel. This, however, brings a further complication—the ark is lost to Israel's enemies. Once again, the sovereign independence of God is emphasized as he shows Himself unwilling to be manipulated by ritual (the presence of the Ark)⁴⁹ but is fully capable of taking care of Himself and of accomplishing His plan. The ark brings calamity to its captors.

The return of the ark in the subsequent narrative signals a resolution to the situation, accompanied by Israel's repentance and Samuel's intercession for the people via prayer and sacrifice (7:1-11). HaShem fights for Israel and her enemies are subdued (7:12-17).

Yet, the earlier promise of a priest has not been fulfilled. This overarching tension is taken upon again as the narrative resumes (8:1ff). Even as Eli's sons were not allowed to continue the priesthood, so Samuel's sons have forsaken the way of their father. Samuel's dynasty is likewise not that enduring

44. Note Walter Kaiser, "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Mankind" in John Skilton, ed. *The Law and the Prophets* (Phil: Pres. and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974) where he understands 2Sam 7:19 and the phrase תורת האדם to mean "charter for mankind." The present writer would even suggest that in this instance תורה might stand as synonymous with ברית, allowing the translation "covenant for mankind" which is, of course, the meaning of Kaiser's "charter". For instances where ברית and תורה stand in a synonymous relationship, note Hosea 8:1 where the two are poetically parallel. A comparison of 2 Ki 23:3 with 23:24 gives the same impression. For further instances, note Is 24:5; Mal. 2:8; Ps 78:10.

45. Note Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 101-107; Claus Westermann, "Arten der Erzählung in der Genesis," in *Forschung am Alten Testament* (München: Kaiser, 1965), 9-91 where Spannungsbogen, "arc of tension" is his key term; George W. Coats, ed., *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms of Old Testament Literature* [JSOT Supp 35] (Sheffield, 1985), 64-66.

46. Note the closeness of the language here with 2Sam 7:16 and the repeated בית נאמן, "enduring house". איש בלבבי, "a man after My heart" is very close to כלבבו, "according to His heart" in 1Sam 13:14.

47. Some commentators, feeling this tension, assign Samuel to the fulfillment of the oracle. Note A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The First Book of Samuel in The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: 1890), 62-3; others consider the section a Josianic insertion (McCarter, *1 Samuel in the Anchor Bible Commentary*, 91f) while opting for Zadok as the fulfillment (cp. Keil & Delitzsch, *1 Samuel*, ad loc.). Note the profitable comments in Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis* (Sheffield, 1985), 135-40.

48. Klein [*1 Samuel in Word Bible Commentary* (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 34] feels "prophet" is sufficient to indicate Eli's dynasty has been transferred to Samuel.

49. To take a phrase from Fokkelman regarding man's attempts to control the God they worship, "Thus men hitched God to their wagon." [*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Van Gorcum, 1986), 2:454].

dynasty which God had promised.⁵⁰

It is this failure of dynastic succession which prompts the people to seek a king (8:4-5) to establish dynastic rule, offering security for Israel. In accordance with the nations around Israel, such a king would not only offer military protection from the nation's enemies, but would also be himself the divine presence for the nation. He could therefore evoke the blessings of the gods upon the people.⁵¹

It is essential to see that God's viewpoint differed radically. His king would indeed bring blessing and peace through military victory, not because he had special powers with the god, but because he was God's vassal in a redemptive sense. God's king would effect God's redemption in God's way, by leading the people to Him, not by "hitching God to his wagon."⁵²

The action of the people in accepting the nations' view of kingship brings in yet another complication, introduced initially by Samuel's displeasure with their request, and amplified by his message regarding the self-centeredness of an earthly monarch (8:4-22). God, nonetheless, instructs Samuel to hearken to the voice of the people. They will learn best by seeing the truth rather than hearing it, and thus Saul is anointed king over Israel.

This brings only an apparent resolution of the complication. The reader suspects that God has given Israel a king to teach her a lesson. The solution of a king after the pattern of the nations brings an ideological conflict into the narrative, contrasting Divine and human kingship from a new angle. Can an earthly king control HaShem as the kings of the other nations "controlled" their gods through ritual and religious contrivance? The intimacy between God and Samuel at the beginning of the narrative⁵³ is conspicuously lacking on the part of Saul. The reader fears there is no "heart after God" in this newly anointed king.

The first military victory assures Saul's acceptance as king by the people and the kingdom is established with the enthronement of Saul. Meanwhile, Samuel is still God's spokesman, as the miracle of thunder and rain proves (12:17f), and he reassures the people that he will continue to intercede for them before God, even though Saul is King (12:23f). Already the reader is very aware that Saul is not the divine presence in Israel, nor does he have special power with God.

The second military skirmish confirms the reader's misgivings. Saul is not a guarantee of Israel's victory. As the battle turns against Israel, Saul attempts to evoke HaShem's help in battle by means of cultic ritual (13:8f). The previous prophecy of Samuel (10:8) is now brought into the narrative: Saul waits seven days for Samuel and then proceeds to offer the sacrifice himself (13:9f).⁵⁴

50. Eslinger, (Ibid., 140), feels that the lack of direct statements in the text to the effect that Samuel's sons die, and that they are still alive in 12:2, would indicate that Samuel's "house" did continue. However, the language of 8:3 is sufficient to dispel this idea.

51. Merrill, Op. cit., 210; Tomoo Ishida, Op. cit., 182; H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), 57-60; De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 100-125; S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, G. W. Anderson, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), 21-95. The data seem quite conclusive that kingship in Canaan and in Egypt differed in some distinct ways. Perhaps the most important is the simple fact that in Egypt the Pharaoh was most clearly divine in his own being, his death returning him to the gods from which he came. In Canaan, the king was not himself divine, though he was often revered on nearly the same level. His death and burial prove him to be mere man. However, the Canaanite king was often considered a "divine being" (though not a god) and could, because of his status, assume a more persuasive role with the city god(s). The implements of the regalia, crown and scepter equipped him with divine power, and his entering into priestly ritual assured the favor of the god(s) [Mowinckel, 38f]. It seems most apparent that Saul envisioned himself in this role. By his office, through cultic ritual, and by relationship with God's prophet Samuel, Saul thought he could manipulate God for the good of his kingdom. In contrast, HaShem's king would lead the nation to worship God as their Great King.

52. Even the fact that Israel's kings were "anointed" distinguished them from the kings of the nations. No evidence exists that the pagan nations surrounding Israel employed anointing for royal enthronement. One wonders how such a ritual was conceived by Israel as fulfilling the request of a king "like all of the nations."

53. cf. 1Sam 3:19-21; cf. note 42 above as well.

54. The instructions of 10:8 are interesting. The "seven days" are a test for Saul, a kind of probation. If sacrifice is

Samuel's arrival brings dialog into the narrative, a sure sign of the heightened complication.⁵⁵ Saul has disobeyed God and has thus forfeited the kingdom and his dynasty (13:13).⁵⁶ In language reminiscent of the former oracle (2:35), Samuel announces that God has sought and appointed a ruler who is a "man after His own heart."⁵⁷ The tension now is doubled: Saul is not the promised priest, made apparent by God's displeasure at his priestly activity. But he is likewise not God's king. The story therefore holds the reader in suspense, anticipating both the coming priest and king.

The second act of Saul's disobedience confirms the arrogance of his heart. In sparing Agag and the livestock, taken for sacrifice, Saul acted in direct opposition to God's command to destroy everything (1Sam 15:3ff).⁵⁸ This brings the complication to a crisis point: God will tear the kingdom from Saul and give it to another who is better⁵⁹ than him.

Here the compiler, in addition to the heightened tension introduced by dialogue, uses a ritual, the hem motif, to signal a major crisis or turning point in the story. Since the hem is bound up in covenant enactment, its being torn away from Samuel's⁶⁰ garment offers a fitting illustration for the prophet's oracle against Saul's self-centered reign. His outward acts of loyalty to God, seen in false sacrifice and trusting in religious "magic" or ritual, is beautifully illustrated by his grasping the hem of HaShem's prophet. Such outward signs of obedience, done with a heart of selfishness, become the very means of Saul's destruction. To lay hold of the hem of HaShem's prophet was no doubt seen by Saul as symbolic of his loyalty to God. But rather than strengthening the Suzerain-Vassal relationship, the hem tears, and with it the covenant made at enthronement.

Such a dramatic turning point is used by the compiler to immediately introduce the reader to David, who is sought out by Samuel and anointed in the following pericope. It seems apparent that such a juxtaposing is structurally thematic and not chronological.

In precisely the same way, the hem motif in chapter twenty-four functions to bring the narrative to a crisis or turning point. In this scene, however, the hem belongs to Saul. David now has the opportunity to

viewed properly, as obedience to God with regard to the covenant, waiting will be no problem. But Saul obviously views sacrifice as a magical ritual by which he can persuade HaShem to fight for him. To wait for Samuel at such a strategic point in the battle invites military disaster.

55. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 63ff.

56. Merrill, *Op. cit.*, 210, maintains that 1Sam 13:13 indicates that the divided monarch was already part of God's plan, and that had Saul been obedient, his dynasty would have continued in the northern kingdom, while the redemptive aspects of the Davidic kingdom would have been in the south.

57. 1Sam 3:35, בללבי, compare 1Sam 13:14, איש כלבו.

58. The text would intimate that Saul planned to sacrifice these animals himself. The meeting with Samuel is not scheduled (15:12ff)! See the comments of Merrill, *Op. cit.*, 210.

59. On טוב as a significant term both in this pericope and in covenant language in general, see Dennis J. McCarthy, "Social Compact and Sacral Kingship" in Tomoo Ishida, ed., *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon* (Eisenbrauns, 1982), 77; טוב is used in the mouth of Saul (about David) four times in 1Sam 24:18-20 (English 24:17-20)!

60. The text is not clear at this point (15:27): ויסב שמואל ללכת ויחזק בכנף מעילו, "and Samuel turned to go and he seized the edge of his garment." The Lxx and Syriac try to resolve the question of the pronouns by adding "Saul" to the second clause. It seems most probable that Saul seized Samuel's hem, but the text itself could go several ways: Saul tearing his own garment, Samuel tearing Saul's, or Saul tearing Samuel's. Brauner attempts to show that syntactically, the meaning must be that Saul tore Samuel's robe (though a typo in the manuscript reads "Saul . . . tore the garment of Saul!") ("To Grasp the Hem and 1Samuel 15:27," *JANES* 6(1974), 35). Gronbaek [*Die Geshichte vom Aufsteig Davids (Compenhagen, 1971)*, 40-2] argues that Samuel tore his own cloak. Fokkelman's comments, *Op. cit.*, 2:105, ns. 29-30, give clear insight into the narrative at this point and show that the flow of the narrative opts for Saul tearing the robe of Samuel.

tear the kingdom away from Saul and take it for himself,⁶¹ but to do so would be to follow the pattern of the nations, one dynasty falling to the sword of another. Even the cutting of the hem would symbolize, not only in a dramatic way, but also legally, David's treason against the king. It would be a denial of the covenant into which not only the people but also David himself entered at Saul's enthronement. To even have considered such a move causes David's conscience to suffer.⁶² When he finally comes forth from the cave, what others might have construed as an object of treason, he turns into the proof of his loyalty. The scene presents an ironic turnabout when viewed in light of the previous hem pericope: There Saul was seen with Samuel's hem in hand, not as proof of a righteous heart, but as a symbol of the demise of his kingdom and dynasty. In contrast, the present scene has David standing with Saul's hem in hand as proof of his integrity and covenant loyalty, both to Saul and to God.⁶³

This second crisis or turning point, marked by the hem motif, leads to an initial resolution of the tension. Saul admits the truth for the first time, submits to the inevitable and seeks the favor of David in his future kingdom reign. As far as the narrative is concerned, the battle is over—everyone, including Saul, is now firmly assured that the kingdom belongs to David.⁶⁴

But the story does not end with a victory feast for David. Instead, the conclusion announces Samuel's death. Once again the reader is reminded that God's promised priest is still to be found. Convinced that David is God's king, the death of Samuel leaves the promise of God's priest looming in the mind of the reader. The hem motif, functioning as a turning point, swings the narrative on its hinge to direct it toward the coming priest.

From this point in the narrative the compiler purposes to show David's integrity. Each story or section ends with the affirmation that David is righteous in his dealings. The Nabal event (ch. 25); another opportunity to slay Saul (ch. 26); even the time spent with the Philistines in exile (chs. 27-29) conclude with the statement that David was upright in all of his ways.⁶⁵ David is gracious in sharing the booty of victory (30:24-25); forgiving and compassionate to his enemies (Saul's house, Abner, Ishboshet, etc., cf. ch. 31) as well as just and righteous. In all of these stories, the compiler stresses the "better than you (Saul)" motif as well as the "after My own heart" character of David.⁶⁶

61. Note the words of David's companions, 24:1-3, urging him to take the matter into his own hands.

62. Most commentators see a hopeless mixing of sources at 24:5. David's conscience is bothered, it is argued, when he, with his men, sought to kill the king. When he cuts the hem, it is a righteous deed, done after his conscience bothered him about his treasonous plans. The verse is then said to be misplaced from an otherwise missing line—see Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel in The Old Testament Library* (Phil:Westminster Press, 1964), 196. Fokkelman, *Op. cit.*, 2:455, is absolutely correct at this point when he rebukes the commentators for expunging this text as an interpolation. Additionally, what should not be missed here is the fact that the reader is given a look into David's heart (וַיֵּךְ לֵב דָּוִד אֹתוֹ), reminiscent of the former "after My own heart" oracle (2:35; 13:14; 14:7; cp. 2Sam 24:10). Interestingly, only the brothers of David ever accuse him of being evil in heart (17:28). Saul, in contrast, is always viewed in the narrative from an outward perspective. His actions reveal his heart, but the narrator never does it for us. Michal, following in her father's footsteps, however, "despises David in her heart" (2Sam. 6:16).

63. cf. 1Sam 28:17, where the phraseology may well show that the hem functions metonymically for the kingdom—"the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David." Note as well the foreshadowing of this ironic turnabout in that David perhaps wore the royal hem at Saul's request in 1Sam 17:38, as well as when Jonathan gave David his clothing, no doubt symbolic of the legal heir giving up his rights to the throne, cf. 18:4f.

64. Fokkelman (*Op. cit.*, 2:458-9) is superb at this point. David's speech, the longest recorded, affirms in clear structural strokes his standing before God and Saul (God's anointed) as the righteous, chosen king.

65. Note particularly 25:32, 33; 26:21, 25; 29:6; 30:24-25; 2Sam 2:5, 6; 3:32f; 5:25. Likewise, the narratives in the section 1Sam 25-31 which speak of Saul always cast him in a negative light, showing his disobedience.

66. It is not as though David has goodness of himself, as the Nabal/Abigail story shows. Throughout the narrative between 1Sam 25-2Sam 7, the reader is well aware that David's righteousness comes as a result of God's grace, for

It is not until after the death of Saul, however, when David is publicly enthroned, that the promise of God’s priest finds its resolution.

A hint is given to the reader when David inquires of the Lord and receives an answer (2 Sam 2:1f), in direct contrast to Saul who inquired of the Lord and received nothing (1Sam 14:27; 28:6). But it is not until the ark is brought to the “city of David” that the reader sees the fulfillment of the promised priest (2 Sam 6). Clothed in an ephod, sacrificing to the Lord in both burnt and peace offerings, David functions as the divinely appointed, regal priest.

The narrative gives no hint of divine displeasure at David’s cultic involvement, again, in direct contrast to the Saul narrative.⁶⁷ God has ordained that His chosen king stand symbolically as His chosen priest. And, in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, the compiler signals to the reader that a king after the pattern of Melchizedech has arrived. David is king of Jerusalem, priest of the Most High God.⁶⁸

III. The Structure of the Hem Pericopes

1Samuel 15	1Samuel 24
27. Hem torn & in Saul’s hand	11a. Cut hem displayed by David
28. Speech by Samuel	11b-15. Speech by David
1. God has rejected you (Saul).	1. God has given you into my hands
2. God has given the kingdom to your neighbor who is better than you.	2. I have not sinned against you
29. 3. God will not change His mind.	3. God will judge righteously
30a. Saul’s confession: I have sinned	16-20. Saul’s confession: I have dealt wickedly You are better than I
30b. Saul makes a request—Samuel’s endorsement	21. Saul makes a request—David’s favor
32. Oracle against King Agag, “Your mother will be childless.”	Saul seeks covenant with David regarding his offspring
34. Samuel and Saul leave in opposite directions.	22. David and Saul leave in opposite directions
35. Samuel’s death noted.	25:1. Samuel’s death

IV. Conclusion

Since in the ANE the hem of the garment often entered into oath/covenant ceremonies, it was seen as imbued with the rights and authority promised in the covenant. In the Samuel narrative, it appears quite certain that the narrator has chosen the hem motif to mark major crises or turning points. The motif is particularly germane here, since the history centers on enthronement, which involves a covenant ceremony no doubt involving the hem of the royal robe. The similar structures of the pericopes themselves strengthens the claim that they function as parallel crises or turning points.

The first hem pericope (1Sam 15:24-35) marks the turning point from Saul to David, presenting from a Divine perspective, and sets the stage for David to enter the narrative. In the corresponding hem pericope (1Sam 24:1-25:1), the demise of Saul’s reign is made evident; even Saul himself agrees to the inevitable, assuring the reader that David will indeed gain the throne. But more than confirming the demise of Saul and the appointment of David, this second hem motif has alerted the reader to the integrity of David. He is now clearly seen as one “after God’s own heart,” the description of the promised priest. This second turning point thus paves the way for the narrative eventually to combine both priest and king in the person of David.

God’s election brings His grace.

67. Even the Uzzah event (2Sam 6:6ff) is juxtaposed against David’s priestly activity to remind the reader that God still regards the sanctity of the priesthood. Thus, God’s acceptance of David’s sacrifices is all the more significant.

68. The Davidic application of Ps. 110 cannot be missed here, nor his standing prototypically of the Messiah, the Son of David, who would likewise be King and Priest. Of this the prophets were surely aware, cf. Zech 6:12,13.