

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WISCONSIN

DAVID THE PROPHET: AN EXAMINATION OF DAVID IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL

SUBMITTED TO PROFESSOR WILLIAM TACKMIER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF

DIVINITY

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FEBRUARY 18, 2021

ABSTRACT

In the New Testament, David is frequently labeled a prophet. Many interpreters have approached this with no concern and have read David the King as a prophet in the Old Testament accounts. Simply put, since David is called a prophet in the New Testament, and the Psalms record his prophecies, it is natural to approach David as a prophet. In modern times, however, some scholars have challenged the notion because, in the entire Old Testament, David is never explicitly called a prophet. These scholars propose various solutions, assuming they will find the original reference to David as a prophet in extra-biblical or inter-testamental sources. This thesis shows that David is a prophet in the earliest narrative account of David's life, recorded in 1 and 2 Sam.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConC	Concordia Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

In his first sermon after Pentecost, Peter begins almost immediately referencing the prophet, Joel. He then proceeds to quote Psalm 16 and says of David, “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But *he was a prophet* and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne” (Acts 2:29–30).¹ In just one phrase in one sermon, Peter triggers a question that seems to be of academic significance but has far-reaching implications. The question is this: Why does Peter call David a prophet? Other New Testament references and later Jewish tradition views David as a prophet, but these are all a millennium or more removed from David’s era. But as Fitzmyer puts it, “Where does it begin?”² My thesis intends to prove that David, though not explicitly named a prophet in the Old Testament, is characterized as one by 1 and 2 Samuel. To do this, I will first define “prophet,” then examine the term’s usage in the Old Testament, David’s life as recorded by Samuel and David’s “Last Words” in 2 Samuel 23.

1. Emphasis added. All Biblical references are taken from NIV, unless otherwise noted.

2. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being Therefore a Prophet’ (Acts 2:30),” *CBQ* 34, no. 3 (July 1972): 332–39.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The question of David as a prophet in the Old Testament is a recent one, mainly because it was not always a question. In the New Testament, Jesus said, “David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36) about Ps 110. Jesus viewed David as a divinely inspired prophet. David is further referenced three times in Acts as speaking by the Spirit or directly being called a prophet.³ Paul also uses David’s words as authoritative in Rom 4:6 and places them parallel to Isaiah in Rom 11:8. The writer of Hebrews says that God “spoke through David” (Heb 4:7). The New Testament writers had no qualms thinking of David as a prophet. But some scholars point out, reasonably, that there is no reference to David as a prophet in the entire corpus of the Old Testament. This observation has led some to question the validity of the claim that David is a prophet and seek the origin of such a claim apart from the text of Scripture.

Luther, representing a traditional approach to prophecy in the Old Testament, had no problem seeing David as a prophet. Luther said of Ps 110, “Here, as nowhere else in the Old Testament Scriptures, we find a clear and powerful description of His person... and of His resurrection, ascension, and entire kingdom.”⁴ Luther saw this psalm of David as the most explicit testimony of Christ in the Old Testament, which would categorize the psalm as a clear

³ Acts 1:16; 2:30; 4:25

⁴ Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, vol 13, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 228. Hereafter, *Luther’ Works* will be referenced as AE.

example of prophecy. He even called David “the holy prophet.”⁵ Not only was David a prophet in Luther’s mind, but he even argues that David was aware that he was speaking of things that were to come; he was not simply writing hymns but hymns that were inspired and prophetic—and he knew it. “Luther was convinced that David knew prophetically that God’s deliverance would come through his own descendant, the Messiah.”⁶ Luther’s firm conviction stands in stark contrast with Fitzmyer and Kugel, who both do not see David conceptualized as a prophet until well after David’s death. This thesis will seek to add a voice in support of Luther to show that David indeed was a prophet, not in retrospect, but within full view of his contemporaries.

James Kugel proposes that the prophetic image “occurs in three distinct phases or movements in David’s reputation, each phase motivated by rather distinct concerns.”⁷ The first movement was in the Chronicler’s portrayal of David as the progenitor of worship life, especially music and the temple. Kugel says that the Chronicler’s desire was “to give music and song in the Temple a distinguished founder.”⁸ Who better to establish worship life post-exile than the great King David? The next movement sees a shift to David as “the divinely chosen one as a fit author for the ‘scripturescent’ Psalms.”⁹ He argues that, though the transition is gradual into this stage, the claim to David’s authorship of the Psalms must come from this period owing primarily to the text of 11 Q Ps^a, which describes David as the author of over 4,000 psalms.¹⁰

5 AE, 228.

6 Robert Kolb, “David: King, Prophet, Repentant Sinner. Martin Luther’s Image of the Son of Jesse,” *Perichoresis* 8.2 (2010), 209.

7 James L. Kugel, “David the Prophet,” in *Poetry and Prophecy, The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990), 50.

8 Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 50.

9 Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 53.

10 Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 53–4.

Kugel sees the final development in the Jewish treatment of the Psalms as divinely inspired.¹¹ His thesis, then, is that David as a prophet is a concept that developed with time, coming to fruition in the inter-testamental period.

Fitzmyer seeks to investigate the Old Testament to find a springboard for the idea of David as a prophet.¹² He, like Kugel, relies on 11 Q Ps^a, which referenced David as a prophet, to conclude that the Qumran community saw David as a prophet. Instead of looking for motives to elevate David to a higher status, Fitzmyer looks to the anointing of David and the connection that anointing had within the Qumran community. He notes, “We find the title ‘anointed ones’ applied to the prophets more clearly in the Qumran literature.”¹³ Since David received this title in Ps 18:51 and 2 Sam 22:51, and especially in 2 Sam 23:1, he says that “it is not impossible that the anointing began to be understood in the Qumran community, not of his regal function, but of prophecy.”¹⁴ Fitzmyer, then, does not view David’s title as a prophet as a necessary development but as an interpretation of an ancient Jewish community that read of David’s life and concluded that he must have been a prophet. However, he does infer that “the notion of David as prophet... is still older in the Jewish tradition, but it has not yet been detected at an earlier date.”¹⁵ This concession does not consider Ps 105:15, which records God saying, “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.” Anointing was something not only for kings but prophets as well, even in the Psalms.

11 Kugel, “David the Prophet,” 55.

12 Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being Therefore a Prophet,’” 333.

13 Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being Therefore a Prophet,’” 337.

14 Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being Therefore a Prophet,’” 338.

15 Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being Therefore a Prophet,’” 339.

The more modern notions Fitzmyer and Kugel bring to the discussion, though different from the traditional interpretation of scholars like Luther, highlight the delicate nature of prophecy in the Old Testament. Indeed, David is not explicitly labeled as a “prophet.” Modern readers, then, should be cautious about making anachronisms by concluding that David as a prophet was as clear to the first audience as it was to Peter and his audience.

PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first issue to tackle is the term נָבִיא as it relates to the Old Testament. Peter calls David a prophet, but there is no direct reference to David as a prophet in the Old Testament. Fitzmyer goes so far as to say, “There seems to be little in the OT story of David that would serve as a springboard for it.”¹⁶ To understand why Peter uses the label, we should consider how the term was used in the Old Testament in the broader context to determine if labeling David a prophet would have been fitting.

Definition

The term נָבִיא is common in the Old Testament. It is used 315 times, but it is only used 15 times before Samuel.¹⁷ Before Samuel, the most notable “prophets” were Abraham (Gen 20:7), Moses, and the prophet who was to come after Moses (Deut 18:15ff). The book of 1 Samuel uses the term 12 times and 2 Samuel 3 times. 1 and 2 Kings use it 83 times! The term, then, was not as prevalent in the early monarchy, or at least in written Scripture, as it was in the later period of the monarchy. However, this shift in usage does not indicate that the function and role of a prophet were absent.

16. Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being therefore a Prophet’” 333.

17. This number is derived by adding the total usage of the terms from the Torah, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. See Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, “נָבִיא” *TLOT*, 2:697.

Jenni and Westermann observe that the translation “prophets” is an expediency, but it is not always clear if the term refers to a “life-style or functional designation... or a professional designation in a stricter sense.”¹⁸ There is no strict definition of a prophet as far as the referent is concerned, but there is not much doubt as far as function is concerned. A prophet speaks the words of God, on behalf of God, to another. Heschel adds an important distinction concerning a prophet’s identification: “The first and main feature of a prophet is his own claim to be a prophet; his own testimony to an experience of the Supreme Being addressing Himself to him for the purpose of conveying a message to others.”¹⁹ Self-identification is important. It might be why the people of Israel asked, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”²⁰ (1 Sam 10:11, 12; 19:24). A careful examination of the use of the term נָבִיא the Pre-Samuel texts²¹ is helpful to understand how David and his contemporaries would have encountered the word in their sacred Scriptures and tradition.

Pre-Samuel Usage

There is limited use of the term before the book of Samuel, so it will be beneficial to examine these uses to establish the understanding and state of prophets by the time of David. By doing so, an accurate definition may be gained by which one can compare David to determine if he matches the description.

18. Jenni and Westermann, *TLOT*, 2:698.

19. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets, II* (New York: Harper, 1962), 252.

20. This saying will be discussed below.

21. By pre-Samuel texts, I am referring to those texts which chronologically precede Samuel: The Torah, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.

Genesis and Exodus

The Torah uses the term sparingly, and its usage is consistent with how later writers utilize “prophet.” The first use in the Hebrew OT is in Genesis when God speaks to Abimelek in a dream, warning him to return Sarah to Abraham: “Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die” (Gen 20:7).²² This passage demonstrates that a prophet prays to God on behalf of another and is protected by God. The next occurrence of the word is in Exodus when the Lord is telling Moses to speak to Pharaoh: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet’” (Exod 7:1). Here, the passage emphasizes the mediator relationship with the distinction that the prophet serves God. Aaron, then, serves as a prophet, conveying the words God speaks to Moses to others, specifically Pharaoh in this context. Implicit in this passage is an indication that there is a commissioning of sorts. Not anyone can serve in the role of prophet, then, but only those whom God has commissioned.

Aaron’s sister Miriam is called a נְבִיאָה (Exod 15:20). We do not get the chance to see what other functions she may carry out or what this means entirely, but this does help us see that the term can be used for multiple people in one setting. Moses is indeed a prophet, and the reference to him being called a prophet will come later in the Torah. Aaron also serves as a prophet, and so does Miriam. Three people, near each other both in their relationship and in the roles by which they serve the wider community, are each described as a “prophet.”

22. Interestingly, God is speaking to Abimelek without the use of a prophet to indicate who his prophet is. Does this make Abimelek, too, a prophet? Probably not, because the message is for the recipient of the dream, namely Abimelek, not for another person, though the irony is interesting.

Numbers

The next occurrence is in Moses' words to Joshua concerning those who are prophesying even though they did not go to the tent of meeting: "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num 11:29). This verse adds a powerful testimony that the Lord is putting his Spirit on people, enabling them to speak. In the framework of the Bible, the Spirit is strongly connected to the role and function of prophets.

The next appearance of "prophet" shows up in the next chapter. In response to Aaron and Miriam's rebellion against Moses, God comes down to them in a cloud and says, "When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num 12:6–8). These verses reveal that God was not always direct and clear with his prophets. What's more, this account shows, as also in Gen 20:7, that God stands in defense of those who speak his word.

Deuteronomy

Maybe the most significant reference to נָבִיא in this discussion appears in Deuteronomy:

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not

commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

²¹ You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” ²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed. (Deut 18:15–22)

There is tremendous Christological value to these verses, but we will limit ourselves to the value added to the conversation at hand, namely, defining נָבִיא. Craigie sees this first as a promise that God will establish a continuing line of prophets for the people of Israel who would speak to them on God’s behalf.²³ This continuing office of prophecy would include men appointed to be leaders as well as those whom 1 and 2 Samuel label as נָבִיא, such as Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. Craigie also notes that these verses indicate how false and true prophets are to be distinguished. The punishment for those who were false prophets is death, so delineating between them is crucial. “Over the course of a prophet’s ministry, in matters important and less significant, the character of a prophet as a true spokesman of God would begin to emerge clearly.”²⁴ With this observation, it is legitimate and crucial to examine one’s life and words to assess the quality of the claim on prophecy.

Judges

The only usage in Judges appears in Judges 6: “When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says’” (Judg 6:7–8). This use is descriptive of the period of the judges and the later usage of “prophet,” particularly the opening address in which he declares that he is not speaking his own

23. Peter C Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, ed. PK Harrison, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 262.

24. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 263.

words, but the words of the “Lord, the God of Israel.” His message and his commission from God enable this unnamed prophet to speak with authority.

Development within Samuel

The terms used to refer to the group of people God commissioned to speak for him vary, especially in 1 and 2 Samuel. In 1 Samuel 2:27, an unnamed “man of God” proclaims God’s words to Eli and even delivers a prophecy. Tsumura sees “man of God” as synonymous with “prophet.”²⁵ He identifies the “messenger formula” as an indication of prophecy.²⁶ This term “man of God” will develop throughout the narrative.

The author of Samuel later gives this note to his readers concerning terminology: “Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer,’ because the prophet of today used to be called a seer” (1 Sam 9:9). Firth sees this passage as one out of context but one that prepares the reader to understand the term “seer” in the coming passages referring to the man of God.²⁷ However, McCarter considers this statement to be an indication of specialization for *נביא* instead of the more general “man of God.”²⁸ Regardless, the author is trying to help the reader understand what a seer is by using the term “prophet,” which means that the term prophet is the one that has meaning to his audience. It is important to remember that for Peter and New Testament Christians, “prophet” has a richer context and history than for David and the author of Samuel. However, the people of David’s time certainly

25. David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 165.

26. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 165.

27. David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 123.

28. McCarter, P Kyle, Jr, *1 Samuel*, AB, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1980), 177.

understood the importance of receiving a message from God through a particular individual that God had designated to carry his message.

The Term Explodes in Usage

The explosion of the term prophet in the book of Kings marks a shift in usage and certainly an increase in prophetic activity. The term “prophet” was not used exclusively during David’s time but often occurred with other words, such as “man of God” or “seer.” During the period after David, the remaining 270 occurrences appear, with strong frequency in the prophetic literature.²⁹ Not all those who claim to be “prophets” are sent by God, but many take the name for personal gain. Consider this passage from Jeremiah as an example: “Then the Lord said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds’” (Jer 14:14). The profession of prophet became so powerful that many would seemingly lie about their commissioning and their message for personal gain. It is critical to distinguish between a prophet and a false prophet.

By the time of the compiling of the Old Testament canon, the word “prophet” would refer to an entire category of books. This shift in how Scripture utilizes the term “prophet” helps inform a student of Scripture how Peter would understand the word. Peter, much like Christians today, would have the entire history of prophets and prophecy on his mind, so to label David as a prophet is not an overstatement but a characterization of David based on his known qualities.

²⁹. Jenni and Westermann, *TLOT*, 2:697.

Conclusion

In a brief study of the term, it becomes evident that there is much meaning behind the word “prophet.” Some of the indicators and descriptions of a prophet, especially before the time of David, were: delivering a message on behalf of God, self-identification, God’s commission and subsequent protection, and empowerment by the Spirit. We will examine those attributes below to determine if it is appropriate to call David a prophet based on what Samuel reveals about David.

DAVID'S LIFE

One of the crucial traits of a prophet is the character by which that prophet lives, as described above. It is no secret that the author of Samuel and the author of Chronicles take different approaches in how they choose to portray David. This chapter will examine the life of David as described in 1 and 2 Sam to determine if David's character matches that of a prophet or if the description excludes David.

The Anointing

Chosen by God

The initial introduction of David into the narrative of Samuel comes in 1 Sam 16, but even before that event, there is a foreshadowed description of him. Samuel condemned Saul's rash decision to offer a sacrifice to the Lord without him and says, "The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people" (1 Sam 13:14). It becomes evident that the man after God's own heart is David in 1 Sam 16. Steinmann notes that "while the phrase 'according to his own heart' (1 Sam 13:14) emphasizes God's choice, it also implies something about David's character. David's God-given intellect and faith—especially his obedience in contrast to Saul's disobedience—distinguished him as the one God had chosen for Israel's benefit (2 Sam 7:10–11)."³⁰ Not only is this future king chosen by God, but his character is of a different kind than Saul's.

30. Andrew E. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016), 243.

Samuel is the one who initially fixed the problems that Saul created. Later, David was the leading actor in improving the weak position into which Saul led Israel, particularly after Samuel died. In this way, David replaced Samuel the prophet as the godly bulwark against Saul's ungodly actions. Samuel's anointing of David appears in 1 Sam 16. However, "David is not officially anointed as king until 2 Sam 2:4 and 5:3; in fact, the expression 'to anoint David as king' never appears in the present chapter."³¹ This is important to remember, especially for the readers so familiar with the outcome of this anointing. At the time of his anointing, David and his family may well not have known for what purpose Samuel had anointed him. And yet, it is unquestionable in the context of 1 Sam that this anointing was to replace Saul and so was a kingly anointing. There is more than just the act of anointing in the present narrative. Steinmann notes how God's choice of the king stands in contrast to the choice of Saul as king because "the choice of a new king was not prompted by Israel's demand, as was the case for Saul.... The choice would be made now solely by God's criteria—according to God's heart."³² There are, then, two important conclusions that are interconnected: God chose David, and he approved of his heart. The choice was based on what God could see in David's heart. His heart's content aligns with the character needed to run a nation, but it also matches the character expected in a prophet. 1 Sam 16 does not speak of God's choice as one of choosing a prophet, however, so there must be further development in David's story to uphold David's character as a prophet.

31. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 415.

32. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 308.

The Spirit Comes on David

Immediately following the anointing, the writer noted an important detail: “From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David” (1 Sam 16:13). The Spirit’s mention is not surprising because twice it is noted that the Spirit similarly came on Saul. “When [Saul] and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying” (1 Sam 10:10). Then, shortly after Samuel anointed Saul and upon hearing of a threat to Israel, the “Spirit of God came powerfully upon him” (1 Sam 11:6). Both of these references to Saul speak of some increase due to the Spirit of God that is externally observable. In the first, it was prophesying. In the second example, Saul became the leader that his people needed.

What is surprising is the narrator’s note following the Spirit’s arrival upon David: “Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him” (1 Sam 16:14). Immediately after David’s anointing and Spirit-appropriation, the narrator mentions that Saul no longer has the Spirit and even that the Lord sent him an evil spirit to torment him. It will be essential to examine Saul’s experiences to understand 1 Sam 16:13–14 because the language is similar, and the juxtaposition requires the reader to consider the two points together.

Saul’s Spirit and Prophesying Experiences

As noted above, Saul experienced the Spirit of the Lord coming on him twice in close sequence to one another. The first is the most significant for this study:³³

33. Here is a quick summary of the other account: Shortly after Saul was anointed and upon hearing of a threat to Israel, the “Spirit of God came powerfully upon him.” (1 Sam 11:6) In this case, the Spirit comes on Saul, and he takes on a role of a king, rallying the people in defense of his nation. The Spirit’s intervention is necessary because word about the Ammonite threat only reached Saul after he came in from working in the fields with his

¹⁰ When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. ¹¹ When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, “What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”

¹² A man who lived there answered, “And who is their father?” So it became a saying: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Sam 10:10–12)

This event does not occur when Samuel anoints Saul, as is noted with David (1 Sam 16:13).

Tsumura says that “here, the spirit of the Lord functions as the means by which he takes ordinary people and makes them fit for his service.”³⁴ This functioning is certainly descriptive of the Spirit’s work with Saul and David. There also seems to be an emphasis in 1 Sam 10 on the Spirit’s connection to prophesying. “There was amazement that Saul would be a prophet, and as implied by one man’s question, that he might even be the leader of a band of prophets (1 Sam 10:12). This is one of two incidents of Saul prophesying that led to a proverbial saying in Israel. The expression seems to be a way of indicating something unexpected and out of character.³⁵ Saul’s character, and maybe his piety, was not reflective of one who would prophesy. Klein says that “Saul is seen as a savior figure like the judges though the connection of the spirit with his anointing is not as direct as it is with David.”³⁶ The people may well have seen the prophesying as an outward sign of God’s approval. God did not set out for Saul to fail and even sent his Spirit to accompany him.

This was not Saul’s only experience prophesying, however. After one of the occasions Saul had attempted to capture David, David fled to Samuel at Ramah. On hearing about David’s

oxen (1 Sam 11:4–5). Saul did not keep a watchful eye on his nation or her enemies and by failing to be king and acting only as a farmer, his nation came under threat.

34. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 287–8.

35. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 199.

36. Ralph W Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 92.

location, Saul sent some men to Ramah to capture David. He sent three groups of men, and each time, when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, “the Spirit of God came on Saul’s men, and they also prophesied” (1 Sam 19:20). When Saul finally went himself, “the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel’s presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’” (1 Sam 19:23–24). In this dramatic story, the Spirit of God came on Saul and his men, and they all began to prophesy. Klein sees this description as a definitively negative characterization. He says, “the narrator expresses his surprise by adding *גם הוּא* (‘yes, on him’) after the pronoun.”³⁷ Steinmann sees this account as a bookend with the other account (1 Sam 10:10–12). The first account showed his prophesying as God’s chosen king, and the final account showed how “God stripped him of his dignity, along with stripping him of his kingdom.”³⁸ For God to use someone he has rejected to prophesy can be challenging to understand. How can God use an unbeliever to prophesy? The reader is not given an answer here but is simply told that the Spirit came on Saul and caused him to prophesy, which is a surprising miracle. Saul is humiliated by this miracle of God, showing that God’s Spirit and prophecy do not make a person holy before the Lord.

What Saul’s Experience Means for David

It was never said of David, “Is David, too, among the prophets?” Saul experienced the Lord constantly making a godly king out of an ungodly man. Each time the Lord sends his Spirit on Saul, it is because Saul is not acting in a manner with either how God has commanded or how a

37. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 199.

38. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 378.

king ought to act. The result was perplexing to those observing. The people of Israel seemed to understand that Saul was not a likely candidate for prophecy. This ungodly ruler and all that God did to him, good and bad, would have been on the hearts and minds of both those who saw the transition of power and those who still read the story today. It would be no surprise for God to choose David to be a messenger in the same way that it was a surprise for those who saw Saul prophesying by the power of the Spirit.

What remains a surprise is frequent references to Saul, the ungodly king, prophesying. There is no reference to David as a prophet or prophesying using such terminology directly in this narrative account. David was anointed, the Spirit came on him, yet the author is silent on David's gifts given through the Spirit.

David and the Spirit

It is interesting to note that the author never records David having an experience with the Spirit as Saul had. He simply says, "The Spirit came powerfully on David from that day onward" (1 Sam 16:13). This is the last time the narrator describes the Spirit coming on David. Klein observes, "With David the spirit seems to be almost a direct result of the anointing, and it lasted permanently, and not spasmodically as it had with Saul."³⁹ This permanence was not a guarantee to David, and David knew it wasn't a guarantee. David prayed fervently, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). David recognized the Spirit as a gift and one that God could take away from him. Saul, however, never realized the significance of the gift of the Spirit that God had given to him.

39. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 162.

Saul's experiences with the Spirit, as well as the experience of the New Testament church, leads Steinmann to conclude that "the coming of the Spirit upon David was manifested in a recognizable way."⁴⁰ This recognizable way is not revealed by the narrator, however. The account does leave the reader with the sense that there may have been something implicitly understood about David but does not indicate what that may have been. Perhaps the author assumes that his audience recognized David already as the inspired psalmist and needed no reminder of that incredible feature of their beloved king. And yet the absence is notable. It is as if the narrator is avoiding referencing David as a prophet.

The Lord is with David

A common narrative observation in 1 Sam was that the Lord was with David. This is not, by itself, an indication of his status as a prophet, but it is instead an observation on the lips of others who recognize that David has the Lord on his side. As stated earlier, God protects his prophets. For God to preserve and advance David doesn't prove by itself David is a prophet, but it does speak to David's eligibility to be a prophet. Klein observes starting with 1 Sam 16:18 that this presence of the Lord is "*asserted* about David in 18:12, 14, 28 and 2 Sam 5:10, and it is a boon *promised* to him in 17:37 and 20:13."⁴¹ The repetition of the presence of the Lord is a sort of leitmotiv in David's story, highlighting the observable fact that the Lord blessed David in many ways.

The first person who observed that the Lord was with David was an unnamed servant of Saul in the account which immediately follows David's anointing. When the evil spirit from the

40. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 311.

41. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 166. Emphasis original. We will follow these verses including 1 Sam 16:18, the verse to which Klein makes this observation. The same list of passages appears in Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 319.

Lord tormented Saul, a servant recommended David as a musician who might soothe him with music and who had numerous other qualifications. The close of this servant's argument is that "the LORD is with him" (1 Sam 16:18). The list of capabilities is so extensive that it leads Johnson to view this narrative as a "double-voiced discourse," meaning two distinct voices in one speech. These two voices are the voice of the unnamed servant and the narrator's voice, both of whom know David from different points of view, and therefore each means something different in each descriptive point made. Johnson argues for this interpretation, observing that what was known of David later fits well with this description, almost better than with David's current state in the narrative since he was thought of as only a boy even by his father. He concludes that there are two pictures of David. The first presents David as a "young but well-qualified candidate for the position of court musician."⁴² The second picture of David is one of a mature King David. "David [is] fully realized, he is a famed psalmist, he is a mighty man of valor and will command a host of 'heroes'... he is a 'man of war'... he is a man of wise words... he is a 'man of form'... and he is a man who will enjoy the support of YHWH in a very unique and powerful way."⁴³ The tension Johnson recognizes is vital: David was not yet a military commander, a warrior, or even a famous poet, yet this servant ascribed these attributes to him well in advance. The essential trait, though, was that the Lord was with him. "This part of the description explains all of the previous parts.... The expression 'Yahweh is with him/David' now becomes a kind of leitmotiv running through the stories of David's rise to power."⁴⁴ This

42. Benjamin J.M. Johnson, "David Then and Now: Double Voiced Discourse in 1 Samuel 16.14–23," *JSOT* 38.2 (2013), 213.

43. Johnson, "David Then and Now," 213.

44. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 281.

leitmotiv becomes evident to the reader, but it was also apparent to David's contemporaries, who recognized the Lord's presence.

The Divine Presence Asserted?

The next person to recognize the Lord was with David was Saul.⁴⁵ "Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul. So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him" (1 Sam 18:12–14). An *inclusio* bookends these verses with Saul's observations that the Lord was with David. The narrator's observation of this presence is attributed as the cause of success for David in all that he did, and Saul was aware of this, too.

The following assertion comes later in the same chapter. "When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days" (1 Sam 18:28–29). Saul's fear of David was growing, and he became a permanent enemy of David. The cause? The Lord was with David. "As in v. 12, Saul knows the Lord is with David, and he realized that 'all Israel,' including his son and even his daughter, loves David."⁴⁶ Under the Lord's care and protection, David became a more prominent and more prestigious figure, and Saul knew it. While the narrative's main thrust was the sharp contrast between Saul and David, it also highlighted that

45. This account includes Saul prophesying because of an evil spirit. For comments on this, see Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 315, 352, and 355.

46. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 488.

David was known to have the Spirit of the Lord with him even before Saul had died and David officially assumed the throne. The author of Samuel wants his readers to know this fact.

The final time that the narrator asserts that the Lord is with David appears in 2 Sam. “And he became more and more powerful because the LORD God Almighty was with him” (2 Sam 5:10). This comment comes at a critical moment in David’s life and reign. After capturing the fortress, he established his residence in Jerusalem, which was thought impregnable (2 Sam 5:6–9), shortly after being anointed king over Israel (2 Sam 5:3). The Lord’s presence with David was apparent not just to the reader in retrospect but also to those who observed David in his own life and time. The Lord’s presence with David was unique and a powerful testimony to David’s character.

The Presence Promised

Shockingly, Saul noticed that the Lord was with David so early. It may also be surprising to note how Saul was the first character recorded as promising that the Lord’s Spirit be with David. In response to David’s defense that not only could he fight Goliath but that he could do it his way, “Saul said to David, ‘Go, and the LORD be with you’” (1 Sam 17:37). Klein sees this as a promise.⁴⁷ A promise may be an overreading of what the narrator reports. It appears to be more of a wish and an ironic one considering the Spirit has departed from Saul already and rested on David.⁴⁸ Either way, Yahweh’s presence with David was evident in the story of David and Goliath.

47. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 179.

48. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 340.

For yet another piece of irony, the next person to wish for the Lord's presence to be with David is Saul's son, Jonathan, who told David, "May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father" (1 Sam 20:13). This wish seems to be acceptance by Jonathan that David, and not Jonathan, will ascend to the throne.⁴⁹ Moreover, it highlights that the Lord's presence with David was not only an observation but the hope of friends.

In all these examples, those who surround David and those who simply hear about him know something is unique about him. They knew that the Lord was with him, and they recognized the Lord was the one who made him successful in all that he did. Not everyone who had the Lord's presence was a prophet, to be sure. But a prophet was undoubtedly accompanied by the Lord and whose actions were protected and confirmed by the Lord. David fit this description well. The narrator notes how the Lord was with David time and time again. In addition, David knew it, Saul knew it, Jonathan knew it, and even the nation of Israel knew it.

David Honors the Priesthood

God expected the whole nation of Israel to respect and honor the priesthood, so there is nothing exceptional about David honoring the priesthood. The priesthood, as it will be shown, suffered tremendously under a king who dishonored it. Not only, then, did David honor the priesthood, but he did so despite his own predecessor's attitude, threats, and actions. David's respect for the priests was not merely a blind adherence to rules but an understanding that priests were God's appointed representatives. These representatives acted as a mouthpiece for God, and David showed himself ready to defend those who spoke on behalf of the Lord.

⁴⁹ McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 342. See also Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 508 and Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 400.

David at Nob

While David was fleeing from Saul, David maintained a good relationship with the priesthood and enjoyed a privileged status before them. The first example of this is recorded in 1 Sam 21:1–9 when David came to Ahimelek and requested food and a weapon. Ahimelek had no regular bread but gave David and his men the show bread, which was reserved for the priests, and Goliath’s sword. Priests placed the show bread on the altar, and when they replaced it the next week, the priests alone were to eat the bread for food (Lev 21:6, 8, 22). Steinmann believes that Ahimelek lowered the standard to a standard of cleanliness, instead of the status as a priest, to allow David to eat the bread.⁵⁰ Tsumura, who says, “the rules may have been loosely applied during this period,” goes on to say that Ahimelek “did feel it must not be treated the same as common bread.”⁵¹ However strictly the rules may have been applied, the rules needed to be bent or violated to accommodate David’s request. Jesus points to this incident to prove that “God’s Law was not designed to prevent actions that serve human needs and preserve life (Mt 12:3–4; Mk 2:25–26; Lk 6:3–4).”⁵² David’s character is respected enough by the high priest that he would be willing to make an exception and an exception that Jesus applauds. Had David been dishonorable, Ahimelek lowering the standard of God’s law would be a scandal.

Ahimelek’s Apology (1 Sam 22:6–16)

The story of David at Nob makes it to Saul through the mouth of Doeg the Edomite, who added the detail that Ahimelek “inquired of the LORD for him” (1 Sam 22:10). Saul was infuriated that

50. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 410.

51. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 531.

52. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 412.

the priest would support David, so he went to Nob to interrogate Ahimelek. Ahimelek points to David's position of honor in Saul's ranks and his frequent previous inquiries to the Lord for David. Ahimelek reveals here for the first time that David regularly went to the priesthood to inquire of the Lord for him. He respected the priests as God's appointed servants and the ordinary means through which the Lord's faithful come to him. David did not expect or receive frequent, direct words from God which would render the priesthood redundant, but quite the opposite.

David Defends the Priesthood

Saul commanded his men to kill Ahimelek, the high priest, and his family in his anger. They refused, so Saul commanded Doeg to do it. "So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep" (1 Sam 22:18–19). This stunning massacre at the king's command, the king who was supposed to protect them, is immediately contrasted by David's response.

A son of Ahimelek, Abiathar, managed to escape and ran to David. David felt responsible for the massacre and promised to protect Abiathar: "Stay with me; don't be afraid. The man who wants to kill you is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me" (1 Sam 22:23). David saw the safety of the priests as his God-given responsibility, unlike Saul, who saw the priesthood as his personal agents who were to carry out his will. Steinmann observes, "David's treatment of Abiathar also serves as an example of respect for the office of the holy ministry that God placed among the Israelites in the form of the Old Testament priesthood."⁵³ Prophets respect God's

53. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 432.

institutions of ministry. David respects God's institutions of ministry. McCarter notes how David is, moving forward, "presented to us as a man guided by the divine oracle at every turn."⁵⁴ The Lord supported David by his presence and was also with the priesthood. Abiathar soon inquired of the Lord on David's behalf via the Urim (1 Sam 23:1–6).

Does this make everyone who respects God's institutions a prophet? Of course not. However, it adds to the picture of David's character. So far, David is chosen by God, commissioned, has the Spirit, and it is widely acknowledged that the Lord is with him, sustaining, protecting, and advancing him.

David Cares for the Ark

An important aspect of David's public character and image is his passion for the ark. David wanted to move the ark to the new capital of Israel: Jerusalem. With great joy in what they were doing, "David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals" (2 Sam 6:5). David led the people in the joy of celebrating the ark and its movement to its new home. When the oxen pulling the ark stumbled, Uzzah reached out to stabilize the ark, and the Lord struck him, and he died (2 Sam 6:7). The problem was that, though it would seem pious to place the ark on a new cart which could not have been defiled, "the legislation in the Pentateuch clearly called for the ark to be carried by hand by the Kohathite Levites (Num 4:1–15)."⁵⁵ David was angry (2 Sam 6:8), but not at the Lord. Instead, he was "afraid of the Lord" (2 Sam 6:9). He was angry at himself because

54. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 366–7.

55. Andrew Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 112.

he was the anointed of Israel, and he had failed to please God in his actions.⁵⁶ Anderson suggests, “וִיחַר should be rendered, ‘he was distressed’ (Gen 45:5).”⁵⁷ As God’s anointed, David took the responsibility upon himself for failing to follow God’s law. He did not want to disrespect the Lord, but his action had done just that in failing to keep the law. So, he sent the ark to Obed-Edom the Gittite (2 Sam 6:8).

When the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom, David understood this to be a sign of God’s forgiveness,⁵⁸ and so he retrieved the ark and finished the procession into Jerusalem with exuberant dancing (2 Sam 6:12–14). David led the parade and was wearing a linen ephod. Tsumura follows McCarter and sees this as merely clothing, pointing to young Samuel’s clothes in 1 Sam 2:18.⁵⁹ Anderson sees this as a priestly garment since he considers David’s previous sacrifices a priestly function.⁶⁰ Steinmann observes that linen ephods, while usually a priestly garment, “could also be worn by others who were leading or aiding in the worship of Yahweh.”⁶¹ Steinmann’s solution seems best. David was acting not strictly as a king but in a quasi-priestly fashion in his service to the Lord. David’s care for the ark was echoed by Eli, the priest at the beginning of 1 Sam, who fell from his stool and died when he heard that the Philistines had captured the ark (1 Sam 4:18). Eli respected the ark and its place of honor among the Israelites, but he was not king. He was not in control of the army and, even if he had spoken out against its

56. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 114.

57. A.A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 104.

58. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 115.

59. David T. Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, NICOT, ed. E.J. Young et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 118. McCarter, P Kyle, Jr, *2 Samuel*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 171.

60. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 105.

61. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 108.

improper use, could do nothing to stop it. On the other hand, David had complete control of the army and chose to honor the ark of the Lord. In the honor he showed the ark, he displayed to those around him that he honored the Lord and respected the means with which God blessed his chosen people.

David Desired to Build a House for the Lord

Even after David brought the ark into Jerusalem, he was discontent to have the ark of God in a tent when he had a house built of fine cedar. Nathan's initial advice was that David should "go ahead and," build a temple for the Lord. His justification was that "the LORD is with you" (2 Sam 7:3). Not only did David protect the ark and desire to bring it to Jerusalem, but he also wanted to place it in a setting that was worthy of a gift that the Lord had given to the nation. Steinmann says that Nathan approved of this decision as a conclusion "based on God's recent blessing that confirmed David's choice of Jerusalem for the ark's resting place (2 Sam 6)."⁶² God had blessed David's decision to move the ark to Jerusalem. God was pleased with how David has treated his ark and how David was leading the nation of Israel spiritually. The desire to honor God and his means of blessing is not exclusive of a prophet and is better seen as David being a godly king. At the same time, up to this point, neither Saul nor the priesthood had truly honored the ark.⁶³

David's life continues to be characteristic of one who honors the Lord as the prophets would.

62. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 132.

63. 1 Sam 4:1–11 describes how the priests, Eli's sons, used the ark as if it were a talisman. 1 Sam 6:19 describes how, after the ark was returned, God struck down seventy people who looked into the ark. Clearly, the hearts and attitudes of Israel at that time did not reflect the same respect and honor that David displayed in 2 Sam 7.

David's Prophets

A valid objection to the characterization of David as a prophet is that others served as God's messengers to him. Three named examples are Samuel who anointed him (1 Sam 16), Nathan, who reported God's dream about the temple to him (2 Sam 7) and rebuked him (2 Sam 12), and Gad, who appeared once at the beginning of David's reign (1 Sam 22:5) and whom God sent to David on account of his sin concerning the census towards the end of his reign (2 Sam 24). This list illustrates that God had a close relationship with David. He constantly spoke with David, but he communicated with David through various means. This is no surprise, however. When Saul was in great distress from an assembly of Philistines, "he inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets" (1 Sam 28:6). God's ordinary means for communicating were dreams, Urim,⁶⁴ and prophets then. As reported above, David frequently went to the priests to inquire of the Lord for him.

Further, not all of those to whom God spoke directly could rely on direct revelation as a given. An example would be Peter, who received a vision from the Lord correcting his view of cleanness and uncleanness (Acts 10:9–23). However, it was not a vision or a dream by which God corrected Peter in Antioch concerning Christian freedom in the same matter he previously received a dream. Instead, God chose to work through Paul to correct Peter (Gal 2:11–21). This example leaves room for the validity of seeing David as a prophet even though God also chose to speak to him through other prophets.

64. Urim almost certainly is a reference to the Urim and Thummim. For a full discussion on what they were, see Steinmann, "The Urim and Thummim" in *1 Samuel*, 272–5. For the use of the Urim and Thummim by the military leader of Israel, see Num 27:21.

Conclusion

Throughout David's life, he shows himself to be a man of character, a man after God's own heart, a man who is concerned about the decrees and ordinances of the Lord, and a man who respects God's established ministry of the priesthood. If David is a prophet, these traits must be displayed and observed by those to whom he was to speak. Otherwise, there would be a shock that God would pick a man like him, much like there was a shock when Saul prophesied. With David, there was no shock. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and did not leave him. When he began to write hymns and psalms for his people by the power of that Spirit, there was no doubt that he was speaking the very words of God.

DAVID LAYS CLAIM TO PROPHETIC SPEECH

Another of the critical traits of a prophecy is the claim to speak for the Lord. In the books of 1 and 2 Sam, the author does not explicitly claim that David is a prophet. Still, it becomes clear in 2 Sam 22–23 that David viewed himself as one given the Word of God to share with others. This makes the final complement to David’s character and life, God’s anointed king and a prophet of the Lord.

David’s Psalm in 2 Sam 22

Surprisingly, 1 and 2 Sam does not refer to the psalms of the great hymn writer of the Old Testament before this chapter. The author includes at least a few mentions of David as a singer, dancer, and hymn writer,⁶⁵ but only in 2 Sam 22 does he reference any of the psalms compiled into the book of Psalms. That all-important question then arises: Why? Why does the author of 1 and 2 Sam not mention any of the other canonical psalms within David’s life until now? Why would he choose this as the psalm over all others to include? By addressing these questions, one can appreciate how the author presents David as a prophet in concrete terms. He has subtly been alerting his audience up to this point in the narrative and now overtly states that David speaks for the Lord in David’s psalm and his “Last Words.”

65. Examples include 1 Sam 16:18; 2 Sam 2:17–27 and 2 Sam 6:5, 14–15.

Why wait so long?

This is a difficult question, and there can be no sure answer. There are at least two possible explanations. The first is that the author of Samuel felt that the psalms of David were so well known and ubiquitous with David that including them would be redundant. The other solution is that more Davidic psalms would not further the themes of Samuel. The first is merely an argument from silence and is difficult to prove. The second point is more defensible. Lessing and Steinmann note that “the book of Samuel repeatedly emphasizes that God provides prosperity and success and that when humans look to their own devices, they are turning their backs on God.”⁶⁶ The psalms certainly reflect these same notions, though. For example:

- ¹ Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.
- ² I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing.”
- ³ I say of the holy people who are in the land,
“They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.”
- ⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.
- ⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
- ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
- ⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
- ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Ps 16:1–8)

This psalm of David reflects God’s preservation and his gift of prosperity for those faithful to him. It also speaks of those suffering who choose to run after their own paths (Ps 16:4). Indeed, the author of 1 and 2 Sam would have been able to include a psalm such as Ps 16 to further his point, right? Unless, of course, his objective was to prove these notions without reference to the

⁶⁶ R. Reed Lessing and Andrew E. Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord: And Introduction to the Old Testament*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 202.

psalms. But that leaves the question: Why not use the psalms, which would further strengthen his argument?

As noted above, the term “prophet” only appears 15 times in 1 and 2 Sam, but it appears 83 times in 1 and 2 Kings.⁶⁷ For this reason, Lessing and Steinmann conclude, “The role of prophets and prophecy in Samuel is limited, but often noted at important junctures in the narrative.”⁶⁸ It is safe to surmise that when prophets and prophetic speech are mentioned, the reader should notice. Indeed, the inclusion of a psalm of David in the so-called “Epilogue” of Samuel highlights the author’s high regard for this prophetic and poetic aspect of David’s life, which has not had a chance to shine up to this point.

Why Choose This Psalm?

David was the author of many psalms, so the choice of this psalm is intriguing. One of the author’s reasons for choosing this psalm may be its similarity in at least seven points to 1 Sam 2:1–10.⁶⁹ These seven parallels help tie the beginning of the book of Samuel to the end. Steinmann notes, “The author of Samuel does not often tell the reader how God is involved in the events he relates. However, these two songs alert readers that in everything that happens in this book, God is the one who rescues his faithful people and grants blessings to Israel.”⁷⁰ That Hannah, the faithful mother of Samuel, and David, God’s anointed, would echo this truth is fitting. This psalm speaks the truth of God and is delivered to God’s people through the mouth of David. This is undoubtedly a prophetic psalm based on these characteristics, even if it does not

67. Jenni and Westermann, *TLOT*, 2:697.

68. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord*, 203.

69. See chart in Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 434.

70. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 433–34.

carry future notions as some other psalms do. And what a fitting way to end the story of David, the one chosen by God to be King: to remember at the end of his life as at the beginning that the Lord was with him and blessed him in unique ways.

David's "Last Words" in 2 Sam 23:1–7

These words of David are the most critical evidence that David thought of himself as a prophet. Though these words appear to form a psalm, they do not appear in the canonical Psalms, and yet the sheer weight of them certifies that David is, indeed, a prophet. The two key phrases that appear in these verses are נאם דוד (23:1) and רוח יהוה דבר-ב' (23:2). In these two short phrases, the author and David both lay claim to David's place as a prophet of the Old Testament. From these two phrases, Noll concludes that "David perceives himself to be (or wishes his hearers to perceive him to be) a prophet."⁷¹ David's self-perception is the final link to fulfill the standards of a prophet of the Old Testament.

נאם

With נאם being used twice in parallel phrases, David claims a prophetic utterance. The term overwhelmingly is used in connection to divine prophecy. Of the 376 uses of נאם, 365 are utterances of Yahweh.⁷² Balaam's oracles in Num 24:3, 25; 23:4, 16 include נאם with a subject other than Yahweh. David uses נאם in Ps 110:1 without Yahweh as the subject as well.⁷³ The seemingly exclusive use for this word is to mark speech as prophecy from the Lord. There are

71. K. L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1997), 160.

72. נאם, *TDOT* 9:110.

73. This psalm is particularly interesting because of its clear Messianic message.

176 occurrences in Jeremiah alone, with 85 in Ezekiel and 25 in Isaiah.⁷⁴ The NIV translates the word often as “declares,” but it means far more. It is better to understand it as “oracle” or “divine utterance” because of its frequent usage as a word which declares divine inspiration. Undeniably, by using this word, the speaker claims that the words coming out of his mouth are not his own but are the very words of God. By using this same word, David claimed that he spoke to the people on behalf of the Lord. Self-identification is one of the critical components of a prophet identified earlier.

Though it comes almost at the end of the narrative, the author does not fail to include this apparent reference to David’s unique place as the king loved by the Lord and as one of the special ranks of those who served as God’s mouthpieces.

רוח יהוה דבר־בִּי

While the previous verse on its own could settle the question of divine inspiration, David went further and said, “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue” (2 Sam 23:2). This defines what it is to be a prophet. Peter describes prophecy when he says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pe 1:21). David’s words declare and explain to the readers that he was a prophet, one who was given divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit, whom he was given as a gift at his anointing.⁷⁵ David is none other than the “man exalted by the Most High” (1 Sam 23:1). He is chosen not only to be the king, not only to restore the honor of the priesthood but also to have the words of the Lord on his tongue.

74. נָאֵם, *TDOT*, 9:110

75. 1 Sam 16:13

The connection to the Spirit cannot be understated. The Spirit of the Lord descended on David at the very onset, immediately after his anointing (1 Sam 16:13). “As the only explicit statement in 1 and 2 Samuel of David’s endowment with the divine spirit, this verse [i.e., 1 Sam 16:13] also corroborates his oracular claim that ‘the spirit of the LORD has spoken by me.’”⁷⁶ Without his anointing and the Spirit being on David, he would have no claim to speak these words. However, by the Spirit, David testifies to the detail that has not been reported since his anointing but still impacts him, even in these last words.

Noll’s Opposition

Scholars such as K. L. Noll disagree with the thesis that David is presented as a prophet in the book of Samuel. Noll concludes that “it is clear that the character David is not a prophet in any meaningful sense of the term, and equally clear that his ‘prophecy’ reveals only a very conventional piety, a belief in divine retribution.”⁷⁷ Noll’s arguments are not universal to those who agree with his conclusion, but since they are clear and systematic, it will be helpful to address them.

Because the actual prophecy in 2 Sam 23 is so short, and because of David’s portrayal in the rest of the Samuel narrative, Noll struggles to see how David could be a prophet in any useful or meaningful way. But, as noted earlier, Samuel rarely mentions prophets, and when they do arise, they arise at a critical moment in the story. The importance of the prophetic words here cannot be overlooked. Noll’s most prominent critique of David is that his life is full of deceit, killing, adultery, and inaction, which is undeniable. Noll concludes from this that David is

76. Jan Jaynes Quesada, “Is David, too, among the Prophets? A Study of 2 Samuel 23:1–7,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 44 (2017): 252.

77. Noll, *The Faces of David*, 165.

concerned about the future due to his unsavory past and that “the future may find Yahweh of a changed disposition, since, as David has consistently affirmed, Yahweh is a God of strict retribution.”⁷⁸ David, however, does not live in fear of retribution. The Lord has pronounced his forgiveness to him, even of the most prominent of his sins.⁷⁹ Klein proposes that “David answers this objection by noting that his kingship is God’s gift, sealed by an everlasting covenant. Success and achievement are brought about solely by divine initiative.”⁸⁰ The purpose of this prophetic speech for David and his readers is to remember that righteousness is not gained by perfect and upright behavior. Even more, it is not achievable even by the one God loves, but rather it is achieved only through the grace of God. Noll so much as admits this as he reflects on 2 Sam 23:5, “David is aware that if Yahweh has observed the covenant made with David, it is by grace alone.”⁸¹ This notion may not be significant in Noll’s calculation, but it is one of the most profound themes throughout the book of Samuel.

78. Noll, *The Faces of David*, 176.

79. 2 Sam 12:13.

80. Ralph W. Klein, “The Last Words of David,” *Currents in Theology and Missiology*, 31, 16.

81. Noll, *The Faces of David*, 176.

THE WHOLE PICTURE OF DAVID

For the author of Samuel, a clear theme is the presence and grace of God in David's life. That God selected David as a prophet, one of the more complex characters of the Old Testament, shows that God's grace is not based on the recipient. 2 Sam 22 and 23 show in a definitive way that David's prophetic utterances are a continuation of the grace that God had shown to him throughout his life. These two chapters, without a doubt, portray David as a prophet, for in these he fulfills the final primary qualification: he speaks for and claims to speak for the Lord (2 Sam 23:1, 2). This is in addition to his commissioning in 1 Sam 16, the Lord's presence and preservation, and his character described throughout the narrative. And yet this arouses an important question: Since David is a prophet, as 2 Sam 22 and 23 so clearly demonstrate, why does the author not make a more explicit reference sooner? The term "prophet" appears at critical moments. The author seems happy to portray Saul as one of the people who possessed prophetic abilities. So why wait so long to depict David in such a light?

It is undeniable that the author of 1 and 2 Sam wishes to show who David is, warts and all. Despite all the warts David has in Samuel's account, he avoids calling David a prophet and yet shows him to be just that at the very end. One tremendous result is that it shows God's grace, and how better to do that than to show David, the great King and hymn-writer, the prophetic voice, appointed prophet despite all his mistakes and empowered by the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has carefully looked at the presentation of David in the books of 1 and 2 Sam. Within the various aspects of the terminology, the life and character of David, and even how David views himself, it becomes evident that, while not a prominent theme in the books, David is considered by the author to be a prophet. He waits until almost the end of his account of David's life to make this clear, but David's character and life circumstances set him up well as he makes his claim to be one who speaks an "utterance of the Lord" (2 Sam 23:1).

The purpose of understanding David to be a prophet even in the earliest narratives of his life is two-fold. First, it affirms that the New Testament did not impose on David something he did not have, namely, prophetic office. Secondly, it reminds the reader to approach each book of sacred Scripture with the knowledge that the first audience did not benefit from the other books that were yet to be written and helps shape the purpose and story within its context.

This thesis has uncovered several questions for further research: What role do the unnamed prophets play in the Old Testament? What is the significance of David using the term "Holy Spirit" for the language of the Church? What role do Old Testament narratives play in dogmatic formulations, such as the doctrine of inerrancy or inspiration?

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