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1 AND 2 SAMUEL

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

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CONTENTS

General preface	7
Author's preface	9
Chief abbreviations	11
Introduction	17
The books of Samuel and their place in the longer history	20
Composition and authorship	22
Theology	36
Text	42
Analysis	49
Commentary	53
Additional notes	
The temple of the Lord at Shiloh	70
Excavation of early Jerusalem	213
The Bathsheba incident	258
Maps	
Israel in the time of David	52
Wars during the reign of David	237

INTRODUCTION

Three characters dominate the books of Samuel: the prophet Samuel; Saul, who became Israel's first king; and above all David, the greatest and best loved of all who reigned in Jerusalem. The very sequence points to one of the main themes of the book, which is the transition from theocracy to monarchy. Under the theocracy, God by his Spirit designated human leaders as and when they were needed, whereas after the establishment of a dynastic monarchy a successor to the throne was already designated from among the king's sons. To Israel, this development seemed altogether desirable: a king would regulate Israel's life according to some agreed policy in place of the piecemeal action of individual tribes, and having organized the machinery of state and trained a standing army he would enable Israel to defeat the aggressive neighbours who plundered their crops and threatened to occupy Israel's land. In the face of strong popular demand for a king opposition finally gave way, and the account of Israel's circumstances at the time, together with the interaction of conflicting opinions and the successes and failures of the three leaders, make up the subject matter of the books of Samuel.

Such a prosaic summary, however, fails to do justice to the ongoing fascination of these books. Simply as a source of stories to hold children spellbound they are incomparable, and moreover they provide an abundance of raw material from which to study the human condition, for they present real life with all its ambiguities but without the kind of analysis of character or motivation such as we have come to expect in modern writing. Instead, they invite the reader to reflect on the narrative in order to tease out the enigmas posed by the text, which often appears studiously to avoid reconciling apparently contradictory statements. Of course, it may be that what appear to the modern reader to be contradictions were part of an attempt to convey a two-dimensional presentation of a character or situation in as concise and straightforward a way as possible. In the absence of other literary works of a similar age with which to compare the biblical narrative, however, it is wise to be reticent in pronouncing upon its debt to its literary predecessors.

What can with confidence be said is that the books of Samuel are the product of highly developed literary art, purposively selective, often restrained, sometimes repetitive, sometimes silent, but by whatever means intending to engage the reader in an active relationship with the text.

What we need to understand better is that the religious vision of the Bible is given depth and subtlety precisely by being conveyed through the most sophisticated resources of prose fiction ... The biblical tale, through the most rigorous economy of means, leads us again and again to ponder complexities of motive and ambiguities of character because these are essential aspects of its vision of man, created by God, enjoying or suffering all the consequences of human freedom.¹

The psychological complexities of Saul or David present enough

1. Alter, p. 22. Alter brings to his study of the Bible wide experience of literary appreciation, and to my mind succeeds in his aim 'to illuminate the distinctive principles of the Bible's narrative art' (p. ix). He concentrates on the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, and so draws examples from the books of Samuel, among others.

food for thought to last a lifetime, as each interacts with the other and responds to circumstances. In the course of the Commentary it is intended that references should be made to some at least of the examples of outstanding artistry in these books.

An appreciation of literary qualities in the Bible in no way conflicts with a theological understanding of its message; indeed the two are inseparably linked. The very fact that the Bible has a message to proclaim which matters supremely because it relates to eternal issues means that only the best in literary art is good enough. When God has a revelation to make to the human race he will surely see to it that it is expressed in many different ways, using every literary device to ensure that what he is saying is both arresting and unambiguous, both earthed in human experience and therefore always relevant to every generation, but introducing all the same the external dimension as the only appropriate context because that is the true context of all human history. The books of Samuel form a significant part of Old Testament narrative. The unusual amount of detail related about the chief characters invites the reader to get to know them as individuals and to appreciate God's dealings with each one, both of which we shall be most likely to do if we enjoy reading about them.

'Enjoy' is not too strong a word for the deep delight to be had through a sustained effort to enter into the human situations depicted here: the hurts, ambitions, spiritual aspirations and above all the failures. To some extent both Samuel and David failed, and Saul obstinately pursued his own interpretation of his kingly office in such a way as to forfeit the divine favour. Here in these people is real life as we experience it. 'The biblical writers fashion their personages with a complicated, sometimes alluring, often fiercely insistent individuality because it is in the stubbornness of human individuality that each man and woman encounters God or ignores Him, responds to or resists Him.'² What grips the reader of these realistic life histories is God's verdict on each life, and the reason for David's acceptance over against Saul's rejection. Truth about God's dealings with men and women is to be discovered, vividly illustrated,

2. Alter, p. 189.

in the pages of the books of Samuel. In other words, the theology in these books is, in its dynamic form, revealed in human lives rather than in textbook definitions; momentous discoveries about both man and God are on offer to those who will respond to the invitation to read and ponder the lives of those depicted here.

The books of Samuel and their place in the longer history

Originally one book in the Hebrew Bible, the text was first divided by the translators who framed the Greek version, where Samuel/Kings was known as ‘Basileiōn A, B, C, D’ (the four books of the kingdoms). This designation was modified by Jerome, when he translated the Vulgate, to ‘The Four Books of Kings’, and the AV retains as a secondary title to 1 and 2 Samuel, ‘The First (Second) Book of the Kings’; 1 and 2 Kings then become the third and fourth ‘Book of the Kings’. This way of referring to the books we know as 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings has the merit of drawing attention to the continuity between them, for the last days of David and his death are recorded not in 2 Samuel but in 1 Kings 1 – 2. The history goes on to cover the four centuries to the collapse of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Since after the death of Solomon the kingdom divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, a parallel account of each kingdom necessitated a much abbreviated record, a remarkable exercise in selectivity. The small amount of space devoted to Saul and the forty chapters given to David by comparison is indicative of the different assessments with which these two kings were regarded.

The books of Joshua and Judges relate how the Israelite tribes entered Canaan, occupied it and settled in the land, but these books in turn look back to the dominant figure of Moses, whose life and work are recounted in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The book of Genesis not only tells the family history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how it came about that Jacob and his sons settled in Egypt, but also in its opening chapters traces the human race back to its very beginnings. Similarly, when the writer of the books of Chronicles presented his interpretation of the history, he began with genealogies which span the time from Adam to King Saul.

The resulting account sets all subsequent history from whatever part of the globe in perspective, broadening our otherwise restricted horizons, and putting us in touch with people who were very much like ourselves, and yet who had discovered some of life's secrets and so had become what C. H. Dodd called 'experts in life'. 'Here [in the Bible] also we trace the long history of a community which through good fortune and ill tested their belief in God.'³ The distinctive characteristic of the people of this community was their firm conviction that they knew God. It is this reference to God which makes history in the Bible, and therefore in the books of Samuel, distinctive. These books are not meant merely as a source of information for people who have antiquarian interests, but rather as a divinely revealed commentary on human life, in which all who will may find wise guidance in the conduct of their own lives.

It is not easy to give dates to the events recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel, but Assyrian eponym lists (lists of those who gave their names to their year of office), king lists and historical texts have enabled historians to arrive at a fixed date for the battle of Qarqar, 853 BC, in which Israel's King Ahab took part. Dates for the united monarchy are arrived at by working back (or forward) from this fixed point, using the biblical data, and in this way the period c. 1050–970 BC is reckoned for the events of the books of Samuel. The accession of David may tentatively be dated between 1010 and 1000 BC.

At this period no great world power was seeking to dominate the Near East. Israel's battles were waged against near neighbours, whose territory bordered the land occupied by the twelve tribes, and in particular against the Philistines, a military aristocracy from Crete, small numbers of whom had settled in Canaan in patriarchal times. Soon after Israel's arrival in Canaan, however, they had arrived in force and had occupied the coastal plain of the south-west. There they set up five city-states, organized under *sērānīm*, 'lords', and demonstrated their mastery of iron technology and their military professionalism in their attacks against Israel. Inadvertently they played an important part in shaping

3. C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Nisbet, 1928), p. 298.

developments within Israel, because it was almost certainly the persistent aggression of the Philistines that led to the repeated request for a king.⁴ Throughout the reign of Saul, and initially during the reign of David also, they continued to be a thorn in Israel's side; both Saul and Jonathan died at their hands, and the Philistines penetrated eastwards to Bethshan, so dominating the Jordan valley. Yet the Philistines 'assist the narrative's movement towards David's takeover ... David's successes against the Philistines advance him at Saul's expense. Saul's attempt to use the Philistines to destroy David misfires (18:29–29). The Philistines recognize David's kingship early in the story (21:11). And they prevent his participation in the disastrous final battle (ch. 29)'.⁵ Looked at in relation to the aim of the narrative, the Philistines can be shown to play a consistent role, and to be an indispensable part of the plot. Looked at theologically, these incidents illustrate God's control of history, though the Philistines were unaware that they were serving any other cause than their own.

By the end of David's reign the political scene had been transformed. Law and order were imposed on raiding neighbours; cordial relations were established with Phoenicia, and kingdoms to the east and north became part of David's empire, of which Jerusalem was the capital. The 'land' promised to Abraham now extended from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18–21).

Composition and authorship

Ancient libraries, made up of collections of scrolls, identified them and maybe classified them by reference to their opening words or to the person of note with whom the early columns were concerned. For that reason Samuel's name was used to identify the books that bear his name. The fact that he died before David became king is

4. For more detail on the Philistines, see *AOTS*, pp. 404–427; *POTT*, pp. 53–78; T. Dothan, *The Philistines and their Material Culture* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

5. Jobling, p. 15.

sufficient evidence to forbid our attributing authorship to him. The same argument applies to ‘the Chronicles of Samuel the seer’, referred to in 1 Chronicles 29:29 as one of the sources for ‘the acts of King David, from first to last’. Clearly the name was not intended to imply authorship.

How then did these remarkable books come into being? This is the basic question which motivated Old Testament scholars, largely in Germany, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though they did not address themselves particularly to the books of Samuel but rather to the Pentateuch. Their method was to submit the biblical text to analysis in accordance with the norms of scientific practice, and the movement became associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), who gave classic expression to the theory of proposed documentary sources behind the Pentateuch.⁶ His analysis of the Pentateuch was, however, closely bound up with an understanding of Samuel and of Israel’s history on its broadest plan.

The Documentary Hypothesis

According to this hypothesis, four strata (J, E, D and P), each representing a different source, could be discerned in the early books of the Bible: J, the earliest, preferred the name Jahweh (or Yahweh) for God; E, a century or so later, preferred the name Elohim; D, the Deuteronomic document, was identified with the scroll found in the temple during the reign of Josiah in 621 BC; P consisted of cultic details, lists and genealogies attributed to priestly writers, and was dated in the sixth or fifth century. According to Wellhausen’s theory, the books of the Pentateuch were therefore composite documents, made up of extracts from these sources which were to be distinguished by differences of vocabulary, viewpoint and theological emphasis. Apparent discrepancies, duplications and repetitions in the biblical books were accounted for by attributing them to different sources which reflected the particular outlook of the period in which they were written.

6. J. Wellhausen, *Die Komposition des Hexateuchs* (1877), the Hexateuch being the Pentateuch together with the book of Joshua.

Wellhausen too had his special interest. He was a historian in search of reliable documents from which to construct a history of Israel, and for this purpose he published in 1883 his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*,⁷ a work in which he summarized his assessment of the documentary sources of the biblical books from Genesis to Chronicles, especially from the point of view of their historical reliability. In 1 Samuel 7–12, for example, he distinguished a later source in which Samuel is ‘a saint of the first degree’, acting as a theocratic leader should, urging repentance and experiencing God’s vindication (1 Sam. 7:2–17; 8; 10:17–12:25). But this he sees as contradicting the whole of the rest of the tradition, found in 1 Samuel 9:1–10:16.⁸ When he compared the picture of David in Chronicles with that of the books of Samuel he found in Chronicles ‘a feeble holy picture, seen through a cloud of incense’, and remarked, ‘it is only the tradition of the older source that possesses historical value’.⁹ Wellhausen’s analytical method of discerning the sources behind the historical books set a pattern which has dominated critical studies ever since, despite the influence of form criticism and, more recently, appreciation of the text as the testimony of a worshipping community, with a message that is important in its own right. Nevertheless, there have been many variations on the documentary theme over the years, so creating a complicated web of possibilities.

One early theory was that two sources lay behind the books of Samuel, and that the earlier was the continuation of the J document of the Pentateuch, while the later could be identified as E.¹⁰ Although this theory was at first influential, it has not in the long term won wide support. A three-source theory, put forward by

7. ET, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 248–249.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

10. K. Budde, writing in 1890, thought he identified the J document; C. H. Cornill argued in favour of an E source in the books of Samuel (1885, 1887, 1890); T. Klähn in 1914 claimed to have proved on linguistic grounds that the J source continued into the books of Samuel, a view taken up by O. Eissfeldt (1925, 1931).

Eissfeldt, who added a conjectured source L to J and E, did not find many followers.¹¹ Nevertheless, whether two or three strands of tradition are postulated, most scholars have concluded that diverse origin accounts for the apparent duplications and differences of viewpoint alleged to be found in 1 Samuel. In 2 Samuel the narrative has been judged to be more a continuous whole, especially chapters 9–20 (together with 1 Kgs 1–2), which have become known as ‘the Court History of David’, and have been described as ‘the supreme historical treasure of Samuel’.¹² These chapters win this accolade because they are judged to have been written by someone who was not only a contemporary of David, but who also knew at first hand life at David’s court.

A compilation of earlier accounts, which may have included a life of Samuel, a history of the ark, and accounts of the inauguration of the monarchy, as well as annals of David’s reign, would have been put together by an editor, probably during the exile. Both Joshua and Judges were thought to show signs of Deuteronomic editing, and, though in 1 and 2 Samuel Deuteronomic influence was less marked, a Deuteronomic redactor was credited with compiling these books also. Poetic passages such as Hannah’s song (1 Sam. 2:1–10) and David’s poems (2 Sam. 22:2–23:7), together with the extra information in the Appendix (2 Sam. 21–24), were thought to be late additions, added after the remainder of the book had taken shape.

Before moving on to consider more recent developments of critical scholarship, we pause at this point in order to assess the method behind the Documentary Hypothesis, which has dominated the field for well over a century. This consensus is in itself indicative of the degree to which the method suited the intellectual mood of the nineteenth century, and the continuing rationalism of the twentieth.

1. It was inevitable that questions concerning the composition of

11. O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, An Introduction* (ET, Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 275.

12. G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1959), p. 80.

the books of the Bible should have been raised; the major problem was lack of hard evidence on which to base an answer. True, reference is made in the biblical books to documents which could be consulted at the time of writing (e.g. Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18; 1 Kgs 11:41), which proves that there were 'books behind the Bible', but these are no longer extant. In the absence of factual checks, the weaknesses in the documentary theories were slow to emerge; eventually the proliferation of possibilities demonstrated how damaging to any theory was the total lack of proof.

2. Wellhausen and the others who shaped the documentary theories were thoroughly equipped scholars who brought to their task linguistic, literary and historical knowledge. They studied the text of the Bible in detail and encouraged rigorous scholarship. On the debit side, 'the text became controlled by scholars, whereas previously scholars had subjected themselves to the text. The text now was subject to their tools, methods, conclusions. The controlling factor was no longer any claim of Biblical authority but now was scientific method, which enjoyed enormous popularity and respect in this period.'¹³ The ruling criterion was 'reasonableness'.

3. The outcome of the search for documents was a fragmented biblical text. The dissection process 'killed' the life-giving message inherent in the books of the Bible, yet they have never ceased to speak authoritatively, and their literary creativity, quite apart from their spiritual power, has often been noted; not least, in the books of Samuel the 'Court History of David' has been recognized as a literary gem. Thus the vitality of these books continues to reassert itself. Meanwhile modern studies of the Pentateuch are highly critical of the classical Documentary Hypothesis.¹⁴

13. W. Brueggemann, 'Questions addressed in study of the Pentateuch', in W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), pp. 13–14.

14. E.g. R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), esp. pp. 43–131. Whybray assesses philosophical, linguistic, literary and cultural aspects of the Documentary Hypothesis, and shows how the breaking of texts into separate documents 'often destroys

The Deuteronomistic History

The claim that a Deuteronomistic editor left his mark, however lightly, on the books of Samuel has continued to find favour, especially under the influence of Martin Noth, whose significant work on the subject has been translated into English some forty years after its first publication in Germany in 1943.¹⁵ This has proved to be one of the most enduring theories to be published during the first half of the twentieth century.

Whereas it had been usual to attribute to a Deuteronomistic hand the editing of the individual books from Joshua to 2 Kings, Noth went a stage further by postulating that Deuteronomy to 2 Kings was a continuous narrative, compiled by one writer. Though this Deuteronomistic writer had made use of existing documents, he freely added his own comments and thus, from diverse material, succeeded in compiling a history which reflected certain theological viewpoints and interests, and which was, to that extent, a unified whole. Noth denied that J, E and P extended beyond Numbers, and regarded the literary sources used by the editor/author of 1 and 2 Samuel as independent units or collections. The Deuteronomistic writer was looking for a meaning in the history of Israel. 'The meaning which he discovered was that God was recognisably at work in this history, continuously meeting the accelerating moral decline with warnings and punishments ...'¹⁶ Thus there was a divine retribution at work in the history of the people of God, and the Deuteronomist made this the great unifying factor of his work as he commented on the course of events.

Noth's concept of a Deuteronomistic History continues to have

literary and aesthetic qualities which are themselves important data which ought not to be ignored' (p. 130).

15. M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), which consists of pp. 1–110 of *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2nd 1957). The adjective 'Deuteronomistic' as opposed to 'Deuteronomic' is used to distinguish the hypothesis put forward by Noth.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

an influential part to play in any research on the composition of the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings. Indeed, as E. W. Nicholson comments in his foreword to the English edition,

This is a 'classic' work in the sense that it still remains the fundamental study of the corpus of literature with which it is concerned, and still provides, as far as the majority of scholars are concerned, the basis and framework for further investigation of the composition and nature of this corpus.¹⁷

Though this assertion may need some qualification in the light of the most recent trends, its estimate of the importance of Noth's book is not exaggerated.

Yet when the Deuteronomistic historian came to narrate the events of the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, Noth believes that he found he was dealing with traditional accounts which 'absolved [him] from the need to organise and construct the narrative himself'.¹⁸ Here the narratives themselves agreed with the emphases which he himself wished to make, and there was therefore little that he needed to add, whereas in 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 25, by contrast, he both supplied the chronology and related the reigns of the monarchs of the two kingdoms to each other, in addition to passing judgment on the individual kings and on the monarchy as an institution. According to Noth, the contribution of the Deuteronomistic historian is limited in the books of Samuel to the following passages:

- i. 1 Samuel 7:2b, the chronological note: 'a long time passed, some twenty years'.
- ii. 7:7–14, which Noth connects with Judges 13:1, where the Philistines are said to have dominated Israel for forty years.
- iii. 13:1, the chronological note concerning Saul's reign.
- iv. 2 Samuel 2:10–11, the chronology of the reign of Ishbosheth, and of David's reign in Hebron.
- v. 1 Samuel 8 – 12, where the Deuteronomistic historian

17. *Ibid.*, p. ix.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

reveals his disapproval of the establishment of the monarchy.

- vi. 2 Samuel 5:4–5, the chronology of David's whole reign, and 5:6–12, David's conquest of Jerusalem, which enabled him to house the ark in his own city.

Apart from these relatively few passages, Noth attributed to the Deuteronomistic historian only occasional rearrangement of the material he found in his sources to suit his purpose (e.g. 2 Sam. 8, which chronologically belongs earlier), and he emphatically denies that 2 Samuel 7, in which Nathan pronounces concerning the future of David's house, could belong to this historian, though he may have made some insertions, notably verse 13a and verses 22–24.¹⁹

Noth viewed the purpose of the Deuteronomistic historian as particularly pessimistic, seeing him as speaking of Israel's 'final rejection and therefore its downfall because of its repeated apostasy'.²⁰ Many scholars, on the other hand, have interpreted the fact that 2 Kings ends with the release of Jehoiachin from prison as an indication of qualified optimism. Similarly, the sin–repentance–renewal theme, characteristic of Deuteronomy and well illustrated in 1 Samuel 7:3–14 and in 2 Samuel 7, is thought by several scholars to point in the same direction.²¹

In the course of developing his thesis that Deuteronomy to Kings was originally one narrative, Noth drew attention to the overlap between books, which he thought went back to the time when the whole was divided.²² The divisions accounted for the

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

21. E.g. G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 90–91; D. J. McCarthy, 'II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomic History', *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 131–138; Gordon 1984, who comments, 'Noth's omission probably has more than a little to do with the incompatibility of the dynastic oracle with his own conception of the purpose of the History!' (p. 20).

22. Cf. Deut. 34/Josh. 1; Josh. 24:29–31/Judg. 2:7–10; Judg. 13:1/1 Sam. 7:1–14.

failure of earlier scholars to identify the extent of the original work, especially as many had become absorbed in studies of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch), and had become accustomed to think of Deuteronomy as part of that collection of books. Moreover, Noth thought that after the time of the Deuteronomistic writer, additions to Joshua/Judges (between Josh. 23 and Judg. 2:6), and at the end of Judges and 2 Samuel, obscured the issue. Noth conjectured that in the original work speeches of anticipation and retrospection summed up the judgments of the Deuteronomistic writer. Thus 1 Samuel 12 would have brought to an end the period of the judges, while 1 Kings 8:14–53, Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple, would have concluded the section on the period of the early kings of Israel.

Noth's contention is that the skill of this Deuteronomistic writer is demonstrated in the unity he imposes on disparate sources, for he is wholly responsible for 'the coherence of this complex of material and hence the unity of the whole history in Joshua-Kings which is clearly *intentional*, as is shown by the form of these books as we have it'.²³ Since there is no trace of Deuteronomistic editing in Genesis to Numbers, Deuteronomy must belong with the books that follow it, and on this argument Noth based his rejection of the theory that Genesis to Joshua should be seen as an entity, a 'Hexateuch'.²⁴

The central importance of Deuteronomy was inescapable either way; it dominated the judgment of the writers responsible for Joshua to Kings.

Sources in the books of Samuel

Already it has become apparent that, according to Noth, Deuteronomistic editing in the books of Samuel is somewhat limited. Here the Deuteronomistic writer was able to take over extensive

23. Noth, p. 10.

24. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*: 'From a literary point of view ... it is more accurate to speak of the Hexateuch than of the Pentateuch' (p. 6). The suggestion was widely accepted, and continued to be employed by many scholars, including G. von Rad, into the 1950s.

collections of traditions, compiled long before his time. These are thought to have comprised the following sources:

- i. The Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4:1b – 7:1), with the possible addition of 2 Samuel 6.
- ii. The Shiloh traditions (1 Sam. 1:1 – 4:1a), sometimes considered to be part of the Ark Narrative.
- iii. Traditions concerning Saul (1 Sam. 7 – 15), collected long before the time of the Deuteronomistic editor, who would have added passages recording his disapproval of the monarchy. The reign of Saul (1 Sam. 13 – 15) is sometimes considered a separate source, hence the division sometimes made at 1 Samuel 12.
- iv. The ‘History of David’s Rise’ (1 Sam. 16 – 2 Sam. 5:10 or 7:29).
- v. The ‘Succession Narrative’ (2 Sam. 9 – 20 and 1 Kgs 1 – 2). (The delineation of sources iv. and v. owes much to L. Rost.)²⁵

It would be misleading to give the impression that this list of sources is universally accepted, for there are many variations in detail on the sources recognized by different scholars, even though i., iv. and v. are widely accepted. Similarly, a variety of theories characterizes the subject of the Deuteronomistic editing of the books of Samuel.²⁶ The absence of any means of verification tends to encourage the proliferation of theories, and inevitably leads to a certain scepticism regarding any possibility of ‘assured results’ in this field.

25. L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982); originally published in German in 1926.

26. Gordon 1984, pp. 14–22, provides a succinct account of recent trends, together with a bibliography. He notes ‘the imperialist tendencies of the phenomenon of Deuteronomism in current Old Testament study’, and points out that, apart from phraseological criteria, little that is regarded as characteristic of D ‘is peculiar to the Deuteronomistic History’ (p. 18).

Prophetic history

Meanwhile preoccupation with Deuteronomistic theories had diverted scholarly attention from the part which the prophets may well have played in compiling collections of written documents that related to their times. At the end of the last century A. F. Kirkpatrick considered that 'contemporary prophetic histories' were probably the chief sources of the books of Samuel.²⁷ Moreover, he could support the supposition with evidence from 1 Chronicles 29:29, where the Chronicles of Samuel, Nathan and Gad are referred to as sources of information on the reign of David. The statement was meant to assure the reader that the resulting account rested on the most reliable authority. The idea of a prophetic history has been taken up recently by P. K. McCarter, who regards it as a middle stage in the growth of canonical books: 'Once the limited scope of the latter [the Deuteronomistic overlay] is recognized ... it becomes apparent that it was at some pre-Deuteronomistic stage that the stories were set in their basic order, and the middle stage takes on considerable importance.'²⁸ At this pre-Deuteronomistic stage, therefore, there was already a continuous prophetic history. McCarter envisages this as consisting of three sections in 1 Samuel – the story of Samuel (1 Sam. 1 – 7); the story of Saul (1 Sam. 8 – 15); the story of David's rise (1 Sam. 16 – 31) – and all three he regards as dominated by the figure of Samuel the prophet.

The prophetic viewpoint was negative with regard to the monarchy: it was a concession to a wanton demand of the people; but though the king would be head of the government, he would be subject to the word of the prophet as the spokesman of Yahweh. McCarter admits that there are affinities between this prophetic outlook and the Deuteronomic tradition, and describes it as 'proto-Deuteronomic'. He sees this as the reason why the Deuteronomistic writer needed to make only slight revision of the text before him, and then add to the continued history of David's rise in 2 Samuel 1 – 5 the 'Deuteronomistic capstone', as

27. Kirkpatrick 1880, p. 10.

28. McCarter 1980, p. 18.

McCarter describes 2 Samuel 7, the theological centre of the books of Samuel.

We have taken the briefest look at the approach of a few selected scholars to the question of the sources underlying the books of Samuel. In reality, the picture is far more complicated. Nevertheless, an attempt to follow the arguments of even a few contributors is important, if only to indicate how impossible is the task of arriving at any definitive answer to the questions, 'How did these books of Samuel come to be written?' and 'What sources did their authors use?' After two hundred years of biblical criticism in the West, the fact has to be faced that even such established concepts as the Pentateuch have been shaken by conflicting theories of composition. In the absence of objective criteria there is no way, apart from scholarly consensus which endures for a while but is open to new directives, of evaluating all the hard work that has gone into the search for sources, but which has come up with so many varying possibilities. According to one recent writer, 'It is no exaggeration to say that the truly assured results of historical critical scholarship concerning authorship, date and provenance would fill but a pamphlet.'²⁹ The fact is that scholarly interest has been moving away from historical-critical study, partly under the influence of the methods applied in the study of secular literature, and partly, one suspects, because of the felt need to find a more fruitful approach to the study of the biblical books.

Recent trends

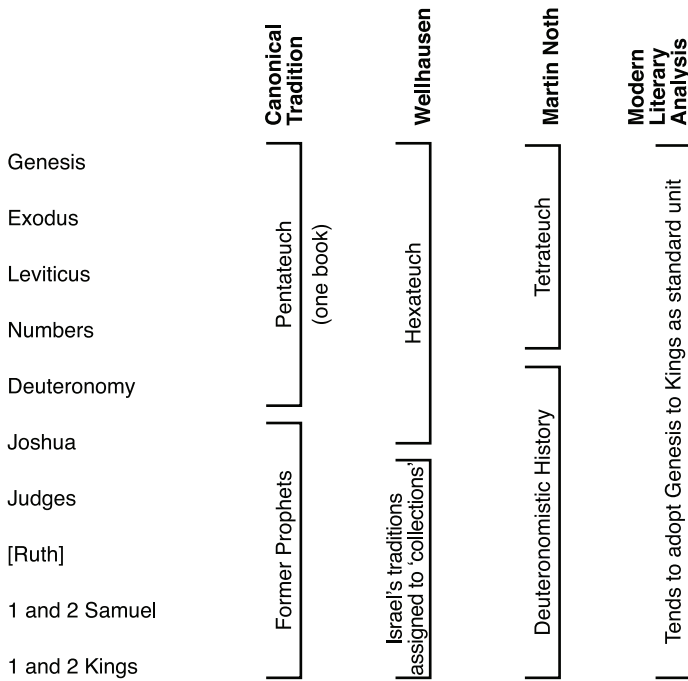
Generations brought up to look for sources do not easily abandon the method which has dominated their research and shaped their whole approach to the text. Yet a shift away from historical criticism has been taking place.

The work of Brevard Childs,³⁰ for example, has marked a

29. D. M. Gunn, 'New Directions in the Study of Hebrew Narrative', *JOT* 39 (1987), p. 66.

30. E.g. B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970); *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, and London: SCM Press, 1979).

Diagrammatic summary of the main developments



significant change of perspective. Whereas for two hundred years theology has largely been subordinated to history – ‘The cake has been history, the icing theology’³¹ – the aim of Childs has been to bring into a proper relation the claims of both theology and history. As Childs argues, the theological message was central to those who formulated the biblical books, which should be accepted in their traditional form as basic material for the construction of a theology, not least because the attempt to identify sources is necessarily hypothetical and subject to change. The task of interpreting Scripture today is then kept in line with that task as it has been understood through the ages. The interpreter must take into account not only the

31. R. W. L. Moberly, *The Church's Use of the Bible: the Work of Brevard Childs*, *ExpT* 99/4 (1988), p. 106.

books as entities but also the books in relation to one another, for the total context 'is one of faith ... *not* the piety of the individual but the corporate life, witness and search for understanding of the Christian church, at the heart of which lies the use of the Bible as canonical scripture'.³²

So far as the books of Samuel are concerned, passages which the older critics regarded as in some sense secondary, such as the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10) may, according to Childs, be regarded as a key to the interpretation of the book. Similarly, 'the final four chapters [2 Sam. 21 – 24], far from being a clumsy appendix, offer a highly reflective, theological interpretation of David's whole career adumbrating the messianic hope, which provides a clear hermeneutical guide for its use as sacred scripture'.³³ For the historical source critic, as we have seen, theological viewpoint was one of the criteria used to distinguish between sources; it served as a pointer to the views which were important in the projected historical and cultural context of the writer. The result was to blunt the theological impact of the text by making the message serve a secondary purpose, and so keeping it at arm's length. Childs aimed to find the meaning of a book in its scriptural context, and restored to pride of place the theological content, so giving full weight to the internal coherence and unity of Scripture.

The importance of regarding a work of art, in this case a biblical book, as a unity with both form and meaning in its own right, has become axiomatic for an increasing number of scholars who associate themselves with the 'New Criticism', or with 'rhetorical criticism'. The text is all-important: it needs to be seen whole and yet at the same time to be read analytically, with special attention to choice of language, patterns of imagery, metaphor, irony; in short, what has become known as 'close reading'. Critics belonging to these schools 'emphasize the way the verbal interrelations within the text work together to produce an organic whole that is more than the addition of the parts'.³⁴ On the face of it, this method is the very

32. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

33. Childs, *Introduction to OT as Scripture*, p. 275.

34. D. Robertson, *Literature, the Bible as*, *IDBS*, p. 546.

antithesis of historical criticism, and a very practical difficulty faces the commentator who wishes to approach the text as a literary unit without at the same time bypassing completely the contribution of commentators who have worked in the historical-critical framework. To a large extent the two methods have to be allowed to work separately for the time being, and maybe for a long way ahead.³⁵ A further practical difficulty arises over the length of book(s) required to do justice to a 'close reading' of the fifty-five chapters of 1 and 2 Samuel. Moreover, the analysis requires a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew text, the only basis for such a study. The majority who have no such equipment have to be content to work from a translation and pick up the crumbs that fall from the scholar's table; but even so it is possible to see and appreciate the literary structure and artistic skill displayed in these books.

The question with which this section began, namely how these books came into being, has not been answered, but the attempt to find an answer has been more than worthwhile, because the outcome has been to prove the vitality of the books of the Old Testament. Though we cannot know the name of the author(s), nor what source books were available, the books themselves still have the power and authority to speak across the centuries and address today's church.

Theology

Historical source criticism, with its concern for chronological order, has long been interested in tracing the development of theological understanding in the Old Testament on an assumed evolutionary model. In practice, however, conflicting theories as to the relative age of the ancient documents made any consensus very difficult, so much so that some have even questioned whether the enterprise is possible. Nevertheless, the attempt to formulate a theology of homogeneous sections of the Old Testament (e.g. Wisdom literature

35. Cf. Gunn, 'New Directions', p. 73. He also expects to see 'the demise of the Deuteronomistic History and the adoption of Genesis to 2 Kings as a standard unit' (p. 72).

or post-exilic prophecy) has proved more convincing. The very concept of a Deuteronomistic History designates the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings as one such section, bound together by a theological theme. Scholars who prefer to think in terms of a 'Prophetic History' equally clearly declare that they recognize a theological purpose which is common to these books.

In the books of Samuel there are three chapters which stand out as markers, characterized by their interpretation of historical changes taking place in Israel's leadership structure. They are 1 Samuel 7, 1 Samuel 12 and 2 Samuel 7. Not that the remainder of these books is 'non-theological', for theological presuppositions undergird the whole, but in these chapters a prophet expounds the divine word for each stage of the crisis through which the people of God are passing.

1 Samuel 7

The prophet Samuel, at the height of his powers as the theocratic leader, is seen in action here. Easy-going compromise had evidently marked the twenty years during which the Philistines claimed a right to dominate Israel. The day came when Samuel, in his capacity as the Lord's spokesman, intervened by calling for an acknowledgment of apostasy. Samuel's order of priorities was first that the Israelites should put matters right between themselves and the Lord by serving only the one covenant God. He would then deal with their need to be free from the Philistine domination. At the Mizpah national assembly, Samuel 'judged the people', calling for repentance and fasting. Predictably provoked by the huge gathering, the Philistines attacked. The emergency provided an opportunity for Samuel to demonstrate the effectiveness of a living faith. In his capacity as a priest, Samuel both offered a sacrifice and engaged in intercession. Through the agency of a storm the enemy was routed, and Israel needed only to pursue the Philistines to their own territory; Samuel's spiritual style of leadership had been vindicated. The memorial-stone named Ebenezer, 'Hitherto the Lord has helped us', proclaimed the effectiveness of trusting the Lord and his designated judge. What possible need could there be to seek innovations such as kingship? The incident provided a strong argument for maintaining the tradition of leadership by judges,

appointed and spiritually endowed by the Lord.

1 Samuel 12

In view of the repeated demand for a monarchy in Israel, a king had been appointed and proclaimed (1 Sam. 9 – 11). Samuel's role must therefore change, and in a public declaration he clarifies the situation. First he draws attention to the integrity with which he has governed, by inviting accusations against himself. Whereas kings will enrich themselves at public expense, and oppress those they should serve, Samuel was free of such ulterior motives. It followed that the people had at the very least made a foolish choice in demanding a king. But even worse, they had by implication rejected their true king, the Lord their God. What now would happen to their covenant relationship in the light of such blatant and deliberate self-will?

The short answer to the question on this occasion was that the Lord would 'not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself' (1 Sam. 12:22). At the same time, their future was secure only so long as both king and people were careful to fulfil all that the Lord had required from them. Samuel, for his part, would both intercede for them and instruct them in applying God's law to the circumstances of their lives. 'For consider what great things he has done for you' (1 Sam. 12:24) lifts obedience out of any legalistic requirement into the realm of personal, loving commitment. Israel was being given a chance to start again, this time with the king they had chosen. There was no going back on the decision they had made.

Thus the monarchy came to be accepted in Israel, and Saul was acknowledged as the first king. Whereas leadership in the past had been embodied in Moses or a judge/prophet, from now on there would be a division of responsibility: temporal and political leadership would be the role of the king, while the prophet would represent spiritual values, and take responsibility for insisting on Israel's obligation to serve Yahweh, Israel's supreme leader and ruler. Samuel could see only too clearly the potential conflict that would arise between the two roles. There could be no doubt in his mind as to which should take precedence: prophecy 'constantly made the demand on kingship to submit in all areas and continually

rebuked the naked and unbridled use of royal authority'.³⁶ To be king in Israel was therefore quite a different matter from being king in the countries round about. Saul did not understand this distinction, and resented Samuel's 'interference', whereas David appreciated the point that the Lord his God was the focus of authority, and therefore he was willing to submit to the word of his prophet even though, in the eyes of the watching world, it must have seemed that David's own authority would thereby be weakened. Here lay the crucial distinction between Saul and David. The man after God's own heart submitted to God's word, obeyed his prophets, and found acceptance and forgiveness, despite his many glaring faults and failures. Saul obstinately clung to his rights as king, but lost the throne.

2 Samuel 7

This important chapter lays the foundation for the Davidic dynasty. By divine decree it is declared to be 'for ever', and yet in 597 BC Jehoachin, David's descendant, was deported, soon to be followed by his only successor on the throne, Zedekiah. Jerusalem was left in ruins, the temple of the Lord was plundered, and there was neither relief from suffering nor ground for hope. If, as many people think, Israel's historical books were compiled at that time, the contrast between God's promises to David and the stark reality of a whole generation languishing in a foreign land put a desperate strain on Israel's faith. This climactic chapter in the books of Samuel was one to dwell upon and use to help formulate an understanding of God's purpose.

The Lord's sovereignty is established by his word to both prophet and king. What counts is not David's aspiration to build a house for the Lord, but what the Lord commands. The Lord's authority and initiative is insisted upon throughout Nathan's address to David: 'I commanded [the judges] to shepherd my people Israel' (v. 7); 'I took you from the pasture ... I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies before you' (vv. 8–9). In his

36. W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), p. 138.

sovereignty the Lord also declares what he will do in the future: he is Israel's Lord God, while the human king is dependent on the supreme King whom he serves.

For his part, the Lord undertakes to exalt his servant (2 Sam. 7:9). The promise of 'a great name' is reminiscent of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:2), and suggests (though the word 'covenant' nowhere appears in these verses) that the Davidic kingship is being incorporated into the Abrahamic covenant. This is reinforced by the reference to God's people Israel dwelling in their own place, undisturbed by enemies (v. 10), a reference to Genesis 15:18–21 and Deuteronomy 11:24. Moreover, the covenant word *hesed*, God's 'steadfast love' (v. 15), ensures the fulfilment of the promises, which are here unconditional, though the need for chastisement is foreseen. The question is whether David's descendants will 'keep covenant', and if they do not fulfil their obligations how God can achieve his purpose of blessing.

When the books of Samuel are seen in the wider context of the history from Joshua to the end of Kings, the contrast between promise and fulfilment is sharp. The cycle of apostasy–repentance–restoration, typical of the period of the judges, was repeated in the period of the kings. It was the theme of Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut. 30:1–3), where the possibility of being uprooted from the land and cast into another land was faced (Deut. 29:25–28). Disintegration followed Solomon's reign, constant apostasy marked the northern kingdom of Israel, and the end came when Assyria carried away captive most of the population. Judah and Jerusalem suffered a similar fate at the hand of the Babylonians not much more than a century later. Had God forgotten to be gracious? Had his covenant promises gone for good?

The question whether the Lord would restore the kingdom to Israel was, of course, still a live issue during the ministry of Jesus, hence the popularity of the 'kingdom' theme in the teaching of Jesus, and hence also the disciples' question about the kingdom after the resurrection (Acts 1:6). By the time the Gospels came to be written, the truth had dawned that the promises to both Abraham and David had been more than fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. The point is taken up in the very first verse of the New Testament, 'Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'

(Matt. 1:1), and is referred to in its last chapter, 'I am the root and the offspring of David' (Rev. 22:16), as well as many times in between (e.g. Luke 1:32; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8).

The historical David, for all his faults, came to stand for the idealized king, and the refrain 'for the sake of David my servant' (1 Kgs 11:13) spoke of mercy to Solomon and his successors, with all their shortcomings. The prophetic word in the promise of Nathan to David had given rise to 'a completely independent cycle of conceptions ... Of the ideal, theocratic David, exemplary in obedience.'³⁷ Through the years, prophets and psalmists took up the hope and developed the messianic concepts even further. This hope was to endure, despite the shock of exile and the ambiguity of events in the centuries that followed it, till the dawn of the gospel era (Luke 2:25, 38).

The creative power of the word of God was demonstrated clearly in the way the prophecy of Nathan developed over the centuries. As von Rad so helpfully expresses his understanding of Israel's history as presented by the books of Kings, 'The decisive factor for Israel does not lie in the things which ordinarily cause a stir in history, nor in the vast problems inherent in history, but it lies in applying a few simple theological and prophetic fundamental axioms about the nature of the divine word.'³⁸ Definite and comprehensible as these axioms were, there were nevertheless tensions between divine judgment and promised salvation. What the biblical history provides is an overview of God's judgment on individuals and nations, but particularly on Israel; yet this was the nation that had received the promises. How could the covenant between God and man stand if on the human side it was broken time and time again? Even within the books of Samuel that tension is already apparent in the human failures of Israel's successive leaders. Nor was that tension resolved during the Old Testament period; rather it provided 'the grit that caused the pearl within the oyster', provoking constructive longing for better integration of actual living with the covenant ideal, and above all longing for a king on the throne of David who would

37. Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, p. 88.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

govern ‘with justice and with righteousness ... for evermore’ (Isa. 9:7).

Text

Before the middle of the twentieth century, the earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of Old Testament texts dated from about the ninth century AD, whereas part of the Gospel of John, known as p⁵², goes back as far as the first half of the second century AD. At first sight it seems strange that older copies of Old Testament books in Hebrew should not have survived, but there is an explanation. In part this was because, after the standardization of the text early in the Christian era, non-standard texts were eliminated. Then again, such was the veneration with which Jewish scholars regarded their copies of the Hebrew scriptures that, when the scrolls were worn and needed to be replaced, they carefully relegated them to a special room in the synagogue, known as a *genizah*, prior to giving them an honourable burial. In this way the scriptures were protected against improper use, but they were also unlikely to survive for the later use of interested scholars.³⁹

All the more extraordinary, therefore, was the discovery of Hebrew manuscript fragments of all the books of the Old Testament (except Esther) – many of which were written before the Christian era – among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were brought to light at the end of the 1940s. These manuscripts, including a complete scroll of Isaiah in Hebrew, renewed research and debate on the transmission of the text of the Old Testament.

So far as the books of Samuel are concerned, the Hebrew text had long been recognized as presenting problems. Already in 1871 Wellhausen had used the Greek of the LXX to reconstruct what he judged to be a more adequate Hebrew text; while Driver could write: ‘The Books of Samuel ... though they contain classical examples of a chaste and beautiful Hebrew prose style ... have

39. One exception is the contents of a *genizah* in a Cairo synagogue, which included many ancient portions of the Hebrew scriptures. Cf. P. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 21959).

suffered unusually from transcriptional corruption, and hence raise frequently questions of text'.⁴⁰

Attention is drawn in the Commentary to a number of places where scholars have argued in favour of preferring the LXX reading to the MT. In view of the fact that the LXX potentially represents a Hebrew text older by a thousand years than the traditional Hebrew MT, its evidence is important, though it must be noted that there is as yet no critical edition of the LXX of Samuel. The initial translation of the Pentateuch into Greek (the only part to which the legend of the 'seventy' translators applies) was made in Alexandria during the third century BC, to meet the liturgical needs of Jews for whom Greek had become the mother tongue. Subsequently the other books were translated, though when and where is uncertain.

The books of Samuel have been well served by finds in cave 4 at Qumran. There are three fragmentary texts of these books, all of which are important for textual study: 1. a well-preserved roll containing both books, which is known as 4QSam^a; 2. a handful of very old fragments, which one can date 'scarcely later than 200 BC', are designated 4QSam^b; 3. a fragmentary manuscript of 2 Samuel 14 – 15, which is known as 4QSam^c.⁴¹

1. At the time of writing, 4QSam^a is still not officially published, although it has been the subject of major study, especially by E. C. Ulrich. In the past scholars had to rely partly on insight and intuition in using the LXX text critically; 4QSam^a, by giving access to a

40. Driver 1913, p. i.

41. F. M. Cross, Jr, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 40–42. Recent work on the Qumran texts of Samuel may also be found in E. C. Ulrich, Jr, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); and idem, '4QSam^c; A Fragmentary Manuscript of 2 Samuel 14 – 15', *BASOR* 235 (1979), pp. 1–25. For an assessment of Ulrich's work, see E. Tov, 'The Textual Affiliations of 4QSam^a', *JSOT* 14 (1979), pp. 37–53; E. Tov (ed.), *The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Samuel* (Jerusalem: Academion, 1980); G. Vermes, 'Biblical Studies and the Dead Sea Scrolls 1947–1987: Retrospects and Prospects', *JSOT* 39 (1987), pp. 113–128.

pre-Christian Hebrew text of the Old Testament, provides a 'control' for the text-critical use of the LXX.

Studies so far have established that there is frequent agreement between 4QSam^a and the LXX. Nevertheless, there are also disagreements, which need to be accounted for, and the suggestion has been made that each should be regarded as an independent source. Interestingly, where Samuel and Chronicles overlap, the text from Qumran often preserves a text much closer to the text of Samuel used by the author of Chronicles than to the traditional text of Samuel surviving from the Middle Ages (the MT).

2. 4QSam^b, together with a worn portion of Jeremiah and a fragment of Exodus, is thought to be a master scroll, the property of the Qumran community from its inception in the third century BC. This archaic manuscript 'obviously reflects at many points a text which antedates both the proto-Masoretic recension and that underlying the Septuagint, though its affinities are clearly with the latter'.⁴²

On the assumption that the LXX Samuel was translated in Egypt, the question arises whether texts were imported from Egypt to Qumran. Cross finds no good reason to suppose that this would be the case, and concludes that this manuscript 'is a witness to a collateral line of tradition that persists in Palestine from a time antedating the divergence of the Chronicler's Palestinian text of Samuel and the Hebrew textual tradition surviving in Egypt'. This divergence would have taken place no earlier than the fourth century BC and no later than the early third century BC.

The question remains where the Massoretic text underlying the standard English translations of the books of Samuel originated. Since Cross believes that this was neither in Palestine nor in Egypt, he conjectures that the proto-Massoretic text developed independently in Babylon, and was reintroduced into Palestine in the Hellenistic period or later. At present, however, evidence for the place of origin of the various 'families' of texts is not available. The analogy of a book like Isaiah (for the great Isaiah scroll from

42. Cross, *Library of Qumran & Modern Biblical Studies*, p. 190.

Qumran was in this ‘standard’ or proto-Massoretic text) argues that it is old.

3. The third manuscript contains parts of 2 Samuel 14 and 15, together with four fragments, and has been described in detail by E. C. Ulrich. He dates it in the first quarter of the first century BC, identifies other work by the same scribe, and exposes his idiosyncrasies as a copyist. Ulrich concludes his study, ‘Despite his many lapses, he [the scribe of 4QSam^c] produced a text noticeably superior to our Massoretic *textus receptus* ... for, having considerably enriched our knowledge of the text and text history of Samuel, [he] merits our gratitude.’⁴³ Though the text it provides is limited to two chapters, this manuscript adds its evidence to the early forms of the text of 1 and 2 Samuel.

The task which faces translators of the Old Testament in deciding upon a ‘source text’ (the version of the Hebrew from which all participating scholars will work) requires very specialized knowledge and sound judgment if all the relevant evidence is to be taken into account. The standard Hebrew text (the MT) is basic because it was itself the product of scholarly efforts to ensure that only the authoritative traditions were handed on, and every effort was made to preserve intact the text established in the early second century AD. Nevertheless, there are many places where the MT Samuel as it stands is unintelligible, partly because the language of the Old Testament is no longer perfectly known, but also because of mistakes made during copying.

A member of the Finnish Committee for Bible translation, Raija Sollamo, has published his committee’s principles for establishing their text.⁴⁴ Sollamo points out that in theory it is appropriate to divide the textual history of the Hebrew into four stages: i. the oldest written texts, no longer available; ii. finally compiled and edited texts (e.g. the books of Samuel/Kings); iii. the consonantal text approved by Jewish scholars after AD 70; iv. the MT with vowels and

43. Ulrich, ‘4QSam^c’, p. 25.

44. R. Sollamo, ‘The Source Text for the Translation of the Old Testament’, *BT* 37/3 (1986), pp. 319–322. No mention is made here of the Qumran evidence.

punctuation inserted. The aim is to use the second stage as the source text for translation:

There is no reason to aim for the first stage, because then literary criticism would be needed, the Bible would have to be broken up into pieces, and even so we should reach only a hypothetical source text. Even the reconstruction of the second stage is full of difficulties, and it will never succeed perfectly.⁴⁵

The reference to ‘literary criticism’, or source criticism, ties up with what we have already written in connection with methods of approach. The specialist in textual studies is obliged to work with the books as they have been handed down to us, using the MT whenever it is satisfactory and the consonantal text when the vocalization appears to be mistaken and the consonants permit a meaningful translation. When neither of these is intelligible the ancient translations may be consulted; but this particular committee has great respect for the MT, and where no reliable conclusion can be reached, tends to translate in accordance with the earlier translation tradition.

Not every translation committee is so careful to conserve tradition, however, and the translators of the NAB, for instance, have been so impressed with readings of Qumran texts published by F. M. Cross that they have incorporated them into their translation. In the books of Samuel the published *Textual Notes* record over four hundred emendations, the vast majority of them from the LXX; of these some seventy-three are supported from a Qumran text, and twenty-two follow a Qumran text without further support.⁴⁶ Thus the question is raised whether the resulting translation is to be regarded as superior to the standard versions of 1 and 2 Samuel – a matter which concerns every reader, not only those trained in textual study.

A most significant challenge to the thesis that 4QSam^a and the LXX

45. Ibid., p. 320.

46. *Textual Notes on the New American Bible* (Paterson, N. I.: St Anthony’s Guild, no date or editor given), pp. 342–351.

are generally superior to the MT of Samuel has come from Stephen Pisano.⁴⁷ His conclusion, after analysing some seventy passages where 4QSam^a or the LXX differ from the MT by way of a major plus or minus (i.e. words added or missing from the text), is ‘that in the vast majority of cases a large plus or minus occurring in the LXX or 4QSam^a vis-à-vis MT indicates a further literary activity by LXX or 4QSam^a’.⁴⁸ He therefore urges caution in emending the MT too quickly on the basis of another text, especially where large insertions or omissions are concerned, though he acknowledges that the texts of the LXX and 4QSam^a are helpful for the restoration of the Hebrew texts where corruptions have occurred through faulty transmission.

In a review of Pisano’s book H. G. M. Williamson finds his arguments convincing on some passages, but in general considers him to be rather too reluctant to depart from the MT. Williamson urges that ‘Neither the Masoretic Text nor (as has become fashionable) the LXX should be given the prior benefit of the doubt, but each instance should be judged on its own merits.’⁴⁹ This involves a great deal of extra work, but to weigh all the arguments in each case will eventually lead to more reliable judgments.

Two considerations may be of help to the non-specialist reader. 1. The standard Hebrew consonantal text made about AD 100 was felt to be necessary because manuscripts were in circulation which showed variants that the traditional teachers judged to be less close to the original than the best they had available. 2. Even where the Qumran texts seem to make better sense, caution is necessary because some of the early scribes (i.e. those at work before AD 100) were not averse to harmonizing or innovating, hence the need for an authoritative text. Once the Qumran texts have been published, so that work on them is open to public scrutiny and scholarly judgment, assessment of their part in establishing the Hebrew text

47. S. Pisano, *Additions or Omissions in the Books of Samuel: The Significant Pluses and Minuses in the Massoretic, LXX and Qumran Texts* (Freiburg:

Universitäts-verlag, and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

48. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

49. H. G. M. Williamson in *JTS* 37 (1986), pp. 458–461.

should become easier. In this present Commentary some alternative readings are noted, but it is not always possible to adjudicate between them.

Even academics who have made specialist studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls (such as Geza Vermes, who has been associated with Qumran studies from the start) admit to their inability to pronounce judgment on the claims and suggestions of other scholars. Vermes finds particularly problematic the existence of so great a variety of texts prior to the second century BC, and wonders whether the lack of need for textual unity prior to this period should not be attributed 'to the unchallenged doctrinal and legal authority of the priesthood which considered itself to have been divinely appointed for this supreme doctrinal and judicial role'.⁵⁰ Socio-historical circumstances are certainly important, and, although the case is not quite parallel, one wonders how many recensions of the Scriptures there must be in China, where Christians make their own copies of books of the Bible. What should impress us more than the variety of small differences in the text is the astonishing similarity between all the books and the MSS that have to date been discovered. When the Qumran scrolls were first discovered they were expected to be strikingly different, 'being about a thousand years older than the earliest Massoretic codices', but 'the expectation did not materialize'.⁵¹ Though there are certainly many questions that remain to be answered, considerations such as this help to keep the problems in perspective.

50. Vermes, 'Biblical Studies and the Dead Sea Scrolls 1947-1987', p. 125.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 120.