

## Saul: The State Builder

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### ABSTRACT

*This article takes a closer look at Saul's achievements as the first king of Israel. There are scholars who minimize Saul's accomplishments as the king who transformed Israel into a monarchy. This article will demonstrate that Saul laid the foundation of monarchy that would ultimately be fully developed under David and Solomon. It was Saul who introduced a new class of officials and functionaries at his court. As a military hero, he laid the foundation of a skilled army and introduced a new weapon, and he was the first to use protective gear. He also established two units of bodyguards. States cannot exist in the fullest form if they do not have the power of taxation; therefore, it was Saul who introduced state taxes. As a religious leader, Saul established a cultic centre in Nob and battled against idolatry. Independent states have capital, so after Saul's successful campaign against the Philistines and their expulsion from the Benjaminite territory, Saul established his capital at Gibeah.*

**KEYWORDS:** servant, taxation, freeman, gift, army, runners, bodyguards, capital, Gibeah, Nob.

### A INTRODUCTION

Saul's crowning signified a major transition from theocracy to kingship. Originally, Israel was a federation of twelve tribes bound by a covenant with God, who was the religious authority, the sovereign, and the king of the Israelites. Now, with Saul as King, a new era has emerged. Saul became the architect of the Israelite monarchy and laid its foundation. Still, there are scholars who debate the nature of Saul's role in the history of Israel. Alt, for example, sees Saul only as a military commander; internal affairs were run by the tribe elders, and he was not a true king.<sup>1</sup> According to Goldman, "the organization of the kingdom under Saul seems to have been very simple and rudimentary."<sup>2</sup> He believed that Saul was too preoccupied with the Philistine threats and, therefore, did not lay the foundation for the civic organization of the kingdom. While Miller viewed Saul as opportunistic, extending his

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\* Submitted: 23/02/2023; peer-reviewed: 06/09/2023; accepted: 15/11/2023. Shaul Bar, "Saul: The State Builder," *Old Testament Essays* 36 no. 3 (2023): 736–753. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2023/v36n3a10>.

<sup>1</sup> A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Trans. R.A. Wilson; Garden City New York, 1967), 223–309.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon Goldman, *Samuel* (London: Soncino Press, 1962), xii.

influence outside of the tribe of Benjamin, he was not head of a state. He credited him with laying the foundation of administration and military bureaucracy but not establishing a state religion.<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages, we will critically evaluate the textual material and raise questions regarding the early stages of the state under Saul. Did Saul create a new reality as an absolute king with unlimited powers? Did Saul introduce a new administrative and military order that, in turn, required new taxation to maintain them? Kings in the ancient world were known for grandiose construction projects such as the state capital, religious centres, and fortresses—did Saul do this? All of these questions will be addressed. Ultimately, we will answer a major question: Did King Saul achieve his mission to transform Israel into a monarchy?

## B SERVANTS IN THE KING'S COURT

Since Saul was the first king of Israel, we might expect to find new terminology for officials in his court. Indeed, the term 'servant of the king', which is found in Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Egyptian sources, is also found in Saul's court.<sup>4</sup> In those traditions, the term was conferred on a wide spectrum of the king's men. It could refer to a variety of functions inside and outside the royal court. The 'servant' (עבד) had high status close to the king, so he could be a prince, an army officer, or another minister of the state.<sup>5</sup> In one of Saul's episodes, Doeg the Edomite is known as עבד of Saul, king of Israel (1 Sam. 21:8).<sup>6</sup> David is also dubbed עבד of Saul, the king of Israel (1 Sam. 29:3); Sacher explains this term as being an officer in Saul's army. The general collective term עבדי המלך appears in reference to officials and functionaries at court. Thus, when a bad spirit seized Saul, his servants looked for a person skilled at playing the lyre (1 Sam. 16:15). The 'servants' in Saul's story refer to high-ranking members of Saul's court, which is made clear from other Biblical evidence (2 Kgs. 22:12; 2 Chr. 34:20; 2 Kgs. 25:8). There is also epigraphic evidence that includes seals inscribed with a proper name followed by the title "servant of the king".<sup>7</sup> Those people who were close to the king received land grants that were confiscated, this practice was also known in Ugarit.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell J. Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 142–44.

<sup>4</sup> Nili Sacher Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 60–62.

<sup>5</sup> Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> The JPS translated this as one of Saul's officials.

<sup>7</sup> Kyle P. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 158; Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 56–60.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in Light of Akkadian Document from Ugarit," *BASOR* 143(1956):19–20; Anson F. Rainey, "Institution:

1 Samuel 22:6 describes Saul sitting under a tree with all his עבדיו ניצבים all his courtiers in attendance upon him. The term here refers to his entire entourage, all of whom belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Klein raised the possibility that Saul's power base was small because of this.<sup>9</sup> It is more likely that Saul trusted his own kinsmen from the tribe of Benjamin. The servants are described as standing next to Saul, which is typical of people who appear before a king (1 Kgs. 1:28).<sup>10</sup>

Another title that is mentioned among Saul's administrators is the term נָצַב. This mostly appears during Solomon's reign, where we read about 12 individuals in charge of a particular geographical region in Israel (1 Kgs. 4:7). They were to supply food for the king and his household. The title also refers to a prefect, where it states that Jonathan killed the נָצַב of the Philistines who was in Geba (1 Sam.13:3). In 1 Samuel 22:9 it appears in a verbal form which describes an official position. It states that Doeg the Edomite was an official of Saul נָצַב על עבדי שאול. The verb can be interpreted in two ways. Doeg was standing by Saul's courtiers, as the JPS translated, along with Hertzberg and Smith.<sup>11</sup> McCarter says that Doeg was presiding over Saul's servants.<sup>12</sup> As Sacher Fox points out, the second interpretation better fits Doeg's exercise of power. She compares his actions to the description of the steward Boaz's estate הנָצַב על הקוצרים "who was appointed over the reapers" (Ruth 2:5–6).<sup>13</sup> It is possible that Saul chose Doeg, who was an Edomite, because he held a senior appointment in Edom before he arrived at Saul's court. This set a precedent because, during the reign of David and Solomon, they had many administrators of foreign origin. They choose experienced men from the neighbouring countries to conduct their administrative affairs.

Doeg is also called Saul's 'chief herdsman' (1 Sam. 21:8), meaning he oversaw the king's property and herds. The LXX refers to him as a "keeper of Saul's mules", as does Josephus.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that in his capacity as 'chief herdsman', he supplied animals for sacrifices at the temple in Nob. This interpretation provides a better understanding of his arrival at Nob.

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Family, Civil, and Military," in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (ed., Loren R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1975), 2: 95–97.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *I Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), 224.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Maimonides in *Hilchot Melachim* says: "They should stand before him and prostrate to the ground see: Maimonides, *Hilchot Melachim*, chapter 2:5.

<sup>11</sup> Hans W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 360; Henry Preserved Smith, *The Books of Samuel* (ICC; New York: Scribners, 1899), 206–207.

<sup>12</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, 360.

<sup>13</sup> Sacher Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 142n.254.

<sup>14</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 6.244.

Doeg's role as an executioner in the massacre in Nob led Heinrich Graetz to read רצים runners instead of רועים shepherds.<sup>15</sup> This suggestion was adopted by scholars who believe that Doeg led a contingent of runners, the bodyguards of the king who ran in front of his carriage (2 Sam. 15:1).<sup>16</sup> Alter suggested that Doeg's services in Saul's court "reflects the enlistment of foreign mercenaries in the new royal bureaucracy."<sup>17</sup> However, there is no textual support for this reading based on 1 Samuel 22:17. Sacher Fox reads "strongman" as she points to the possible parallel to the Assyrian title "chief of the shepherds" that was held by a court official of the crown prince; interestingly, he is listed together with different types of guards, including bodyguards.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it was Aster who maintained that Doeg's designation as אביר הרועים must be understood as a military title based on evidence from Hittite and Akkadian texts.<sup>19</sup> According to him, Doeg's function was similar to titles held by Joab and Benaiah as 'commander of the army' (2 Sam.8:16; 20:23; 1 Kgs.4:4). Therefore, it is not surprising that Doeg was dealing with a disloyal individual in 1 Sam.21–22.

Another term that is mentioned in the King's court is the Hebrew term נער, which means "young man", servant, and retainer.<sup>20</sup> Ziba is called עבד (slave) of the house of Saul (2 Sam.9:2). When he was addressing King David, he referred to himself as עבד 2 Sam.9:2, 11). However, David called him נער שאול "Saul's steward" (v.9); this indicates that David regarded Ziba as more than an עבד. In 19:18, Ziba is called נער בית שאול, "the steward of the house of Saul", and in 2 Samuel 16: 1, "Mephibosheth's steward". Macdonald pointed out that the two terms were used properly. Ziba is called נער because of his specific function as a personal servant of a great man; at the same time, נער is the עבד, the subject of the king and the royal house.<sup>21</sup> In 2 Samuel 9:10, Ziba's

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (ed., and trans., Bella Löwy; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891–1898), 1:91.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Nowack, *Richter, Ruth u. Bücher Samuelis* (HKAT;Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902),111; Samuel R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Typography of the Books of Samuel* (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha,1984), 175–176; Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1902), 149; Smith, *The Books of Samuel*, 200; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 348–349; Klein, *I Samuel*, 213.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W.W. Norton,1999), 132

<sup>18</sup> Sacher Fox, *In the service of the king*, 281.

<sup>19</sup> Shawn Zelig Aster, "What was Doeg the Edomite's Title? Textual Emendation versus Comparative Approach to 1 Samuel 21:8," *JBL* 122(2003):353–361; M. Tsevat, "Assyriological Notes on the First Book of Samuel," in *Studies in the Bible presented to Professor M. H. Segal* (ed. Y. M. Grintz and J. Liver; Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1964), 85–86.

<sup>20</sup> Kyle P. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 261–62.

<sup>21</sup> John Macdonald, "The Status and Role of the Na'ar in Israelite Society," *JNES* 35(1976):156.

duty is to work on Saul's estate and provide the family with produce. Evidently, the term נָעָר implies the office of a high-ranking steward or superintendent of property of the estate. The fact that Ziba was important is confirmed by the fact that he had fifteen sons and twenty servants (2 Sam. 9:10).

## C TAXATION

Taxation is one of the first signs of a monarchy. States cannot exist in the fullest form if they do not have the power of taxation. The Bible says little about taxation. Ironically, there were foreign states that taxed the Israelites (Judg. 3:8, 14). The Book of Samuel records that the Philistines exploited the Israelites. In the wars between the Israelites and the Philistines, the conquered became slaves of the conquerors (1 Sam. 4:9). More so, Goliath, in this challenge to the Israelites, says: "If he beats me in combat and kills me, we will become your slaves; but if I beat him and kill him, you shall be our slaves and serve us" (1 Sam. 17:9). The Philistines denied the Israelites arms, and therefore, there were no blacksmiths in all the land of Israel. Clearly, this was an indirect tax on the Israelites, who were forced to use the Philistines to repair any of their farm equipment, such as ploughshares, mattocks, axes or sickles (1 Sam. 13:20). Evidently, this was another reason for the rebellion against the Philistines and the establishment of the monarchy.

A clue to taxation during Saul's period is found in 1 Samuel 17:25, where King Saul promised the person who would slay Goliath great riches. He would also give him his daughter and "grant exemption to his father's house in Israel". The Hebrew word חָפְשִׁי an adjective meaning free, is used in the Hebrew Bible for a person manumitted from slavery (Exod. 21:2). Some scholars tried to connect this term with the Akkadian (Amarna, Nuzi, Alalakh) noun *ḥupšu* and the Ugaritic *ḥpt/ hbt*, both refer to a class of people between slaves and landowners.<sup>22</sup> However, it is difficult to apply this meaning to Israel, as there was no class of חָפְשִׁי.<sup>23</sup> Rainey compared it to the Akkadian adjective *zaki*, where in the Akkadian texts from Ras Shamra it describes an emancipated slave (RS. 16.250:21–22); or a soldier because of his bravery received freedom from the king, who exempted him from service to the palace: "and the king has exempted him from service to the palace; as the Sun-goddess is free, so he is free" (RS 16.269:14–16).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Isaac Mendelsohn, "The Canaanite Term for 'Free Proletarian,'" *BASOR* 83(1941):36–39; John Gray, "Feudalism in Ugarit and Early Israel," *ZAW* 54(1952):49–55; N. Lohfink, "*ḥopšî*," *TDOT* 5:114–18.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions*, trans. John Mchugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 88; S.E. Loewenstamm, "חָפְשִׁי" *EMiqr* 3:256–57

<sup>24</sup> Rainey, "Institutions: Family, Civil, and Military," 2:104

In the Bible, the term *הפשי* designates the legal status of a free man who is not subjugated to others. The king's laws, which appear in Samuel's speech, outlined the rights of the king, stipulating the King's right to take fields, cattle, servants, and even sons and daughters (1 Sam. 8:11–18). The exemption that Saul promised the victor was a release from the early form of taxes.

Another clue for the existence of taxation during Saul's era is the term *מנחה*. Generally, in the Bible, the term *מנחה* means gift. The term is also attested in Arabic *manaḥa*, "to give loan" also Tigr. and Geez, to "give someone a cow on loan."<sup>25</sup> A similar interpretation appears in Ugaritic in KTU, 1.2 I, 38 the suffixed *mnḥyk* means "your gifts."<sup>26</sup> In the Bible, the term signifies a gift given as an expression of friendship with respect and also a tribute in recognition of the donor's subordinate status. In the Joseph story, the brothers brought him *מנחה* consisting of balsam, honey, myrrh, pistachios, and almonds (Gen. 43:11, 15, 25, 26). Jacob brought his brother Esau *מנחה* in recognition of his subordinate status and to appease him (Gen. 32:14, 19, 21, 22). Presenting a gift to a King for receiving his favour was customary (2 Kgs. 20:12; Isa. 39:1; Ps. 45:13), as was bringing tribute between rulers and their subordinate states (Judg. 3:15; 2 Sam. 8:2, 6; 1 Kgs 4:21; 2 Kgs 17:3, 4). A *מנחה* was presented to the new king 'All Judah brought tribute *מנחה* to Jehoshaphat' (II Chr. 17:5); it is stated the king had riches and wealth, and this tribute added to his wealth. This is the only instance where people brought tribute to their own king. The other instance appears at Saul's coronation at Mizpah, where we read that the useless scoundrels did not bring him *מנחה* (1 Sam. 10:27).

In contrast to these scoundrels, Jesse sent Saul bread *לחם*, a skin of wine, and a kid (1 Sam. 16:20). Solomon received daily provisions of *לחם* that included 30 *kors* of semolina, and 60 *kors* of flour, 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture-fed oxen, 100 sheep and goats (1 Kgs. 5:2). Nehemiah describes the former governors who laid a heavy burden on the people and took bread *לחם* and wine in the equivalent of forty shekels of silver from them (Neh. 5:15). We believe that the gift of *לחם* that was sent to King Saul by Jesse was an early form of taxation. This taxation became permanent during Saul's reign: therefore, the king promised tax exemption to the person who would defeat Goliath.

<sup>25</sup> Heinz J. Fabry, "*minḥâ*," *TDOT* 8:407–08.

<sup>26</sup> KTU 1.2 I ,38, 7; In KTU, 4.91,1 *mnḥ.bd.ybn* means "tribute from the hand of PN," and has no religious connotation. See: Fabry, "*minḥâ*," *TDOT* 8:409; KTU 4.91,1, 245.

## D ARMY

### 1 Soldiers

Israel's enemies, the Canaanites and the Philistines, had professional armies that included infantry and charioteers.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Israelites suffered defeats at the hands of the Philistines further justified their need for a professional army. The army might be small, but it would be trained, effective, and ready for action. The creation of a skilled army was the work of Saul. He started his army by recruiting mercenaries; thus, whenever he saw a *mighty* man or any *valiant* man, he took him into his service (1 Sam. 14:52); these two terms for soldiers are not mentioned in Ugaritic sources. There is a contrast between the technical terms of the Ugaritic text and the Biblical text of Iron Age Israel. Rainey has suggested that these two terms appear in Israel due to Aramaean influence.<sup>28</sup> The military terminology did not stem from the tribal period; Saul introduced it. Saul knew about the city-state system of professional soldiers, but he preferred men from his own tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 22:7). Nevertheless, we read that he took men from other Israelite tribes as well, including David from the tribe of Judah (1 Sam. 16:18, 18:2). Foreigners such as Doeg the Edomite were also included in his army (1 Sam. 21:8, 22:18). Their numbers probably were small because they were mercenaries.

Saul's professional army was called *בחורים*. When the term *איש בחור* appears, it is used to designate selected warriors. This is also true when the term appears alone as a collective form. The root *בחר* often denotes the selection of soldiers (Exod. 17:9; Josh 8:3; 1 Sam. 13:32; 2 Sam. 10:9, 17:1; 2 Chr. 13:3, 17, 25:5). Saul himself is called *בחור* and he selected the national army *איש בחור* which he himself led.<sup>29</sup> This army included 3,000 men (1 Sam. 24:2, 26:2). The army was divided into three units, each numbering 1000 men (1 Sam. 13:2). They were headed by captains of thousands and captains of hundreds (1 Sam. 22:7). This selection process was further developed by David (2 Sam. 14:3; 26:2). His kinsman Abner commanded the army whether it was the *בחורים* or the tribal levies, scholarly opinions are divided.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There were exceptions where we read about an attempt to have mercenaries. Therefore, Abimelek recruited mercenaries (Judg. 9:4). Jephthah gathered a band of armed supporters (Judg. 11:3).

<sup>28</sup> Rainey, "Institution: Family, Civil, and Military," 2:101.

<sup>29</sup> Richter suggested that the term means one who is capable of war, inheritance, and marriage. See: Wolfgang Richter, *Die sogenannten vorprophetischen Berufungsberichte* (FRLANT 101; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprechts, 1970), 30.

<sup>30</sup> A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munich: Beck, 1952–59), 30; O. Eissfeldt, *The Hebrew Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 41. Who says that Abner commanded the military levy?

In historical accounts of David's period, a place named **בְּחֹרִים** is mentioned (2 Sam. 3:16, 16:5, 17:18, 19:17; 1 Kgs. 2:8). The place was in Benjaminite territory near Jerusalem. Among its inhabitants was Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite, who led a revolt against David (2 Sam. 19:17; 1 Kgs. 2:8). Also mentioned is one of David's "mighty men" Azmaveth (2 Sam. 23:31; 1 Chr. 11:33). There is also a reference to David's spies, Jonathan, and Ahimaaz who hid in the well belonging to a man from **בְּחֹרִים** (2 Sam. 17:18). Thus, it is possible that the name of the place **בְּחֹרִים** should be rendered as "warriors' village" and not "young men's village" as it was assumed before.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, this is supported by 1 Samuel 22:7, where we read that Saul gave his soldiers ownership of fields and vineyards. The "men chosen out of all Israel" were picked personally by King Saul to serve in his army; they all received fields, one of which was **בְּחֹרִים**.

## 2 Bodyguards

In addition to establishing a standing army, Saul also established two bodyguards units. As the new king of Israel, Saul needed protection. Murders of kings in the ancient world were common, and they came to exist among the Israelite kings. Therefore, Saul surrounded himself with two circles of bodyguards. The first and closest group, the **מִשְׁמַעַתָּה** meaning 'those who obey who answer the call' (1 Sam. 22:14; 2 Sam. 23:23). This probably referred to "an intimate circle of royal retainers, i.e., a king's bodyguard."<sup>32</sup> They were very close to the king and had to protect him physically.<sup>33</sup> According to Eissfeldt, David came to Saul's army as an experienced soldier; how he gained his experience is not clear.<sup>34</sup> Later on, David would become the leader of Saul's bodyguards (1 Sam. 22:14). This position was held by Benaiah, son of Jehoiada in David's court (2 Sam. 23:20–33; 1 Chron. 11:22:25).

The second group of bodyguards included the runner's **רָצִים** (1 Sam. 22:17). The royal chariot was escorted by a team of runners. From the context of verse 17, it appears that they were Israelites. Their task was to protect the king's royal chariot and the king's palace. Indeed, when Absalom and later Adonijah tried to seize the throne, they had at their disposal a chariot with fifty runners (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kgs. 1:5). In 1 Kings they are mentioned as guarding the entrance to the royal palace of King Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 14:27–28; 2 Chr. 12:10–11). Their guardroom was located at the entrance to the palace, and they carried bronze shields when they escorted the King to the palace. They were

<sup>31</sup> Ze'eb Weisman, "The Nature and Background of *bāḥūr* in the Old Testament," *VT* 31(1981):450.

<sup>32</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 364.

<sup>33</sup> While, on the King Mesha Moabite stone inscription, the term *mishma'ath* refers to a city or state giving allegiance to the king. See: "The Moabite Stone," (trans. W. F. Albright; *ANET*), 320–321.

<sup>34</sup> Eissfeldt, *The Hebrew Kingdom*, 41.



also involved in court intrigue and played a part in Athaliah's deposition and Joash's enthronement (2 Kgs. 11).

### **3 Weapons**

The men who went to battle supplied their own arms, swords, and slings. The people of the tribe of Benjamin were known as experts with the sling. The Philistines had disarmed the Israelites, so in the Michmas battle, only Saul and Jonathan had swords (1 Sam.13:19–22). In David's eulogy, Saul's shield is mentioned (2 Sam. 1:21); while Jonathan is mentioned as an archer (1 Sam.18:4, 20:20; 2 Sam.1:22). Among the people who joined David at Ziklag were people from the tribe of Benjamin armed with a bow (1 Chr. 12:2). We believe that Saul introduced this weapon into the army. It was used in ancient times for hunting and for war. The Philistines used archers (1 Sam. 31:3; 1 Chr. 10:3). Since the Philistines disarmed the Israelites, the bow was an answer to the Philistine threat. The bow was made of wood reinforced with twisted sinew or cord; its end was held by a string. The arrowheads could be made from flint or bronze.

Protective gear was also used in Saul's army, therefore we read of the helmet and breastplate. When David went to fight Goliath, Saul gave him his bronze helmet and breastplate (1 Sam. 17:38). Goliath also wore a helmet and breastplate of scales (1 Sam. 17:5). de Vaux says that it is questionable whether Saul had this equipment for David to try on.<sup>35</sup> However, we believe that Saul had this gear on hand. Saul was probably trying to eliminate Goliath's advantage; therefore, he gave David the same equipment at Goliath's disposal. Thus, David received a sword which was rare among the Israelites; only Saul and Jonathan had swords (1 Sam. 13:22). However, afterwards, it became a common weapon, as did the helmet and breastplate.

### **E CAPITAL**

It was suggested that Saul tried to make Gibeon his capital.<sup>36</sup> According to Blenkinsopp, Saul was impressed by its prestige as a religious centre, impressive fortifications, hydraulic work, and especially its strategic position. Indeed, archaeological excavations point to a massive city wall, 10.5–11ft in width, which circled the hill dating from the Iron Age I Period (1200–100 BCE). In addition, water systems from the Iron Age I to provide water to the

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<sup>35</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 245.

<sup>36</sup> Klaus D. Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines Israelitischen Stammes* (BZAW 86. Berlin: Töpelmann,1963), 131–38, 71. Diana Edelman, "Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early-Persian Yehud?" in *The Land That I Will Show You* (FS J.Maxwell Miller; ed. J.A. Dearman and M.P. Graham; JSOTSup 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 77; Peter J. Kearney, "The Role of the Gibeonites in the Deuteronomic History," *CBQ* 35(1973):16.

inhabitants of the city during the time of siege were also discovered. This system is the Pool of Gibeon mentioned in 2 Samuel 2:13. A huge round pit, thirty-seven feet round and eighty-two feet deep, was found within the ancient site of the city of Gibeon.<sup>37</sup> Blenkinsopp also points to the term הגדולה הבמה which evidently was the large shrine where Solomon went for his inauguration, referred to as Gibeon in 1 Kings 3:4. He also suggests that David went to the Gibeonite sanctuary and 'sought the face of Yahweh' before giving the descendants of Saul to the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:1). It appears that the Gibeonite sanctuary rivalled Jerusalem before the completion of the temple.<sup>38</sup> However, it is unlikely that Saul established his capital in Gibeon simply because no biblical passage associates Saul directly with it.

Saul probably established his capital at Gibeah. There are several places with names based on the root g. b. ' which in Hebrew means "hill". Therefore, we find Geba (1 Sam. 14:5); and Gibeah (1 Sam. 14:2). In addition, there are longer versions of these names, such as Geba of Benjamin (1 Sam. 13:16), Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Sam. 13:2), and גבעת האלוהים, the hill of God (1 Sam. 10:5). The latter was the place where the Philistine prefect resided and became one of the strongholds in the highlands (1 Sam. 10:5). According to McCarter, גבעת האלוהים is the longer name of Gibeah of Benjamin, Saul's home.<sup>39</sup> Jonathan struck down the Philistine prefect in Geba (1 Sam. 13:3) which seems to be Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Sam. 13:2). Saul also resided in this city (1 Sam. 10:26, 11:4)<sup>40</sup>. Gibeah is mentioned in the 'rise of David' stories (1 Sam. 15:34, 22:6, 23:19, 26:1). After the battle of Michmas, Gibeah became Saul's capital, and was renamed after him as "Gibeah of Saul" (1 Sam. 15:34).

Gibeah is identified with the modern site of Tell el-Full, which is situated 3.5 miles north of Jerusalem. The ancient path from Judah to Mount Ephraim extends along the Tell. This was the main north-south road of central Palestine. Its location was crucial to the Philistine domination of the central hill country. Saul stationed his army at Gibeah, which was situated between the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim, placing his army in the midst of the Israelite population.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> James B. Pritchard, "The Water System at Gibeon," *BA* 19(1956):66–75; idem, *The Water System of Gibeon* (University of Pennsylvania Museum Monographs; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1961); idem, *Gibeon, Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 159–60.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Did Saul make Gibeon his Capital?" *VT* 24(1974):5

<sup>39</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, 182.

<sup>40</sup> According to the genealogical list in 1 Chr. 8:29; 9:35 Saul's ancestral home was at Gibeon.

<sup>41</sup> There are scholars such as Miller and Arnold who did not accept the identification of Gibeah with Tell el-Full. They suggest that Gibeah should be identified with Geba, (modern village Jaba). However, we should stress that there is no archaeological

Archaeological excavation in search of Saul's capital at Tell el-Full revealed some evidence of the pre-fortress period (1200 BCE) which was an early Iron Age settlement.<sup>42</sup> Sometime after its destruction (1100 BCE), a rectangular fortress was built there with corner towers and casemate walls (level II A). Later this fortress was rebuilt with masonry and better-quality workmanship (level II B). There is no evidence of destruction from period I but abandonment; this is probably connected to the revenge against the Benjaminites, which is recorded in Judges 19–20.

Alt and Mazar suggested that the Philistines built the fort, and one of a series of Philistine fortresses built to control the trade routes. Afterwards, the place was occupied by Saul, who built Fortress II.<sup>43</sup> Saul's successful campaign against the Philistines and the expulsion of the Philistines from the Benjamite territory enabled him to establish his capital at Gibeah. From his capital, he went to fight against the surrounding enemies (1 Sam. 22:6; 23:19). L.A. Sinclair however, at first suggested that fortress I was built by Saul and that David may have simply repaired fortress II. Later he changed his theory and accepted Mazar's theory of reconstruction.<sup>44</sup> Recently, Brooks proposed a new chronology, and according to her, during Period I, tell el-Full was a Philistine post. The place was destroyed by fire when Saul was fighting against the Philistines (1 Sam. 13–14) before or around 1100 BCE. Saul captured the place, and he rebuilt it with a large tower (Period II, fortress I). After the battle at Gilboa, the tower was destroyed by a massive fire. The second fortress (Period II, fortress II) was built following the destruction of the first one, and since the second fortress was very similar to the first, it is believed that the builder was connected to Saul. According to Brooks, this was either Saul's uncle, Abner, or Saul's son, Ishbaal. Their goal was to rebuild Saul's tower and

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evidence to support their claims. Recent excavations produced ceramic from the Iron Age II and also from the Persian period, but none of the Iron Age I data. See: Patrick M. Arnold, *Gibeah: The Search for a Biblical City* (JSOTSS 79; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 54, 87–106; Maxwell J. Miller, "Geba/Gibeah of Benjamin," *VT* 25(1975):145–66.

<sup>42</sup> W.F. Albright, *Excavation and Results at Tell el-Ful (Gibeah of Saul)* (AASOR 4; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924); idem, "A New Campaign of Excavation at Gibeah of Saul," *BASOR* 52(1933):6–12.

<sup>43</sup> Alt, *Kline Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 2:31n.1; vol. 3,259; B. Mazar, "גבעת בנימין, גבעת שאול," *EMiqr* 2:412–416.

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence A. Sinclair, *An Archaeological Study of Gibeah (Tell el-Ful)* (AASOR 34–35; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960):1–52; "An Archeological Study of Gibeah," *BA* 27(1964):52–63. Similarly, according to Demsky, Tell el-Full was desolate when Saul arrived. He points to archaeological evidence that was gathered by Albright, Sinclair and La Accordingly, there is no trace of the Philistines presence at Tell el-Full, the large well-built fortress was Saul's work not the Philistines. See: Aaron Demsky, "Geba, Gibeah, and Gibeon-An Historical-Geographic Riddle," *BASOR* 212(1973):29.

move back to Saul's town. Since Abner was murdered, Fortress II was abandoned.<sup>45</sup> However, according to the Biblical narrative, the seat of government was transferred to Mahanaim, the capital of Gilead. It was done in light of the victory of the Philistines at Mount Gilboa. The territory of Benjamin was too vulnerable to serve as the seat of the new government. The northern tribes, those of East Jordan, were loyal to Saul. This new location of the capital was far away from the Philistine-controlled area. Thus, it is unlikely that Abner, or Saul's son, Ishbaal, rebuilt fortress II. As Alt and Mazar suggested, it was probably Saul who built Fortress II. Saul's successful campaign against the Philistines and the expulsion of the Philistines from the Benjaminites territory enabled Saul to establish his capital at Gibeah.

## F CULTIC CENTER

Saul established a cultic center in Nob. During his time, Nob held the prestigious position of chief sanctuary of Yahweh. This occurred after the fall of Shiloh. Priests from Eli's house settled in Nob. Albright suggests that Saul gathered the surviving Elides and resettled them at Nob.<sup>46</sup> Nob was located close to Jerusalem, which is attested to in Isa. 10:32, where the invader shakes his fist at Jerusalem from Nob. It has been suggested that Nob was on Râs el-Mešârîf, and the slope of Mount Zion was within sight of the top of Mount Zion. Another place that was suggested was a slope north of Mount Scopus, Qu 'meh. However, this is not within view of Jerusalem. Nob achieved its prominence during Saul's era because he housed the sacred objects and rites there. The ark was probably also brought there. Even the sword of Goliath, the Philistine, was kept at Nob to commemorate the great victory against the Philistines.

Saul had a personal priest, Ahijah, who accompanied him to the battlefield (1 Sam. 14:18). He was the great-grandson of Eli, priest of Shiloh, and the brother of Ahimelech. Alternatively, scholars pointed out that Ahijah, son of Ahitub, is the same person named Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, the priest of Nob mentioned in chapters 21–22.<sup>47</sup> During the battle of Michmas, Saul ordered the priest to bring the ark to the battlefield to give confidence to the warriors. This is similar to the battle of Aphek when the ark was brought to encourage the Israelites. Saul captured the ark before the battle of Michmas and, after the victory, transferred it to Nob. He moved the ark to Nob and converted the city into a cultic centre. Through the ages, the ark united the Israelites. Saul wanted to unite the Israelite tribes under his leadership. To

<sup>45</sup> Simcha Shalom Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy: A new Look* (Society of the Old Testament Study Series; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 136.

<sup>46</sup> William Foxwell Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 50.

<sup>47</sup> Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 150; B. Mazar, "אההימלך," *EMiqr* 1:217; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 66.

achieve this, he established a new cultic center to host the ark, the most important religious symbol.

Blenkinsopp suggested that the sanctuary of Nob housed the ark.<sup>48</sup> He advanced three main reasons. 1. The priests at Nob came from Shiloh, which is associated with the ark. Abiathar, the son of Abimelech, became David's priest. He was the ark priest; therefore, his life was spared (1 Kgs. 2:26). David appointed him because he planned to bring the ark to Jerusalem in order to strengthen the religious allegiance of Israel. 2. According to 1 Samuel 21:5, the sanctuary of Nob contained the 'bread of presence'. Exodus 25:23–30 [also Lev. 24:5] mentions this in conjunction with the ark. 3. The existence of the sword of Goliath and the ephod point to the privileged status of the place as a cult centre. In addition, the ritual of purification before eating the consecrated bread is mentioned in verse 5.<sup>49</sup>

When Saul found out that his established important cultic center had Ahimelech, the priest, assisting David, he ordered the slaughter of all Elide's priests. It was only after the destruction of Nob and the slaughter of its priests that the ark was moved to Gibeon.

Samuel's actions are puzzling. He did not restore the Tabernacle and did not communicate with the surviving Elides. He is described as judging the people of Israel and visiting different cultic centres. Among them, Beth-el, Gilgal and Mizpah. Samuel built a shrine in his city of Ramah. This is probably because Samuel tried to establish his own dynasty. This might explain Saul's motivation for establishing the cultic center at Nob. The choice of Nob strengthened Saul's position against Samuel. Secondly, it also gave him control over the priestly family with its important symbolic meaning. In the Talmud we read: "Now it was: When Eli the priest died, Shiloh was destroyed and they repaired to Nob; when Samuel the Ramathite died, Nob was destroyed, and they went to Gibeon."<sup>50</sup>

In addition to building a cultic center, Saul was also a religious leader. Saul oversaw the covenant with God; thus, he battled idolatry. He never deserted Yahweh for other Gods. On the contrary, he banned the use of ghosts and familiar spirits in the land (1 Sam. 28:9). His piety to Yahweh is reflected in the name of his son, Jonathan (Hebrew: Yahweh has given). He attributed his victory over the Ammonites to Yahweh (1 Sam. 11:13). Van der Toorn pointed out that the way Saul ruled was innovative. According to him: "The god of the head of state was promoted to the rank of national god; ...Its

<sup>48</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel*, 65.

<sup>49</sup> This brings to mind Uriah who refused to sleep with his wife during a military campaign. This was due to the religious nature of the war and the presence of the ark in the camp.

<sup>50</sup> Zebahim, 118b.

priesthood, sworn to loyalty, was expected to serve the king's best interests. They became the civil servants of a state religion."<sup>51</sup> The priesthood of the house of Eli served Saul during the fight against the Philistines, Ahijah, son of Ahitub, the great-grandson of Eli, was present at Saul's camp. According to van der Toorn, the religion of the Saulide state was born in the army.<sup>52</sup> Thus, he did not go anywhere without a priest on his military campaigns. More so, Saul decided to fast during the battle and ordered the death penalty for its violation (1 Sam. 14:24; 7:6; 2 Sam. 23:16). Before the battle he sacrificed (1 Sam. 13:9).<sup>53</sup> He prevented the people from eating flesh with blood (1 Sam. 14:33–34). As a religious leader, he is instructed by Samuel to enforce the ban against Amalek (1 Sam. 15:3). He set up an altar to the Lord (1 Sam. 14:35) and interestingly, in Leviticus Rabbah, we find that the sages asserted that he was the first to build an altar to Yahweh:

It is written: So many altars were built by the ancients- Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua, and you say *'oto hehel*- "he was the first?" The rabbis say: *'oto hehel* means "he was the first of the kings." But Rabbi Yudan said: Because he was prepared to give his life for this matter, Scripture assigned him as much credit as if he himself had been the first to build an altar to the Lord.

We can see that the rabbis agreed that—according to 1 Samuel 14:35—Saul was the first to build an altar to Yahweh. But this assertion is problematic because it contradicts the biblical tradition. To resolve this contradiction, the rabbis said that Saul was the first king to build an altar to Yahweh. Rabbi Yudan solved the problem by not accepting the plain sense of the verse. According to him, Saul chronologically was not the first to build an altar to Yahweh, but because of his courage in building it, he might have been the first.<sup>54</sup>

## G SAUL'S IMAGE

A technique the biblical narrator employs to describe his heroes is to compare and contrast them. Using this technique, the narrator points to the virtues and weaknesses of his hero. Characters can be revealed through their actions, lack of actions, appearances, gestures, and comments. In the narrative, characters are revealed both by a statement made by them or by other characters. Contrary to the description of Saul as a state builder, the description of Saul in the book is unflinching as he quarrels with everyone that surrounds him. There is

<sup>51</sup> Karel van der Toorn, "Saul and the Rise of Israelite Religion," *VT* 43(1993):519.

<sup>52</sup> van der Toorn, "Israelite Religion," 528.

<sup>53</sup> In Judges 6, Gideon scarified long time before the battle and in Gibeah they scarified only after the second battle (Judg. 20:26).

<sup>54</sup> For further study on this Midrash see: David S. *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 130.

constant tension between him and Jonathan, and on one occasion, he even tried to kill him. Saul's daughters, Merab and Michal, were used as pawns against David. He is mean-spirited and willing to sacrifice the happiness of his daughters to get rid of David. Saul accused his inner circle of courtiers as traitors. He clashed with the prophet Samuel twice. He is a king who is capricious, moody, and unfailing in his efforts to kill David. He makes promises to David and to Jonathan, and he even swears by God's name, but to no avail, as he breaks his promises, one after the other. Yet David is a loyal servant who comes to the king's aid; he fights the king's wars and succeeds. 1 Sam 16:14–2 Sam 5, which describes the history of David's rise, had one purpose: to show why David was the legitimate successor to Saul and why the kingship was taken from Saul. In Sam. 24:1, Saul admits directly to David that he would resign, and the kingdom would be established by him. It was a pro-Davidic author who portrayed Saul in a negative way and, on the other hand, glorified David. This author evidently could not underestimate Saul's achievements. Thus, he mentions them indirectly.

## H CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Saul chose a desolate hill location, Gibeath Benjamin, to establish his capital which he named after himself. Archaeological excavations for the search of Saul's capital point to Tell el-Full. As the first king with a capital, we find that he had servants who were referred to as עבדי המלך, officials and functionaries at his court. Another term is נער, which implies an office with a high rank like a steward or property superintendent of an estate. Another administrator was the 'chief herdsman' who was in charge of the king's property and herds. In addition, Saul established a cultic center in Nob. During his time, Nob held the chief sanctuary of Yahweh. Saul was also a religious leader who fought against adultery and never deserted Yahweh for other gods. He also created a skilled army. He started his army by recruiting mercenaries, and thus, we read that Saul's professional army was called בהורים. We believe that Saul introduced the bow as a new weapon, as well as the first to use protective gear such as the helmet and breastplate. Saul also established two units of bodyguards. The first and closest group is called משמעת, which means 'those who obey who answer the call;' the second group of bodyguards included the runner's רצים. A state cannot exist without taxes; therefore, as the first king of Israel, Saul implemented a system of taxes. He promised great riches and his daughter to the victor against Goliath; this included a grant for tax exemptions to his father's house in Israel. We believe the gift of להם was sent to King Saul by Jesse as an early form of taxation. Another clue for the existence of taxation during Saul's reign is the term מנהה. Considering all these achievements, Saul was indeed a state builder. He transformed Israel from a loose federation of tribes into a state with a capital, religious centre, army, and taxes. Saul laid the foundation for the monarchy that would ultimately be fully developed under David and Solomon.

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