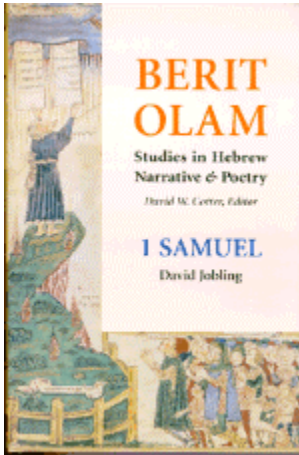


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Jobling, David

1 Samuel

Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry

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In this contribution to a fascinating commentary series, Jobling examines 1 Samuel according to T. Eagleton's triptych of class, race, and gender. It explores the tension between 1 Samuel as a book in itself and as a part of a larger whole. Jobling's approach to 1 Samuel as Israel's national autobiography is a summation of the course of his own academic career. The 1970s saw him engage structuralism and feminism, while poststructuralism and ideological criticism marked his career in the 1980s. In the 1990s, he turned to new historicism and psychoanalysis. All of these methods come together in an analysis that affords Jobling personal reflection on his own career in a seminary with a high percentage of female students.

Jobling denies that ideological criticism can be divorced from the fight for equality for the disempowered. He complains of the "travesty" and "narrowtology" of the new literary "orthodoxy," naming specifically R. Alter, F. Kermodé, M. Sternberg, L. Eslinger and especially R. Polzin (e.g., pp. 25, 144, 166-169, 308-309). Jobling replaces these scholars' concern for identifying literary artistry and narratorial omniscience in 1 Samuel with a program of uncovering points at which the text reveals uncertainty over the meaning of the past, and of recovering incompletely suppressed expressions of Israel's premonarchic egalitarian ideals.

In chapter 2 Jobling divides 1 Samuel according to book divisions presumably original to the DtrH (following M. Noth and D. J. McCarthy): Judg 2:11-1 Samuel 12 is labeled the "Extended Book of Judges" (hereafter EBJ) and 1 Samuel 13-2 Samuel 7 becomes the

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"Book of the Everlasting Covenant" (hereafter BEC). Jobling cogently argues that the later synthesis of the canonical book of 1 Samuel from the DtrH has a great influence on how the text is now interpreted, especially in terms of separating Hannah's story from those of the women in Judges, and of changing the emphasis in the closing episodes.

Class is discussed in Part 2 (chs. 3-5) under the guise of a critique of the transition from judgeship to kingship in EBJ and BEC and then in the canonical 1 Samuel. Jobling himself regards any form of kingship as a disaster and Israel's experience of it as a "tragedy" (p. 65). He asserts that 1 Samuel has no effective class analysis because it upholds one monarchic ideal as distinct from others, without realizing that all monarchies have "specific social effects" (p. 104). The canonical 1 Samuel develops the idea of a "surrogate fatherhood" system of succession (Eli/Samuel, Samuel/Saul, and Saul/David) that avoids the pitfalls of both judgeship and monarchy, although Jobling gives insufficient reasons why such a system was not also expressed by the EBJ and the BEC, both of which are components of a greater historical work.

Part 2 (chs. 6-8) treats gender issues. Hannah is viewed according to a recuperative feminist paradigm. She is portrayed as a decisive character who makes connections between her unhappy life and the national situation, especially regarding the abuse of women at the shrine. Attention is also drawn to the cooption of Hannah by Deuteronomists, canonizers, and modern scholars. Jobling complains of "perverse" royalist interpretations of Hannah's song that emphasize the favorable mention of God's king in the last verse (1 Sam. 2:10) (p. 166). These interpretations reverse "the plain meaning" of the song and trivialize it, the character Hannah, and feminist biblical scholarship as a whole. Such interpreters also "become complicit in the Bible's destructive cultural effects" (p. 169). This is certainly an unreasonable accusation; and, in any case, appeals to the "plain meaning" of a text are not easily compatible with a deconstructive analysis. Jobling's own solution recalls a time-honored strategy of historical-critics. He does not excise the offending 1 Sam 2:10, but he does write that the song "has been *made* into a celebration of kingship" (p. 168, emphasis original).

The rest of Jobling's analysis of the women in 1 Samuel is far less controversial and more convincing, especially concerning the Medium of Endor's importance to the story and the lack of condemnation for her occult practices. Abigail's motives also receive an interesting treatment that emphasizes her selfishness. Jonathan's role is perceptively seen as analogous to the roles of David's wives. That Saul's rage stems from a homophobic reaction to a consummate gay relationship between Jonathan and David is plausible, but it is not clear why the reader must believe the same things about the young men that Saul may believe.

The two chapters of Part 2 take a highly intertextual look at race. The portrayal of the Philistines in the Bible is illuminated by a discussion of the use of the name "Philistine"

in the Western world over the past few centuries. Jobling attributes his own access to higher education to the work of his "Philistine" predecessors. Similarly, he shows how Israel used the Philistines to fantasize about its own situations, although more realistic portrayals are also discovered.

The final part of the book (chs. 11-12) first presents 1 Samuel as the heart of Israel's tragic vision because it tells of the greatest tragedy of all, the rise of monarchy and the abandonment of the premonarchic ideal. The traces of guilt, failure, and cooption that are found in 1 Samuel are then illuminated by four modern intertexts. These include novels by H. R. Haggard and D. Barthelme and scholarly works by M. Bal and J. Derrida. Jobling argues that even if the DtrH preserves a faint and conflicting view of a lost egalitarian ideal it can still inspire modern social revolutions. The closing chapter contests the view that the Bible determines the methods that ought to be used to interpret it. Rather, its openness allows that a diversity of methods can legitimize themselves, a system of influence Jobling labels transference. He concludes with reflections on the theological need for freedom of interpretation and on the incremental overturning of patriarchal interpretations.

Jobling's overt political motives raise important questions to which a short review cannot do justice. This book fully deserves (and will probably receive) lengthier published responses. A few points can be briefly mentioned here. First, Jobling can hardly be called a historical literalist, although his discussion of the historical shift of Israel's mode of production from a premonarchic egalitarian model to a native tributary model is too hastily related to the depiction of the shift in 1 Samuel itself. He ignores the numerous objections to academic constructs such as the "standard historical model" of the rise of Israel's monarchy and the "period of the judges." Jobling also makes too little distinction between the producers' conception of Israel's lost monarchy and their post-monarchic situation of enduring foreign imperialism, writing off any pro-monarchic statements as offensive propaganda. Still, this is a very valuable contribution with many well thought out and fascinating insights on 1 Samuel itself and on its canonical formation as an interpretative process. Perhaps most significantly, Jobling achieves much in advancing methodological pluralism as not only viable but necessary in biblical studies.