

In Search of a Righteous King: A Melchizedekian Reading of Samuel's David

In Genesis 14 Abraham, God's chosen son, is confronted with two kings—Bera the king of Sodom and Melchizedek the king of Salem. Returning from war, where Abraham and his 318 armed men defeated many kings and saved his nephew Lot, Abraham is portrayed as a mighty prince in his own right. Yet, as the story goes Abraham is faced with a choice of identifying himself with Sodom or Salem. The details of this choice are found in verses 17–24, and can be outlined like this:

Genesis 14:17–24

Introduction of Two Kings (vv. 17–18) – The King of Sodom (v. 17) and the King of Salem (v. 18)

Melchizedek's Blessing (vv. 19–20) – Melchizedek gives bread, wine, and a blessing

Abraham's Response (v. 20b) – Abraham responds with a tithe

Bera's Taking (vv. 21) – Bera demands the people and offers the spoils of war

Abraham's Choice (vv. 22–24) – Abraham identifies with Melchizedek's God and refuses to take Sodom's offer

The contrast in these verses between the kings of Salem and Sodom could not be any more striking. The king of Salem brings Abraham a gift of bread and wine and pronounces a blessing from God Most High. He demonstrates himself to be a king of peace and a king of righteousness (Heb. 7:1–10).

By comparison, the king of Sodom comes empty-handed and his words are filled with greed. To Abraham, who just defeated “Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him,” Bera, king of Sodom, demands the spoils: “Give me the persons” (v. 21).

In context, Abraham went to reclaim Lot and his family, when the kings following Chedorlaomer took him (v. 12). So, why would Abraham now hand his nephew over to this other king? Such a request discloses Bera's heart, and foreshadows the wickedness that will be fully disclosed in Genesis 19. This ruler of Sodom is a king of the nations, and one whose willingness to take from Abraham anticipates the description Samuel portrays in 1 Samuel 8:10–18—a text we will turn to momentarily.

At the same time, Bera's offer to Abraham take material goods from him is ironic. Abraham won the spoils of war and now Sodom's king, who did not and could not defeat the other kings (see Gen. 14:1–12), is attempting to say he had some right or authority over Abraham. However, Abraham refuses.

Instead, as Hebrews 7 makes clear, Abraham recognizes the greatness of Melchizedek and identifies himself with him. And more importantly, Abraham identifies with Melchizedek's God. In response to Melchizedek's bread and wine, a sign of covenant friendship, Abraham pays a tithe and blesses the God of Melchizedek. In this way, we see that Abraham and Melchizedek worship the same God (see vv. 18, 20, 22). In context, Abraham also rejects the king of Sodom and his materialistic impulses.

Thus, in this context we find an explicit contrast between two kings. And if Paul can speak of Genesis 16 as being written “typologically” (Galatians 4:24), as Ardel Caneday has argued,¹ then I would suggest that this story is also written “typologically” to describe two patterns of kingship—one that gives to others and promises a blessing (Melchizedek) and one that takes from others and invites a curse (Sodom). Melchizedek of Salem is the first type of the first kind of kingship, a priestly kingship that worships the true God; Bera of Sodom the other type of kingship, a ravenous kingship which devours those whom it rules.

In the context of Genesis, these two kinds of kingship begin to emerge, as the sons of Abraham are promised royal heirs in Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11. Even more, however, when Judah is promised the scepter, the identification of the coming king is compared to the likes of Joseph. As Sam Emadi has argued, Joseph is a type of David, who in turn is a type of Christ. And in the context of Genesis 37–50, Judah is promised a royal heir who will be a priestly type of king, like that Joseph.

That is Genesis. Yet, in this hour, I want to focus our attention on 1 Samuel, where I believe that the inspired author, whoever he may be, develops a certain portrait of David that is meant to identify him with Melchizedek. By title, Melchizedek can be translated, King of Righteousness, and as we will see David is going to be identified as a righteous king. But more, set next to Saul, David is going to be presented as a type of Melchizedek, while Saul is a type of Bera, the king of Sodom.

In this way, there appears to be a lingering awareness of Melchizedek in the people of Israel. Or to put it more precisely, the people, like Abraham, are going to have to decide whom they desire—a king like the nations who will war for them, even as he takes from them. Or, do they want a king who will give himself to them, honoring God, establishing the priesthood, and walking in righteousness? That is the comparison between Saul and David in 1 Samuel, and it is one that develops this typological comparison introduced in Genesis 14.

1 Samuel

For our purposes, we will not rehearse the comparison of Genesis 14, nor follow all the ways that this theme moves through the Pentateuch, to Joshua through the Judges, to David. More directly, we will go straight to 1 Samuel, where we will observe in the text this comparison. And from this comparison, we can see more clearly the royal and priestly themes of this book. So, to begin, let’s consider a basic outline of 1 Samuel.

By way of personage, the book can be divided into three sections. Samuel, the great prophet in Israel, is the focus of chapters 1–7. Then, Saul takes center stage in chapters 8–15. And finally, David will eclipse Saul in chapters 16–31, even as Saul remains a central figure in the narrative.

In the book, Samuel is presented as a prophet, priest, and judge of Israel. And in due course, he is called upon to anoint two kings (Saul in 1 Samuel 10:1; and David in 1 Samuel 16:13). The context of each anointing, however, is vastly different. The one is the people’s choice; the other is God’s choice. One comes as a curse upon the people; the other comes as a blessing. And one comes from the wicked tribe of Benjamin, while the other comes from the royal tribe of Judah who actually fought against Benjamin.

¹ Ardel Caneday, “Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: “Which Things Are Written Allegorically” (Galatians 4:21–31),” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 50–77.

This appraisal of Benjamin and Judah comes from the closing chapters of Judges, where the sons of Israel go to war against the sons of Benjamin. Due to Gibeah's Sodom-like behavior with the Levites concubine (Judges 19), the nation of Israel rises against Benjamin. And as a result, 25,100 men from Benjamin died, but not before 40,000 men of Israel die (Judg. 19:21, 25). Indeed, it was a terrible time, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and there was no king in Israel.

This is the background to 1 Samuel, and it begins to explain why a king was needed in Israel. Yet, the place where that king came from would matter. In Judges 19, Gibeah proved to be a place of unrighteousness. And Mizpah, in Judges 20:1, became the location where the sons of Israel took up arms against the Benjaminites. Incredibly, in 1 Samuel both of these locations would come to the forefront, as Saul came from Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1–2), was from Gibeah (10:10, 26; 11:4), and received his commission to be king when the nation assembled in Mizpah (10:17). By contrast, David would arise from Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:1), the place where Boaz proved himself righteous in the book of Ruth.

In these ways, there develops in 1 Samuel a strong contrast between Saul and David. Yet, that contrast is more than personal; it is typological. These two men represent two kinds of kings, two kinds of kingdoms. And as I want to demonstrate, this is not accidental. It is key to understanding this book, and to understanding the royal and priestly themes found in it. To put it in the key of Melchizedek:

We should read 1–2 Samuel as a narrative that is looking for a righteous king, which is to say, the Samuel is a book in search for Melchizedek—or, at least, a king like Melchizedek.

That is my thesis. And in what follows, I will attempt to show from the text how a careful reading of 1–2 Samuel show us how Saul and David are presented at these two kinds of kings. For sake of space, I will outline my observations about Saul and David in graphic form and then make four arguments from 1 Samuel to make this point. At the end, I will make a couple connections to Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7.

Fourteen Ways 1–2 Samuel Contrast Saul and David

	A King like Sodom	A King like Melchizedek
1 Two kinds of shepherds	Saul is introduced to us as a shepherd who is unable to recover the lost donkeys and who returns home empty-handed and motivated by a fear for his own well-being (9:5)	David is also introduced to us as a shepherd, but one who is faithful in his shepherding (1 Sam 16:11), evening risking his life to protect his father's flock (17:34–37)
2 Two kinds of election	Saul is chosen by the people and from Benjamin, with disregard to the Law and the choice of Judah as Israel's royal tribe (1 Sam 8–10)	David is chosen by the Lord, and in keeping with the Law (1 Sam 16:6–12); his anointing among his brothers even echoes Deuteronomy 17:15 (1 Sam 16:13)
3	Saul is obsessed with self and displays ongoing timidity at his vocation (9:21; 10:16; 10:22)	David is obsessed with the Lord and displays ferocious boldness to defend the name of the Lord (17:26, 32, 34–37, 45–47)

Two kinds of obsession		
4 Two kinds of warfare	Saul wins battles with the strength of men that he for to himself (14:52). When called upon to defend the nation he refuses, even Goliath calls Saul by name (17:8). Goliath's command to Israel "choose a man" echoes the people's reason for choosing a king (8:6, 20), but instead of fighting the giant, Saul bribes men to fight in his place (17:25), and lets a youth go to his death instead of fighting for the nation (17:34–37)	David wins battles with the strength of the Lord (18:5). He trusts in God and wins the victory by the Lord's strength. Then, David strengthens the distressed men whom he leads. With Goliath David fights not for prize money, but for the people (17:32). And even when tired and distressed men come to him (2 Sam. 22:2), he turns them into mighty warriors (2 Sam 23:8–39)
5 Two responses to God's Word	Saul did not obey God's Word (15:19, 23, 26), and lost the kingdom as a result.	David loved God's Word as evidenced in his 73 Psalms, esp. Psalm 19. Second Samuel 24:2 calls him the sweet psalmist of Israel.
6 Two ways to lead	Saul, when his troops were leaving, forced himself to make an offering, because Samuel had not arrived (13:12)	David waits on the Lord and does not force his way to the throne (1 Samuel 24); he also inquires of the Lord before battle (2 Sam 5:23; cf. 1 Sam. 22:10)
7 Two approaches to the Lord	Saul, by making a foolish vow, led his army to sin of eating blood. He responded by offering a sacrifice and threatening his son. (ch. 14).	David regularly consulted the Lord and inquired about what to do in battle (23:9–10; 30:7–8).
8 Two kinds of worship	Saul shows no signs of worship and only builds an altar when it was politically advantageous (14:35)	David worshiped the Lord and danced uncontrollably when the ark came to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:14)
9 Two kinds of agreements	Saul threatened his son Jonathan and the kingdom that would be his (14:44).	David made a covenant with Jonathan (18:3) and honored the Lord's anointed.
10 Two kinds of kings—one who	Saul took plunder for himself (15:21) and distributed to his tribe to gain their loyalty (22:7)	David shared the material goods he gained (17:53); "David's spoil" (1 Sam 30:20) is shared compassionately with all under his care (1 Sam 30:16–30)

takes, one who gives		
11 Two kinds of kings—one who exploits the priests; one who protects the priests	Saul used the priests, rather than obeying them (14:3, 18, 26). Likewise, Saul used the ark for his own military purposes—a foolish tactic already tried and found wanting in 1 Samuel 4.	David honored, sought and protected the priests of Israel (1 Sam 21–22). David protected the ark and sought to establish its central location in Jerusalem. Instead of bringing the ark into battle; David went to battle to find a place for the ark. When he failed to keep God’s law in the ark’s transport, he learned and changed his ways (2 Samuel 5–6).
12 Two kinds of valor	Saul regularly defended himself with his people (15:21; 17:25), rather than defending his people by sacrificing himself.	David endangers himself for the good of others; he risks his life in order to care for others (e.g., killing Goliath and collecting 100 foreskins).
13 Two results	The kingdom is taken away (13:14; 15:28)	The kingdom is confirmed with a covenant (2 Samuel 7:9–14)
14 Two hearts	When confronted in his sin (1 Samuel 15), Saul hardens his heart and loses the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:14), so that he must seek spiritual help from the witch at Endor (1 Samuel 28).	When confronted in his sin (2 Samuel 11), David repents and cries out for mercy. Even as his sin invites the sword into his house (2 Sam. 12:10), he does not lose the Spirit and proves to be a man of faith.

On the face of this evidence, it is compelling that David is a righteous king, but does that make David a king like Melchizedek and Saul a king like Sodom? Is that something we see as we read the text or is it something the author is attempting to communicate? From what we have seen already I believe the author of Samuel is intentionally setting a contrast between Saul and David, such that the latter is displayed as a king like Melchizedek.

And, in fact, there are at least four more reasons for that assertion.

1. The origin of Saul’s kingdom identifies him with Sodom.

In Judges 19 the people of Benjamin in the city of Gibeah act as Sodomites. The men of Gibeah come to the home where a traveling Levite is staying and they seek relations with him. He and his host refuse, but they give over his concubine for the men to abuse. This event unveils not only how bad Israel has gotten, but in the context of the Scripture, it portrays Gibeah as a city just like Sodom. The events of Gibeah in Judges 19 mirror the events of Sodom in Genesis 19.

Keeping our eye on Judges 19 when we turn to 1 Samuel, we discover that the king whom the people desire is from Gibeah. In this, there is unmistakable irony. This king comes from the city in Benjamin whose reputation is like that of Sodom. Therefore, in the geographic identification of Saul, his unrighteousness is not just like any nation; rather, it is linked to the wickedness of Sodom.

Moreover, when the people request a king like the nations and Samuel identifies the characteristics of this king in 1 Samuel 8:10–18 as one who will take their daughters and sons, this is Sodom’s king writ large. Only now, this is not a foreign king enslaving Israel; this is an Israelite enslaving Israel. Do remember, the crowning feature of Bela, the king of Sodom, in Genesis 14 is his desire to take.

And notice what Samuel warns when God gives the people what they want. In 1 Samuel 8, the people asks for a king like the nations. And here is Samuel’s warning:

¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. ¹¹ He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. ¹² And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.” (1 Samuel 8:10–18)

Could there be an ironic connection in v. 17 between the tenth that this king would take, versus the tithe that Abraham freely gave to Melchizedek? Perhaps.

What is undeniable, however, is the wickedness that will come with Israel’s king. And that wickedness is one that is identified by a pattern of taking. As Jesus will say later, the Gentile kings rule it over you, and as we know too well, the kings of the earth take from the people by imposing harsh taxation, taking our freedoms, and enslaving our children. Such is the wickedness that Samuel identifies with Saul. And yet, it is more than a personal bug with this king; it is a feature of all kings like him.

And thus, in 1 Samuel there is needed another and more righteous king—a king like Melchizedek. And remarkably, Saul himself will point us to that king.

2. Saul explicitly identifies David as “righteous” and “king” in the same passage, which makes David a “righteous king” or a “king of righteousness.”

In 1 Samuel 24 David is given the first of two opportunities to kill Saul, a move that would have eliminated this king from the throne and secured his own place as Israel’s ruler. Despite the encouragement of his men (v. 4), David refused. Instead, he ordered his men to withhold their swords from Saul’s neck (vv. 6–7) and he let him go.

In this episode, repeated in 1 Samuel 26, David evidenced his trust in the Lord and his unwillingness to kill the Lord's anointed (vv. 6, 10). By doing so, David also demonstrated his righteousness and his lack of blood-thirstiness. Though David would be called a man of blood (1 Chron 28:3), in his warfare, he fought for God, not himself. Moreover, he displayed that he is not a king like the nations, or like Saul, who will do anything to advance themselves. Rather, David proved himself a king of righteousness.

And explicitly, Saul says the same thing. First, in verse 17, after David had revealed himself to Saul, Saul says, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil." Next, as Saul continues to speak, he says in verse 20, "And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand."

While Saul despised David, these prescient words are used to further solidify the nature of David's kingdom. He is the true king who will replace Saul, and he is the righteous king whose leadership will not rest on taking men to himself like Saul (1 Sam. 14:52) or Bera (Gen. 14:21). In other words, David is a Melchizedek. And though 1 Samuel does not explicitly say that, placing Saul's words in such close proximity makes the inference very straightforward—David is a righteous king, a king of righteousness, a Melchizedek.

3. David's priestly concern identify him as a king like Melchizedek, a king who served God Most High.

Another striking contrast between Saul and David is the way they treat the priesthood. In 1 Samuel Saul vacillates between ignoring the priesthood and using it for his own purposes before taking a sword to the priesthood in 1 Samuel 22.

First, in 1 Samuel 13:12 we find Saul "forcing" himself to offer a sacrifice, instead of waiting for Samuel to come and intercede for him. This is the first of two events which strip the kingship from him (13:14); the other is when he refuses to obey the Lord in striking down the king of Amalek (ch. 15). Together, these episodes show a pervasive dishonoring of God and his Word (cf. 1 Sam 2:30), a disrespect that attaches itself to all the ways Saul treats the priesthood.

Second, when Saul goes to war, he brings the ark with him (14:18). Instead of learning from the mistakes of Hophni and Phinehas who foolishly brought the ark into battle in 1 Samuel 4:3–4, Saul again risks the capture of God's ark by bringing it to the battle line. In this move, he shows a repeated pattern of using others (men, priests, God, even the holy things of the tabernacle) to secure his kingdom. In this Saul shows how he is a king like Sodom and not a king of righteousness.

Third, Saul's willingness to use others for his personal gain is seen again in 1 Samuel 14, when after making a foolish vow that denies his tired army the freedom to eat the honey of the land, his men defile themselves by eating the blood of the animals. In response, Saul builds an altar to offer sacrifices, and tellingly, verse 35 records, "it was the first altar that he built to the LORD." Set in contrast to David, whose young life is filled with writing songs of praise to God, this passage spotlights the exploitative heart of Saul. He is a king like the nations, as defined by Samuel in 1 Samuel 8.

Still, the most shocking action of Saul is found in 1 Samuel 22 when he orders the execution of 85 priests of Nob. Because they assisted David and fed him the bread of the presence (1 Samuel 21), Saul employs a Gentile, Doeg the Edomite, to execute the high priest (Ahimelech) and the rest of his priestly household. In the context of 1 Samuel, Saul is willing to reject God's Word and let the Gentile king of the

Amalekites escape the sword, but here in an act of wicked cruelty and self-preservation, he uses an unclean Gentile to kill the priests of Nob.²

From these actions, we learn what kind of king Saul is. He is king like Sodom who will use the priesthood for his own purposes, and one will destroy the priesthood of God if it doesn't serve himself. By contrast, David, in the same chapter, reveals what kind of king he is. When the son of Ahimelech (Abiathar) runs to him, David blames himself for the deaths of the priests and promises protection for this remaining son of Aaron.

In context, this willingness to protect the priesthood anticipates David's later concern for the ark, the priesthood, and the temple (2 Samuel 5–7; cf. 1 Chronicles 22–26). In his lifetime, David regularly risks himself for the sake of the priesthood and the temple. Instead of using the ark in his battles; he goes to battle in order to secure a place for the ark (2 Samuel 5–6). Thus, he proves to be a righteous king who lives to serve and protect the whole Levitical system of priesthood, sacrifice, and temple.

4. First and Second Samuel identify David as a new Melchizedek, one who is a priest-king.

Clearly, David is a king who honors the priesthood of Israel. However, there is evidence that David is more than a royal protector. He is also a priestly king.

Early in 1 Samuel, a promise is made that a faithful priest would come and replace the wicked priests of Eli's house (1 Samuel 2:27–36). In particular 1 Samuel 2:35 reads, "And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever." The key word here is "faithful priest" (*kohen ne-eman*). The priests from Eli's house have failed to be faithful, and thus a new priesthood is needed.

To date, there is some excellent discussion on this verse from Mary Rose D'Angelo, Karl Deenick, and Matt Emadi.³ In Emadi's most recent monograph on Psalm 110, he follows the logic of Karl Deenick, that David is presented as a priest in 1–2 Samuel, but he does not follow Deenick's view that we can or should emend the text of 1 Samuel 2:35. On the basis of emending the MT, Deenick suggests that verse 35 identifies the messiah as one royal priest, instead of a priest who goes in and out before the anointed king. On this basis, Deenick argues that this promise of a future priest is fulfilled at first in David, but that even David does not complete the fulfillment. Therefore, another priest will be needed.

Because Emadi does not find a textual support for this reading, he prefers the translation of D'Angelo, who suggests that the first person pronoun whose antecedent is priest can be taken in the neuter ("it") instead of the masculine ("he"), resulting in this translation: "I will build him a sure house [priestly house] and *it* shall go in and out before my anointed always." Here is what Emadi says:

Her interpretation of 1 Sam. 2:35 is different from Deenick's, but it adds another possibility for HOW the 'two' figures of 1 Sam. 2:35 - priest and Messiah - might be one. She writes, 'An examination of the context of the oracle helps to clear up the difficulty of applying to a single messianic figure, the royal priest, the second half of 1 Sm. 2:35 LXX . . . [As it currently reads], the verse speaks of a second figure, the Messiah, before whom the priest will serve in the house of

² Peter Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 130.

³ Matthew Emadi, *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

the Lord. However, it is also possible to read the verse: "I will build him [the] a sure house and it shall go in and out before my anointed always."

Emadi continues,

"Such a reading might easily be either inspired by or justified from the immediate context: "Your house and your father's house will go in and out before me forever" (2.30). In both verses 30 and 35, *di-eleu-setai* ("to go in/thru") refers to the priestly service in the sanctuary. The house is the priestly line, which serves in the sanctuary before the Lord and his Christ—[which], by our reading, his anointed priest."⁴

Without resolving all the grammatical details here—on that I would commend the discussion of Emadi in his *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology*—I would suggest that what I am about to argue follows the direction D'Angelo, Deenick, and Emadi—namely, that in Samuel, David is not only an anointed king, but he is a priestly king. He is not a king like the nations, but a king who enjoys many priestly prerogatives, as seen throughout the rest of the book. And of course, if Samuel is seeking to present David as a king like Melchizedek, then it would be necessary to include this priestly element.

In my estimation, the first and largest clue to seeing this fact is the way that 1 Samuel 2:25–36 (1) moves away from the priestly family of Eli and (2) moves toward a new and better priest, so that (3) when we read the rest of the book, we are on the lookout for that faithful priest. And in 1–2 Samuel, who fits that description best? As we will see, no one fits that identification better than David.

So, to return from this exegetical detour, let's continue to look at the whole book, where we find at least four more lines of evidence that David is portrayed as a priest in his own right.

First, David eating the bread of presence with his men is priestly. In 1 Samuel 21 when David is on the run from Saul, David arrives at the house of the Lord. There, Ahimelech, the high priest, feeds David with the bread of the presence, the bread that comes from the holy place in the tabernacle. Now, this could be a mere act of humanitarian aid, but as David announces the "holiness" of his men (v. 5), it appears that something priestly is going on. Only priests could eat the bread of the presence (Lev. 24:5–9), and thus David's eating from the holy precincts of God's temple suggest that David might be a priest in some capacity and that his followers who have consecrated themselves for battle were acting not just as warriors, but "temporary priests" with him.⁵

This idea of a priestly warrior might seem far-fetched, until we remember that Levites were called to wield the sword (Exod. 32:27) and guard God's holy temple (Num. 3:7–8), the fusion of warrior and priest is not so unlikely. Likewise, later when the Lord is portrayed as a Divine Warrior, he is clad in priestly apparel (cf. Isaiah 59:15–20). Accordingly, we can see how the holy warfare of David is presented in priestly terms, a point that makes connection with Psalm 110. In that Psalm, where David identifies a priesthood like Melchizedek, David combines the imagery of priesthood, kingship, and warfare. So too, in Samuel we find the same combination.

⁴ Emadi, *The Royal Priest*, 185n35.

⁵ Peter Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 126–27.

Second, David's wearing the ephod is priestly. In Exodus 28, the high priest and his sons are given priestly garments. One part of that apparel is the ephod (vv. 4, 6–14), which functioned as the basic robe of for the high priest. Other priests also wore ephods and men like Gideon made them, as well (Judg. 8:22–28). But for all the ways ephods were made, worn, and at times misused, they always carried a priestly connotation.

And thus in 1 Samuel, the first mention of an ephod is found when Samuel is given a linen ephod to wear as he served in the presence of God (2:18). Based on the background of this type of apparel, this garment is suggestive of Samuel's priestly role (cf. Psalm 99:6–7). Next, the man of God sent to condemn Eli and his sons speaks of the ephod given to Aaron (2:28), an association clearly identifying the ephod with the priestly tribe of Levi. Next, when Ahijah, a priest from the household of Eli is mentioned in 1 Samuel 14:3, he is wearing a linen ephod. And again, the priests at Nob are all clad in ephods according to 1 Samuel 22:18.

From these statements, we learn how ephods carry with them a priestly association. Accordingly, when David is seen wearing an ephod in 2 Samuel 6:14, his priestly identity should not be missed. David as king is also a priest. Bringing the ark into the city of Jerusalem, which is probably Melchizedek's Salem, the author paints David as a priestly-king.

The question becomes, though, how did David get an ephod? Can we determine? I believe we can, and in 1 Samuel we can see how David received the ephod from his close association with Ahimelech and Abiathar, which is a third line of evidence.

So third, the removal of the priests results in David functioning as a high priest. Follow me closely. In 1 Samuel 21 when David eats the bread of the presence, he is also given a sword from the priest Ahimelech. Interestingly, this sword is hidden behind the ephod (v. 9). But even more symbolically, this sword is the one David won from Goliath. Accordingly, we can estimate that this sword is properly David's, as he won it from Goliath, but its placement in the house of God behind the priestly ephod is a stunning combination. What does David's sword resting in the house of God, hidden behind the priest's apparel, suggest? Does that imagery communicate a joint venture of priest and king? It is at least suggestive, and it leads to this open-handed conclusion: That when the priests are killed at Saul's request, David is going to become the cornerstone of a new priesthood.

For consider what happens next: In 1 Samuel 22 records, when Doeg killed all the priests in Nob, one escaped. Abiathar fled to David, and David gave him refuge (vv. 20–23). As 1 Samuel 23:7 indicates, "When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand." This, I believe, is when the text tells us that David receives the ephod, or at least access to using the ephod. For as 1 Samuel 23:9–10 and 30:7–8 indicate, David inquired of the Lord with the ephod and with the priest Abiathar. Though the text doesn't say, it is very possible that the inquiry employed the Urim and Thummim, which were stored in the breastpiece of the ephod (cf. 1 Sam 14:41).

Thus, in these episodes we see how David acquired access to the ephod, which results in him wearing the ephod (2 Samuel 6:14). Still, this leads to the question: How does David possess the right to wear the ephod? And my answer to that question comes from the relationship between David and Abiathar.

Later in 2 Samuel 8:17 and 15:24 we discover that Abiathar is a priest under David's rule. Zadok, one of Abiathar's sons, will become the high priest under David's kingdom. But notice the position of the

priesthood. Whereas Deuteronomy 17 calls the king to sit under the Law of Moses—something David does, at least in his younger years—the priesthood is now established by and under David himself. It is a priesthood which is sponsored, protected, and developed from David. How does this happen?

If we remember that all the priests who wore the linen ephod were killed in 1 Samuel 22, we might surmise that only one Aaronic priest remained, the man Abiathar. And when he came to seek refuge from David, he was in a sense coming under the rule of David, the king of Israel. As the book goes on David becomes the patron of the priesthood and he and his son (Solomon) will be the kings in Salem (Jerusalem) where he will set up the priesthood and build the temple (1 Chron. 22–26). Accordingly, while their priesthood must conform to the standards of Moses (see Deuteronomy 17:14–20), this chosen king now functions as the chief priest in Israel. Or at least, that is my open-handed conclusion.

This does not mean that David has replaced Aaron's son as the high priest, or that Judah has replaced Levi as the priestly tribe, but as we read 1–2 Samuel we are led to believe that David has a priestly role. Already, we've seen that David (1) ate the bread and (2) wore the ephod. Now, in his relationship with Abiathar we see how David takes the leading role of the priesthood, which conforms to 1 Samuel 2:35 and his priestly actions throughout the book. Still, David is righteous king (a Melchizedek), who does not take the priesthood for himself. Instead, as a patron of the priesthood, he is a king who brings the ark to Jerusalem, so that he can establish the temple of God—a desire that will be fulfilled in his Son.

Which brings us to the fourth and last line of evidence for David's priesthood: Namely, that his sons are identified as priests. Indeed, adding weight to this argument of David's priesthood is the fact that David's sons are actually called priests (2 Samuel 8:18), and the fact that the opening promise of 1 Samuel 2:35 is framed very much like the promise to David and his house.

For consider, the six passages in 1–2 Samuel where the word “faithful” (*emet*) is used, five of them speak of David, one of Samuel (1 Sam. 3:20). And of those five related to David, four speak of David and his house. Let's consider:

1 Samuel 2:35: And I will raise up for myself a faithful [*emet*] priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure [*emet*] house, and [it] shall go in and out before my anointed forever. (1 Samuel 2:35) – *Imagine how much more sense this makes if this priestly house that is built for the messiah relates to David's sons.*

1 Samuel 22:14: Then Ahimelech answered the king, “And who among all your servants is so faithful [*emet*] as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house?”

1 Samuel 25:28. Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure [*emet*] house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. – *Again the Lord is seeking to build a sure / true house for David.*

1 Samuel 27:12. And Achish trusted [*emet*] David, thinking, “He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant.”

2 Samuel 7:16. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure [*emet*] forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ”

By comparison, then, it seems proper to read all of these verses together, and to see that what God has promised David is a kingdom of priests. That is to say, that 1–2 Samuel both identify in David a royal house and sons in that house who will be priests. To be sure, this does not negate the place of the Levitical priesthood, but it does take a step closer to Jesus Christ, who as a son of David will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. And, this revelation is not something that sprang up in David's mind in Psalm 110, but rather it fits with the whole story of David's life. And this is especially clear when we compare David to Saul in 1–2 Samuel.

David: A New Melchizedek

So what should we say? In a word, I am arguing from greater and lesser lines of evidence in 1–2 Samuel that we should see David as a New Melchizedek. And if my reading of 1 Samuel is correct then it makes great sense of how David can apply the name of Melchizedek to his son in Psalm 110.

David is not reaching for something in Israel's past that was not actualized in his present life. Rather, in 1–2 Samuel David himself is portrayed as a king of righteousness (a Melchizedek) whose humble obedience before God and passion for God's glory and God's temple is so great, that he is given the right to wear the ephod.

Certainly, David and later Solomon's rule in Israel would be compromised by sin. Both of them proved that their righteousness and wisdom was not complete or enduring. Nevertheless, as types of Christ, they illustrate the kind of king that would come from their family. And notably, this king would not be a king like the nations, one who ruled for himself. Rather, he would be a servant-king and importantly a priestly-king, one whose passion for righteousness qualified him to sit at God's right hand.

In the whole scope of the canon, we come to find these truths explicated in books like Hebrews, but it is my belief that the author of Hebrews may have also found these truths in a book like 1–2 Samuel. Certainly, the contrast between Saul and David brings to life the way these two figures model two types of kingship—one is a king like Bera, king of Sodom; the other is a king like Melchizedek, king of Salem.

The point is not without some abiding questions related to the Law of Moses, but as we read 1–2 Samuel, it becomes clear that the house of Aaron and Levi is collapsing, and that God is establishing a new priesthood. Rightly, we need to maintain that in the history of Israel, the priesthood and kingship did not join together, for the Law of Moses required two separate tribes to inhabit those two offices. However, as the Law was given to recover what was lost in Eden, where Adam was a royal priest, we can begin to see, as the latter prophets foretell, that the hope of Israel and the hope of the world is a royal priest, a son of David whose righteousness is so great God gives him the kingdom and the covenant too.

As Psalm 110 puts it, this Davidic son is a priest after the order of Melchizedek and one who has sat down at God's right hand and is now proclaiming a message of peace to all nations. Truly, this is how the New Testament understands Jesus's royal priesthood. And it is one that 1–2 Samuel develops as it puts the reader on a search for Melchizedek.

In context, David rises to become that righteous king, but David also falls. And thus, the whole of the book makes us look forward to day when a greater David and another priest-king like Melchizedek comes on the scene.