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Establishment of the Israelite Monarchy

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Abstract: This essay examines the portrayal of the Philistines in Judges and Samuel as vital to the establishment of a legitimate, divinely-authorized monarchy in ancient Israel. After an opening section that looks at the Philistines and their origins, the essay examines the Philistines as antagonists in the ongoing narrative concerning the establishment of a permanent Israelite royal dynasty as ultimately achieved under David. It is demonstrated that Saul failed in his responsibility to remove the Philistine threat from Israel, but David succeeded precisely matching Saul's failures. After David's reign the Philistines are largely absent from the narrative concerning the Israelite kingdoms—they have become simply one of the surrounding nations.

Key Words: Israelite monarchy, kingship, Philistines, Caphtorite, Casluhite, Samson, Saul, David

Introduction

The establishment of the Israelite monarchy under the aborted reign of Saul and then the successful reign of David was due to a number of factors, not the least of which were Israel's request for a king and God's approval of that request (1 Sam 8:1–9). What has seldom been noticed is the pivotal role played by Israel's main protagonist throughout the book of Samuel as the monarchy comes into being. The words *Philistine or Philistines* occur 183 times in Samuel, more often than any other ethnic designation except Israel (269 times). When one considers that *Philistine(s)* occur a total of 290 times in the OT, it is clear that the Philistines are critical figures in the rise of Israel as a kingdom.

Who Were the Philistines?

Excluding occasional references to places such as the "land of the Philistines," people called Philistines play a prominent role only in a few OT books: Genesis, Judges, Samuel, and Chronicles (mostly in passages that parallel material in Samuel). It is widely held that the Philistines in the later parts of Judges and in Samuel are among

the Sea Peoples from the Aegean basin who attempted to penetrate into Egypt in the eighth year of Pharaoh Ramesses III (c. 1176 BC). Ramesses names a coalition of several groups, including Denyen, Tjeker, Peleset [Philistines?], Sherden, and Weshesh among these Sea Peoples that he defeated. After Ramesses defeated them, they apparently settled them along the Levantine coast in southwest Canaan.[1] This fits much of what the OT says about the Philistines' origin and eventual location in Canaan: According to Jer 47:4 and Amos 9:7 the Philistines came to Canaan from Capthor, called Keftiu in Egyptian texts and Kaptara in cuneiform texts. This is widely agreed to be Crete.[2]

The Philistines are associated with the Cherethites (Ezek 25:16; Zeph 2:5), which some have taken to mean "Cretens" based on the Septuagint rendering of כְּרֵתִים as Κρῆτες. However, this may be no more than a guess based on similar sounding proper nouns.[3] Yet, it would appear that the Cherethites were either a Philistine clan or ethnic group from the Aegean, as probably were the Pelethites. David and Solomon had Cherethites and Pelethites in their employ and who served in something resembling a palace guard (2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kgs 1:38, 44; 1 Chr 18:17). Judges and Samuel as well as some of the prophets locate the Philistines along the Mediterranean Sea in Canaan and depict them as forming an alliance of five cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (1 Sam. 6:17; cf. Josh 13:3; Jer 25:20; Amos 1:6–8; Zeph 2:4–7; Zech 9:5–6). It would appear, then, that during the period from late in Judges (Judg 10–16) through the formation of the monarchy and afterward, the Philistines mentioned in the OT are Caphtorim—a people from Crete whose lineage in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 is traced through Ham's son Mizraim (Gen 10:6, 13–14; cf. 1 Chr 1:8, 11–12).

Before proceeding to our extended discussion of the role of the Philistines in the establishment of the monarchy, there are two side questions that need to be briefly explored:

What accounts for earlier notices of Caphtorite Philistines in the OT (Deut 2:23; Josh 13:2–3; Judg 3:3, 31 and perhaps Exod 23:31)?

What accounts for the mention of Philistines at Gerar in the time of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8, 14–15, 18)?

1. H. J. Katzenstein. "Philistines," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992): 5.326; *CAH*[3] 2.2.371–2; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 339–40.

2. W. S. Lasor, "Philistines," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.844; *CAH*[3] 2.2.373; ABD 5.326; K. A. Kitchen, "The Philistines," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Oxford University, 1973), 54.

3. Andrew E. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2017), 163.

Early Caphtorite Philistines in the Old Testament

Egyptian sources do not mention the Peleset before about 1176 BC. However, as Kitchen observes, there were much earlier contacts between the Aegean and the Levant.4 Moreover, there notices in Egyptian texts of a number of Aegean peoples for some time before the twelfth century BC, and Hebrew פְּלִשְׁתִּים, unlike Egyptian Peleset may have been a catchall term for these Sea Peoples. Kitchen notes:

> Thus, when the Philistines (Prst), Tjekker, and Weshesh appear with the Sherden, Danuna, Sheklen, and Tursha under Ramesses III, they do so as part of a movement of peoples that had been affecting the Levant—Cilicia, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and Libya—for over 150 years before c. 1200 B.C., merely reaching a migratory climax by the latter date. As the Sherdan particularly were used as slave troops by the Egyptians, including in Palestine (e.g., up to Qadesh), a passage such as Joshua 13:2 may already reflect the presence of Sea Peoples in South-West Canaan in the late thirteenth century B.C., with their troops used in Egyptian key garrisons in such well-established administrative centres as Gaza.[5]

Thus, it is not inconceivable that some Sea Peoples groups from the area of Crete settled along the south Levantine coast as suggested already in Deut 2:23:

> The Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed the Avvites, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, and settled in their place. (Deut 2:23 CSB)[6]

If this is taken as an actual statement by Moses shortly before his death in 1406, it would appear that people who would later be characterized as Philistines had already at that time established a foothold on the coast of southern Canaan "over 150 years before 1200 BC."[7] Not much later in time (c. 1400 BC) Joshua not only mentions the Philistines, but notes that they have organized themselves into the well-known pentapolis of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (Josh 13:3). About 100–125 years later, c. 1275 BC, the judge Shamgar was active against the Philistines (Judg 3:31).

Later, Samson was active against the Philistines in the mid-eleventh century (c. 1068–1049). This was about a century after the time of Ramesses III, so it is difficult to classify this as an anachronism. However, it should be noted that in Samson's time, the head of the Philistine pantheon was Dagon (Judg 16:23), which is clearly an

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4. Kitchen, *Reliability*, 341; Kitchen, "The Philistines," 58–60.

5. Kitchen, "The Philistines," 58.

6. The destruction of the Avvites mentioned in this verse must refer only to those Avvites living on the coast (i.e., "in villages as far as Gaza"), since Avvites are mentioned later and located further into the interior of Canaan in the territory allotted to Benjamin (Josh 13:3; 18:23).

7. Throughout this paper dates for biblical events are taken from Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis, Concordia, 2011).

adaptation of a Canaanite deity.[8] If the Philistines did not arrive in Canaan until the early part of the twelfth century, their adoption of or adaptation to Canaanite religion must have happened at a very rapid rate. However, if they had established a thriving pentapolis already by the late fifteenth century during the days of Moses and Joshua, it is much more reasonable to assume that Philistines had been living in Canaan for some centuries by the time of Samson and had gradually adapted their culture toward that of native Canaanites. Then, when some Philistines were driven away from the Nile Delta by Ramesses III, they found a welcome home among Philistines who had previously colonized the southern Levantine coast.

Thus, we ought not conclude that simply because Egyptian sources do not mention Peleset in Canaan before the time of Ramesses III, there were no Aegean peoples who had settled there and whom Israelites called by the general term *Philistine*. That is simply an argument from ignorance—that is, if we do not know about something, it must not be or must not have been. Thus, the oft-quoted aphorism that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" applies to the extra-biblical evidence for Philistine presence in Canaan before the early twelfth century.

It is interesting to note that these Caphtorite Philistines and Israel appear to have entered Canaan about the same time. Both were relative new newcomers, and both were expanding into a land where they would displace the Canaanites. Thus, they were rivals of sorts destined to clash. As we will see, the rise of the monarchy in Israel revolves around whether the founding monarchs can outstrip the Philistines for political and territorial dominance in Canaan.

Philistines in Genesis

Because Egyptian sources do not mention the Peleset [Philistines] before the time of Ramesses III, critical biblical scholars often opine that Philistines mentioned in Genesis are anachronisms.[9] In Genesis Abraham and then Isaac encounter Philistines at Gerar (Gen 20:1–17; 21:22–32; 26:1–31). In these cases the Philistines are ruled by an Abimelech who is said to be king (Gen 20:2; 26:1, 8). Moreover, the commander of Gerar's army in both cases is named Phicol. Are these anachronistic references to the Philistines? There are significant reasons to believe that they are not.

First, if this is an anachronism, why are the Philistines said to be at Gerar? Later sources only mention the five cities of the Philistine pentapolis. Surely if this was an anachronistic account by a later redactor, one of those cities would have been made Abimelech's city.[10]

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8. *CAH*[3] 2.2.374.

9. R. K. Harrison, "Philistine Origins: A Reappraisal," in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C Craigie* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1988), 11; *ABD* 5.326; Kitchen, *Reliability*, 339–40; Kitchen, "The Philistines," 56.

10. Kitchen, *Reliability*, 340.

Second, Abimelech is called *king* (מֶלֶךְ), not *ruler* (סֶרֶן). Yet later sources always employ the native Philistine term *ruler* (Josh 13:3; Judg 3:3; 16:5, 8, 18, 23, 27, 30; 1 Sam 5:8, 11; 6:4, 12, 16, 18; 7:7; 29:2, 6-7; 1 Chr 12:20). If the narratives concerning the Philistines in Genesis are anachronisms, why was the term consistently used for the later Philistine leaders not employed?

Third, Genesis does not trace the Philistines to Caphtorim, but to the Casluhim (Gen 10:13–14; cf. 1 Chr 1:11–12):

> Mizraim fathered the Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Casluhim (the Philistines came from them), and Caphtorim.

These verses characterize both the Caphtorim and the Casluhim as descendants of Ham's son Mizraim, thereby making them related ethnic groups. Some critical scholars contend that the words "the Philistines came from them" must have been accidentally misplaced from its original position following "Caphtorim."[11] The textual evidence, however, does not support this. There is no Hebrew text of Genesis that places "the Philistines came from them" after "Caphtorim." Moreover, the reflection of Genesis 10:14 at 1 Chronicles 1:12 also places the phrase after Casluhim, not Caphtorim, demonstrating that the Chronicler's source (his text of Genesis) agrees with our surviving textual evidence for Genesis. Septuagint Genesis 10:14 agrees, providing another ancient source to confirm that MT Genesis does not contain a misplaced phrase at Genesis 10:14.[12]

Rendsburg has argued that Gen 10:14 preserves an authentic Israelite tradition concerning the origin of the Philistines.[13] He notes that the names of three of the last four peoples listed as descended from Mizraim all have the same vocal pattern.[14] *Pathrusim* is a Hebraization of Egyptian "the southland," that is, Upper Egypt. *Naphtuim* is a Hebraization of Egyptian "those of Ptah," that is, the people of Memphis in the middle of Egypt, where Ptah was worshiped as a major deity. He then proposes that the Casluhim were most likely people of the Nile Delta in Lower Egypt. If Rendsburg is correct, then the Philistines in Genesis may be the Casluhim, and they migrated from the Nile Delta to the area near Gerar.

In support of this theory, we may note that the name *Philistine* was often translated as "foreigner" (ἀλλόφυλος) in the Septuagint. Recently, Abulafia has proposed that Egyptian *Peleset* (assumed to be cognate of Hebrew פְּלִשְׁתִּים and

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11. This is reflected in some English versions, notably NRSV at both Gen 10:14 and 1 Chr 1:12. Curiously, TANAK moves the phrase to follow *Caphtorim* at Gen 10:14, but does not do the same at 1 Chr 1:12. See G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 143; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 68; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 113.

12. The oldest Septuagint manuscripts do not contain 1 Chr 1:12.

13. Gary A.Rendsburg, "Gen 10:13–14: An Authentic Hebrew Tradition Concerning the Origin of the Philistines," *JNSL* 13 (1987): 89–96.

14. *CaCCûCîm* (where C = consonant).

Akkadian *Palastu*) originally meant *foreigner*.[15] Therefore, it may be that Genesis is using the term *Philistine* in a wider sense to denote non-Canaanite peoples in the land, in this case Casluhites who had migrated from Egypt and settled near Gerar. Later, notably in Judges and Samuel, the term would be used in a slightly different way to denote peoples who had their origins in the Aegean basin.

These Casluhite Philistines in Genesis and their conflicts with the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac serve to foreshadow the later conflict between the Caphtorite Philistines and Israel. Like Israel's patriarchs, the Casluhite Philistines were relative newcomers to the land of the Canaanites. Both Abraham and Isaac have conflicts with the Philistines over possession of wells (Gen 21:22–33; 26:12–33). Moreover, in the end the patriarchs have the upper hand in gaining possession of wells, since in both cases it is the Philistine king whose hand is forced and must ask for a treaty guaranteeing that he and his people will not be harmed (Gen 21:22–23; 26:28–29).

Thus, these stories present intriguing parallels with Israel's later conflicts with the Caphtorite Philistines for dominance of Canaan. Considering that the patriarchs' interaction with the Philistines do not portray them in the most favorable light (Gen 20:1–18; 26:7–11), we might ask why Genesis includes these narratives about Abraham and Isaac interacting with the Philistines. However, if Genesis was written for Israel who would soon be entering the land of Canaan and vying with another Philistine culture that would also be seeking to dominate the land, the parallels are quite important. They demonstrate God's determination to ensure that Israel, not the Philistines, would obtain dominance. Thus, the patriarchs' earlier experiences with Philistines are included in Genesis to assure Israel that God would, indeed, keep his promise to give his people that land promised to Abraham and Isaac.

The Philistines Among the Later Judges: Preparing the Way for the Monarchy

The Philistines as Israel's External Threat

Among the later Judges, Philistines are mentioned at the beginning of the account of Jephthah's activity (Judg 10:6, 7, 11) and again throughout the Samson narrative. Though introduced into the account of Jephthah's accomplishments, the Philistines are curiously absent from the action until the beginning of the Samson cycle at Judg 13:1. Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, but he did not deliver Israel from the Philistines. This itself argues that the Ammonite oppression and the Philistine oppression that is related in the Samson cycle were concurrent.[16] However, while the

15. David Abuafia. *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011), 55.

16. Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges," *JETS* 48 (2005): 495–96; Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville, TN:

Ammonite oppression lasted eighteen years (Judg 10:8), the Philistine oppression lasted forty years, the last twenty of which Samson was active as a judge "in the days of the Philistines" (Judg 13:1; 15:20; 16:31).[17]

Samson's time as judge is spent exclusively in conflict with the Philistines. However, unlike any of the other major judges, neither he nor the other major judge during this period—Jephthah—is ever said to have brought peace to the land.[18] Jephthah "subdued" the Ammonites without ushering in an era of peace for the land (Judg 11:33; cp. Judg 3:30; 8:28). In Samson's case, it is clear that God never intended Samson to be the final solution to the Philistine threat. His mother was told that "he will *begin* to save Israel from the power of the Philistines" (Judg 13:5). Thus, at the end of the line of judges the reader is left with the impression that there is unfinished business—the Philistines have not been subdued and are still a present threat to Israel.

Spiritual Malaise as Israel's Internal Threat

Of course, there is another impression left on the reader who completes the rest of the book of Judges: that Israel needs a king. As is well-known, the last five chapters relate no exploit of the judges but instead is a series of vignettes that illustrate spiritual corruption within Israel during this period. Four times in these chapters the reader is told that "there was no king in Israel" (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Any thoughtful reader who had read all twenty-one chapters of Judges would be left with the impression that Israel had two problems that had yet to be solved: The Philistine threat and the lack of a central authority—a king—to place a check on Israel's spiritual malaise. These two problems are not directly linked to each other in Judges, but they will continue to be intertwined as Israel transitions from life under judges whom God raises up to a monarchy established under God's authority.

Internal and External Threats to Israel in the Opening Chapters in the Book of Samuel

The Philistine threat to Israel is related in two separate narratives in 1 Samuel 1–8: the capture and eventual return of the ark (1 Sam 4:1–11; 5:1–7:1) and Israel's victory at Mizpah under Samuel's leadership as judge (1 Sam 7:2–17). These two narratives are also closely intertwined with the continuing internal threat to Israel—spiritual malaise. It is introduced in the behavior of Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam

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Broadman and Holman, 1999), 35–36; David L. Washburn, "The Chronology of the Judges: Another Look," *BSac*5147 (1990): 424; Eugene H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *BSac* 138 (1981): 248.

17. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 96–104.

18. See the periods of peace that resulted from the service of Othniel (Judg 3:11), Ehud (Judg 3:30), Deborah (Judg 5:31), and Gideon (Judg 8:28).

2:12–17), and underscored by the contrast to Samuel's faithful service (1 Sam 3:1). Eli is also condemned as complicit in his son's sins (1 Sam 3:11–14), and he, too, is contrasted to Samuel who is God's prophet (1 Sam 3:19–20).

The Ark narrative joins these two themes when the Ark of the Covenant is taken out to battle and captured by the Philistines as Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli die (1 Sam 4). The sojourn of the Ark in Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron demonstrated Yahweh's superiority to the Philistine god Dagon as well as his ability to humble the Philistines. Yet, the deliverance from Philistine domination that Israel sought when they took the Ark out to battle is not one of the results of the seven-month sojourn of the Ark in Philistia.

The account of the Ark's capture and return, however, does allow another contrast between Eli's failed leadership as judge (cf. 1 Sam 4:18) and Samuel's successful leader as prophet and judge (cf. 1 Sam 7:6, 15). After the Ark's return to Israel, the author of Samuel quickly summarizes the next twenty years (1 Sam 7:2) before slowing the pace in the narrative relating Samuel's time as judge beginning with a convocation at Mizpah. At Mizpah the two major threats to Israel—spiritual malaise and the Philistines—are at least temporarily solved in under the leadership of Samuel. Spiritual renewal was the purpose of the convocation, and Samuel dealt with that (1 Sam 7:5–6). However, the gathering at Mizpah also was perceived by the Philistines as an opportunity to attack Israel once again. Israel's victory comes through the ministry of Samuel as God hears his pleas and thunders against the Philistines (1 Sam 7:7–11). Unlike the failure of leadership under Eli, who allowed the Ark to be removed from Shiloh's Tabernacle and taken to war, Samuel's service before God was effective leadership that dealt with both with Israel's internal malaise as well as the external menace embodied by the Philistines. Samuel's continued service as judge offered as sustained check on Philistine aggression (1 Sam 7:13), peace with the Ammonites, who had been active during the Philistine oppression mentioned in Judges (1 Sam 7:14; cf. Judg 10:7), and steady guidance to prevent further spiritual corruption in Israel (1 Sam 7:15–17).

Internal and External Threats to Israel in the Choice of Saul as King

Like the twenty years that the Ark was at Kiriath-Jearim, the ministry of Samuel as judge is summarized briefly (1 Sam 7:15–17), and the next time the narrative slows is to relate Israel's request for a king (1 Sam 8:1–22). The external threat of Philistine aggression is not in view. Rather, the internal threat of corruption—specifically the dishonest practices of Samuel's sons (1 Sam 8:3–5)—prompted Israel's request. In fact, in Israel's initial request, this is the only reason given, and the purpose of the king was "to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5). Samuel had been judge and had provided the authority to stanch spiritual decline. Moreover, the narrator specifically points out Samuel's taking offense to Israel saying "Give us a king to judge us" (1

Sam 8:6). It is perhaps telling that Samuel was the only judge who attempted to make the office hereditary, which may have led to Israel thinking about a hereditary ruler, a king.[19]

It was not until Samuel warned Israel about the rights of the king (1 Sam 8:11–18) that Israel's demand for a king included the royal responsibility to defend the people from both internal and external threats: "our king will judge us and go out in front of us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:20). The specific external threat in view was not specified by the people, but later by God when he revealed to Samuel that he was sending him a man from Benjamin to be anointed: "He will save them from the Philistines because I have seen the affliction of my people, for their cry has come to me" (1 Sam 9:16 CSB).

The importance of defeating the Philistines as part of establishing the monarchy comes to the fore in Samuel's instructions to the newly-anointed Saul. After telling the king-designate two signs will confirm God's choice of him as king (1 Sam 10:2–4), Samuel instructs Saul:

> After that you will come to Gibeah of God *where there are Philistine garrisons*. When you arrive at the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place prophesying. They will be preceded by harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres. The Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully on you, you will prophesy with them, and you will be transformed. When these signs have happened to you, *do whatever your circumstances require because God is with you.* Afterward, go ahead of me to Gilgal. I will come to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice fellowship offerings. Wait seven days until I come to you and show you what to do." (1 Sam. 10:5–8 CSB)

"Gibeah of God" designates Saul's hometown.[20] There was a Philistine garrison there. Surely Saul, who was from Gibeah knew the situation there. Yet Samuel went out of his way to point out that the Philistines maintained a garrison in Gibeah despite no longer being able to mount a successful invasion of Israel's territory (cf. 1 Sam 7:13). Moreover, Samuel told Saul to "do whatever your circumstances require, since

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19. It is interesting to note that Gideon specifically refused the offer of making the office of judge hereditary (Judg 8:22–23). However, the suggestion led to Gideon's son Abimelech being declared king by the Shechemites (Judg 9:1–6).

20. There are three reasons for this identification: 1 Sam 10:10 identifies it as Gibeah, Saul's hometown, 10:11 notes that there were people there who recognized Saul, and 1 Sam 13:13 connects Gibeah and a Philistine garrison. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis,* 4 vols. Vol 4: *Vow and Desire (I Sam 1–12)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993)*,* 419; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Second Ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 91; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction Notes and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 181–82; Henery Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 68; Andrew E. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, Concordia Commentary (St.Louis, MO: Concordia, 2016), 192; David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 285.

God is with you." By these words Samuel was implying that Saul had a specific task to undertake in order to demonstrate to Israel his fitness for the throne: attack the garrison and drive the Philistines out of Israel. This would have revealed to Israel that he was God's designated king whom Israel requested to "go out in front of us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:20). Saul was guaranteed success, since Samuel had assured him that God was with him. Then Saul was to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel, where his public confirmation as king would be accompanied by the appropriate sacrifices to Yahweh, who had designated him to be king (1 Sam 10:8). Following this Samuel would have told Saul what to do next, presumably in a campaign that would once and for all pacify the Philistines.

Saul, however, was a failure in that he did nothing. Long notes:

> Unfortunately, in the aftermath of his anointing and the fulfillment of all three signs, Saul simply fails to do what lies at hand. Indeed, it is not until 1 Samuel 13 that the Philistine garrison comes under attack, and it is not Saul but his son Jonathan who launches the attack (13:3). Jonathan's bold action had the desired effect (13:4a), and the Philistines come out in force (v. 5). Meanwhile Saul repairs to Gilgal (v. 4b) to await Samuel's arrival, in keeping with the second part of his first charge (10:8).[21]

While these observations are helpful, what Long and others miss is that Saul is consistently portrayed as hesitant to attack the Philistines. His inability to initiate a campaign against them is underscored repeatedly in that Jonathan would have to attack the Philistine garrison at Gibeah (1 Sam 13:3) and again at Michmash (13:23–14:23).[22] Later Saul would send David to battle Goliath (1 Sam 17:37) and then send him out to defeat the Philistines (18:5–30). Before his final battle, Saul would cower in the face of the Philistine threat (1 Sam 28:5). Nowhere in the book of Samuel is Saul depicted as initiating war with the Philistines. He is constantly reactive to the successes of Jonathan or David when they are victorious in their conflicts with the Philistines. However, Saul is never proactive in his fight against Philistine forces. He never acts in faith that God would grant him victory against them, even though Samuel had assured him that "God is with you." (1 Sam 10:7)

Saul's cowardice in the face of Philistine aggression is a major factor that leads to his budding dynasty being disqualified as providing permanent rulers of Israel. In fact, Saul's foolish action in sacrificing at Gilgal in the face of gathering Philistine forces instead of waiting for Samuel to preside over the sacrifice led to his being

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21. Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 212.

22. At 1 Sam 13:3 MT reads "in Geba," while LXX reads "in Gibeah." The reading "Geba," may be due to an accidental loss of the final *he* in the proper noun *Gibeah*, confusion caused by the similarity of the names of these two cities, and/or the assimilation of this verse to 14:4–5 where Jonathan is present at Geba. However, 13:2 located Jonathan at Gibeah, and in 10:5 we are told that the Philistines maintained a garrison at Gibeah, not Geba. See Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 232.

rejected in favor of another choice for king (1 Sam 13:10–14). It would fall to another king who would not cringe when confronted by Philistine armies to establish a lasting dynasty by Yahweh's choice and blessing.

Breaking Philistine Supremacy: David and the Founding of Israel's Great Dynasty

David's Victories over the Philistines during Saul's Reign

In 1 Samuel David is a study in contrast with Saul. While Saul was explicitly assured at his anointing that God was with him, no such assurance is recorded for David at his anointing (1 Sam 16:13). Yet David acts as Saul ought to have acted. He confidently engages Goliath in battle and defeats him (1 Sam 17). He rose to become a commander in Saul's army, and God repeatedly gave him success against the Philistines (1 Sam 18). In fact, David's time in Saul's service—about four years—is spent entirely in conflict with the Philistines.[23] David also exhibits mastery of a different type over the Philistines after being driven from Saul's court: he outwits them. First, in feigning madness he escapes from Gath (1 Sam 20:10–14). Then later as a mercenary for Achish, he manages to deceive the Philistine king as to the true nature of his raids into Canaan (1 Sam 27:1–12). Thus, by the time that Saul commits suicide during his final battle with the Philistines, the reader of 1 Samuel has come to see David as the one who is poised to succeed in accomplishing a major goal set forth when God first allowed the establishment of an Israelite monarchy—to save Israel from the Philistines (1 Sam 9:16).

David's Establishment of His Throne in Defeating the Philistines

After the death of Saul the Philistines disappear from the narrative during David's seven-year reign over Judah in Hebron. However, 2 Samuel reports two battles with the Philistines early in David's reign over all Israel that firmly establish his supremacy over them (2 Sam 5:17–25). In both cases the Philistines were the aggressors and in both cases David inquired of Yahweh as to how to defeat them. With these two victories Philistine advances into Israel come to an end. Later, David would take the fight to the Philistines and wrest Metheg-Ammah from their control (2 Sam 8:1). This, however, would be part of a larger expansion of his hegemony over the region around Israel (2 Sam 8:2–14). Thus, later in David's reign the Philistines had simply become one of the surrounding peoples whom he subjugated. Their reduction in status from the prime opponent of Israel to merely another ethnic group over which Israel exerted its dominance signals that David's throne had been established by his removal of the Philistine threat.

23. For the chronology of David's service see Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 114–15.

In 2 Sam 21:15–22 we read of four more conflicts with the Philistines which most likely took place after the Ammonite War and the capture of Rabbah (2 Sam 12:26–31) but before David was granted peace from his enemies and began to build his palace (2 Sam 7:1, 9, 11).[24] After the first battle, David's men vowed that he would not go out to war with them again (2 Sam 21:17). The other three battles take place without David—but his throne has been established and his men are now capable of extending his victories over the Philistines. In these latter four battles defeat of specific Philistine warriors contain elements reminiscent of Goliath.[25] The message of these parallels is that as Yahweh was with David and delivered him from Goliath, so Yahweh was with David's troops to grant them continued victory over Israel's enemies. This is later emphasized by the illustrious accomplishments of David's three elite soldiers Eshbaal, Eleazar, and Shammah whose deeds included victories over the Philistines (2 Sam 23:8–17).

Thus, one key to David's dynasty becoming the most long-established among all the dynasties of ancient Israel is found in David's victories over the Philistines. These victories, of course, were possible because of God's blessing. Yet God was with Saul, also, according to Samuel. The difference between Saul's failed attempt to establish the monarchy and David's success in firmly establishing his dynasty is found in David's bold trust in God's promises versus Saul's lack of confidence in God's word given through the prophet Samuel and Saul's resulting cowardice in the face of every instance of Philistine aggression.

Final Thoughts

After the reign of David, the Philistines largely fade from view during the reign of Solomon and the subsequent reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel. In David God had removed the Philistine threat from Israel, and they play only a small role in the rest of the history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Yet there is one more king whose exploits against the Philistines is noted: Hezekiah. At 2 Kgs 18:5–8 we read:

> Hezekiah relied on the Lord God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. He remained faithful to the Lord and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the Lord had commanded Moses. The Lord was with him, and wherever he went he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its borders, from watchtower to fortified city. (2 Ki. 18:5-8 CSB)

The language used to describe Hezekiah calls to mind David. Just as there was no king of all Israel like David, there was no king of Judah like Hezekiah. Like David, Hezekiah, too, defeated the Philistines.

24. I.e., between 997 and 980 BC. See the discussion in Andrew E. Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 78–79,
25. See Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, 411.