

David and His Theologian: Literary, Social, and Theological Investigations of the Early Monarchy, edited by Walter Brueggemann and K. C. Hanson. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2011. Pp. xvi + 204. Paper. \$24.00. ISBN 978161097534.

Andrea Ravasco, Deutsche Schule Genua, Genoa, Italy

This book collects nine articles written by Walter Brueggemann over his career about the theology of the Yahwistic tradition and the books of Samuel and Kings. As Brueggemann writes in the preface, “These several articles ... constitute a narrative account of my own coming to awareness both in faith and in critical capacity” (xiii).

In “David and His Theologian,” originally published in 1968, Brueggemann compares the Yahwistic texts of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1–24), Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16), Noah and the flood (Gen 6–9), and the Tower of Babel, respectively, with the narratives of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12), Amnon and Absalom (2 Sam 13–14), Absalom and David (2 Sam 15–20), and Solomon and David (1 Kgs 1–2). He finds many parallels between these narratives, such as the promise and destiny of the dynasty. He suggests that “the radical revision by the Yahwist of the old materials he had at hand may have been guided by the David narrative” (21). He concludes that the J theologian “saw in the government of his own people a strange benevolence about events” (27).

“On Trust and Freedom,” which originally appeared in 1972, analyzes the narrative account of David and his sons (2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2). Taking as his starting point the studies of L. Rost, G. von Rad, and R. N. Whybray, Brueggemann assumes that the Succession Narrative was written in the tenth century. In his account the narrative presents: David as a man who feels the freedom of his manhood; the kerygmatic element that history cannot be experienced or written without Yahweh; Yahweh as guarantor of order and maintainer of boundaries; and faith as the capacity and willingness to put oneself completely at the disposal of Yahweh and to reject all other supports and helps. According to the author of the Succession Narrative, the promise of Yahweh about the dynasty can be trusted.

“The Trusted Creature,” originally published in 1969, deals with 1 Sam 21:1–6, 2 Sam 12:16–23, and 2 Sam 23:13–17 in order to explore “the meaning of the David tradition for our understanding Biblical faith” (46). In the tenth century the “revolutionary” Yahwist, Israel’s most brilliant theologian, depicted David as

a free man who knew that man is not under law and God is not simply giver of Torah: "What God does first and best and most is to trust his men with their moment in history" (50–51). In conclusion, the narratives "affirm and re-affirm that Yahweh continues to trust and is not prepared to abandon his oath to David"; "the gospel out of the tenth century is not that David (or Adam) is trustworthy, but that he has been trusted" (62).

"Life and Death in Tenth-Century Israel," from 1972, deals again with the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2) as compared to the Joseph Narrative (Gen 37; 39–48; 50). In the tenth century, royal theology first became important for Israel; thus, both the Joseph and the Succession Narratives reflect "a cultural situation focused on the issue of power, a milieu of humanism created by wisdom influences, and an ideology of king as life-giver that mattered intensely to the development of Israel's royal institutions of the period" (65). On the one hand, Joseph appears as a life-bringer, having power to turn death to life; on the other, the rule of Solomon is willed and prospered by Yahweh but in fact secured by death: David and Solomon appear as death-bringers. Brueggemann suggests that theological reflection centered on the use of power over life or death, the issue of life or death, a characteristic theme of wisdom, informs the stories and is central in both.

"Kingship and Chaos" originally appeared in 1971. In this article Brueggemann, following other authors, suggests that the formula of Gen 8:22 is a royal decree proclaiming the reestablishment of order and harmony (*shalom*). Suggesting a relation between the Absalom and Noah narratives, Brueggemann concludes that the royal decree of Gen 8:22 contains reflection upon and memory of the Absalom rebellion. It seems likely that the historical experience of the Absalom rebellion informs the Noah story. Thus the historical reality of David and his sons provides the J theologian with the basic data for his theological understanding and affirmation.

"Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18" was first published in 1993. The paper proposes a literary-rhetorical interpretation of 1 Sam 18: "this chapter is not simply a piece of *reportage*, nor is it simply a collection of miscellaneous items concerning David. We are able to see that it is a skilled and delicate artistic construing of reality that makes a larger statement about Saul and David" (119). In this chapter David is loved by Jonathan, by Israel and Judah, and by Michal; he is successful, and Yahweh is with him. On the contrary, Saul is destroyed through the process of the narrative and at every chance he chooses wrongly. In conclusion, 1 Sam 18 "constitutes a peculiarly powerful theological statement" (120) in which God powerfully works through human interaction.

"Narrative Intentionality in 1 Samuel 29," originally published in 1989, deals with the narrative of David's sojourn with the Philistines as compared to the narrative of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. According to Brueggemann, 1 Sam 29, placed between the cycle of bloodguilt avoided in 1 Sam 24–26 and denied in 2 Sam 1–4, is not only a convincing "alibi" to remove David from the scene of Saul's death but a statement of David's innocence. David is acquitted by Achish, is guilty (he is not reliable for the Philistines), but is in fact innocent. Thus, both Luke and

John Gospels make use of the same literary conventions: Jesus is acquitted, is in fact guilty (against authority), but is in fact rightly acquitted by Pilate.

“On Coping with Curse: A Study of 2 Samuel 16:5–14,” was originally published in 1974. Brueggemann, following previous scholars quoted by him, notices in the narrative the “wisdom theme” of the freedom of God: the order in creation “is neither a closed system nor is it one that is totally at the disposal and control of human choice and conduct” (150). David affirms the freedom and the sovereignty of Yahweh. The episode “shows David as a remarkable model of that type of faith that takes human history and human activity seriously without in any way diminishing God’s share in events” (155).

In “An Appendix of Deconstruction? 2 Samuel 21–24,” which originally appeared in 1988, the author analyzes the six units of 2 Sam 21–24 “to see to what extent they function to deconstruct and to combat the well-established royal ideology” (159). Brueggemann suggests that these chapters are early traditions subsequently gathered together; thus it is not possible to date the material. However, he goes on to propose a date in the immediate wake of Solomon or when the monarchy failed after 587 B.C.E. Furthermore, chapters 21–24 are regarded “as a distortion to be rejected” (172): they deconstruct not simply the character of David but patterns of faith. Finally, quoting Childs, Brueggemann submits that 2 Sam 24 matches the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 1) because together they provide an *inclusio* for the Samuel narrative about power and the transformation of power.

Study of the material explored by Brueggemann has been deepened over recent years. Consequently, some of these papers could perhaps be reconsidered in the light of recent works on the text of Samuel and the history of the Pentateuch. For example, Brueggemann dates J material at David’s and Salomon’s times, whereas the more recent research has given different opinions on the date of the Yahwist and on the existence of the very Yahwist source.

Taking the article “Narrative Coherence...” as an exemplar, one can find that the author considers but does not discuss the textual problems posed by the LXX in the text of Samuel. Brueggemann writes (103 n. 9) that his analysis follows the MT, whereas the text of this chapter (i.e., 18) is considerably shorter in the LXX. In the same note he adds that “the LXX has important variations in vv. 1–5, lacks the doublets (?) of vv. 17–19, and does not have the theological reference in v. 12.” But the Greek tradition presents variants within it: for example, the Vatican codex has the “short” text of MT, whereas the Alexandrinus and the Lucianic Recension have the longer one. Thus the theological implications might be different in the light of Hebrew or Greek texts, because the short text lacks the first comment on the success of David (v. 5): the verb *škl* does not occur in the *Vorlage* of the short text. However, the verb occurs in verses 14, 15, and 30, and, as Brueggemann writes (117), these verses testify to the success of David. Thus, the lack of verses 1–5 is not essential for the theological judgment that David is successful, but the problems posed by LXX are many in this chapter.

Nevertheless, scholars will find in this book some milestones in the history and theology of the books of Samuel, as well many quotations of previous studies.