

TEXTUAL MATTERS

The text of the books of Samuel is a relentless war--zone of O.T. biblical scholars. This is so because the original text has such a welter of Oral footnotes and also a number of alternative readings and 12 textual gaps in the Hebrew text to which I will give an introduction so that the reader may not shoot off at a tangent in misapprehension of why such gaps exist.

My view is that the Spirit of prophecy has in the provenance of scripture given us what we need to know and that there is much spoken material that, reading between the lines, we must assume existed in the conversations we have in synopsis. It is even so with NT narrative. But we have sufficient. One footnote tells us that virtually half the Samuel material is oral conversational exchange and clearly it is but part of an original fullness that we do not and need not and cannot possess. Again I repeat-we have what the Spirit desires us to know.

TEXTUAL GAPS 1-12

(1) TEXTUAL GAP WITH VERY REAL SIGNIFICANCE 10.11

The gap is of interest. It suggests a total change equivalent to conversion. In the later chapter 20 Saul again falls under the power of the Holy Spirit. First he received a new heart and with this experience to which he was introduced by Samuel came the new tongue and new interpretations that were associated with the ancient gift of discerning God's will and the authority to rebuke kings. These lived close to God. Israel's first king through disobedience became subject to weighty conviction of the Holy Spirit and aware of a burden of calamity which was his lot.

(2) TEXTUAL GAP 10.22

*They ask if Saul is still the man since he has not mustered. Then the LORD said he has gone to the stuff or **the weapons**. This gap stressed that Saul had a personal interest in material things. He never was without his javelin. When Israel had few weapons Saul and Jonathan had the best equipment. The other option is that he had gone to the pots or vessels to eat or drink.*

(3) (4) (5) TEXTUAL GAPS & COMMENT

*The text which previously in Chapter 10 had two small gaps at verses 11 & 21 now has two more. In this chapter we have three further spaces 3, 4 and 5. Further along there are spaces in Chapters 16, 20, 23(2), 24 and 28 – making 10 in all of the sort I quote and a final space which states “part of the book is in the spaces” or as others interpret the word qsp “destroyed” [cf Proverbs 13.3]. The Rabbinic comment is “A space to be repaired by the opening of the lips”. The Hebrew interpreters were kind to **the Kethibh or written text** and simply mention that there is oral detail which is unaccounted not vital and space testifies to its existence. Critics deal controversially with this book not alone because of the gaps but because words seem to be dropped easily. On one occasion I propose to counter this criticism when Saul climbs Ramah the speech is staccato and words are dropped but understandably so as the men are out of breath.*

*There are over 100 footnotes in the Hebrew text tendering comments on the text of which the twelve that I give in some detail are just one tenth. Some are insignificant as the spelling of “a thousand” with or without an “I” in Chapter 21.12 and in the subsequent Chapter 22 six **Qere or oral alternative readings** are given which I will now set out as examples of textual detail*

- (1) v.13 The expressing “conspired **against me**” has the Qere alternative “conspired murmuring against” with *nyl a* instead of *yl* [
- (2) v.15 The Qere or **oral interpretation** has the Peal participle “asking constantly”(God) for the textual “the asking” or “prayer”
- (3) v.17 The Qere has “the guard” [literally “ears” instead of “footmen”.] The LXX has “”runners”. The A.V. reflects the Hebrew alternative in its margin
- (4) v.18 The Qere spells the conspirators name “Doag” whereas the text gives “Doeg”
- (5) v.22 A repeat of the previous readings
- (6) v.23 There is a comment at the end of the passage which says “Not according to the opening of lips”. The Hebrew is clear “He that continually seeks my life seeks your life” but the LXX which probably reflects the Qere reads “Where I seek (a place) for my soul I will seek for yours” There is no good reason to reject the kethibh text of the Hebrew

With such detail the text is strewn. The provenance may well have been historically undulating as the composition derived from primary sources such as Samuel himself and Hannah and David passing through the hands of Shemaiah and the military scribe and being re-written on new scrolls over hundreds of years. Nothing of the message is lost and the word of the LORD is clear throughout.

(6)TEXTUAL GAP 16.12

The Hebrew text has a gap at this point which allows us to have something like a picture of the youthful David. His hair and eyes impressed but above all his cheerful disposition. The space like others in the narrative of Samuel allows of oral exchanges which are not recorded by the Spirit or provided in the provenance of scripture for us. We are to conclude that further comment either by Jesse or Samuel is superfluous. Clearly the sacrifice and the meal took place at this time though scripture makes no mention of either. The LORD’S business was about His anointed.

(7)TEXTUAL GAP 20.18

At this point we have a further textual gap where the sworn faithfulness of David would have naturally featured but does not. To this the only testimony we have is David’s kindness to Mephibosheth. The textual note tells us they parted significantly **on the eve of the new moon** when the lamb was slain. The connection with the passion of Christ is immediately significant.

(8) TEXTUAL GAP 20.27

And Saul said to Jonathan his son “Do you know why the son of Jesse has not come either yesterday or **today** to the feast?”(**Sunday**) And Jonathan answered Saul “David made earnest request from me **to be at** [*d*][*]* Bethlehem. The absence of a verb suggests Jonathan spoke in quiet staccato saying “He pleaded for leave—at Bethlehem” And he said “Please release me for my family have a sacrifice (Passover) for us in the city and my brother has demanded that I be there and now if I have found favour in your eyes let me get off and see my brothers. For this reason he has not come to the table the king prepared.” Then the anger of Saul grew fierce against Jonathan and he said to him

This was Passover and David becomes an unsuspecting precursor of the Christ who was taken and crucified at Passover. This was the commemoration of the Exodus and had Saul had his way David was to be scapegoat for Saul’s sins. This “second day of the month”v27 would actually parallel the resurrection. It becomes evident why the Spirit provided for pause in the sacred text. The Saturday was a silent day with Saul but the search for David was well and truly pursued on Sunday as was the frenzied action of the religious authorities of Jerusalem on the first day of the week after

Passover. The intimate knowledge of David's whereabouts compares with that of the disciples who knew that Jesus had risen. In this book Gaps 7 & 8 bear a curious but significant testimony to the death and resurrection of Christ and to that extent represent in another idiom signals of something greater than they prophecy.

(9) TEXTUAL GAP 23 1-2 WITH A "RATIONALE THEORY"

(a) **The gap retailed by scribes suggests more information on "these" and "other" Philistines.** There is no discontinuity of sense so it may be that as in several other cases there is an amalgamation of text from different scrolls at such points. **1 Samuel is a long book and it is not impossible that it was written on short documents or skins.** If this theory were correct the scroll beginning at 23.2b would end at 28.23 and the last one would run from 28.24 to 31.13. The theory a priori runs into some difficulty on the word "repair" and the proposal of **supplementary oral matter** in the margin—but this is surmountable as I shall explain! The theory does poor service in certain sectors of the book because gaps appear within the same story as in 19.21 and 20.18 (and in the case of the latter verse has a footnote that the "space" belongs to emphasis on the **"opening of the first year"**) which encloses but 21 verses. There are 3 spaces in Chapter 14 and all suggest "repair from oral" and between them with the next sequential space at 16.1 sections of only six, sixteen and forty-seven verses respectively would comprise each scroll whilst at 14.36 the story runs on. Of course there was no accounting when hide or papyrus would run out and overflow text may originally have been written on the back of the original less adequate autograph material and then later imported to a larger scroll capable of handling the entire text. This "gap rationale" theory has the distinct asset of being able to explain the word "repair" and the word "oral tradition" because at such gaps **the text is re-united or repaired** on subsequent scrolls and **the "tradition"** is the historic provenance of scrolls rather than text – **which helps to explain why there is little if anything textually to observe at the point where gaps appear!**

(b) On the other hand there is solid reason for pause and the Holy Spirit appears to have made no mistake as to where we should catch breath and survey developments within the books of Samuel. In this instance we are to contemplate how providential was the Ephod now accessible to David and that **he made doubly sure he was walking in the will of God.** The manifest value of the gaps in the original text is that serious contemplation would be given to the immediate contexts perhaps above other sections through the years where they occur. Much has actually been learned and stands to be learned from such meditative reading.

(10) TEXTUAL GAP 23.11a

And the LORD said "He will come down" *There is absolutely no textual corruption to be urged in the received text. The gap if it does anything serves to demonstrate that the answer was a strait "Yes" but not a full explanation of what would happen to David himself! This incomplete answer does not entail a perceived corruption but emphasises an incomplete Hagiddah or explanation. This gap shows the future is **not fully** ours to see.*

(11) TEXTUAL GAP 24.1

This 11th textual gap after the reference to David at Engedi brings us back to the inexorable hatred of Saul—that even now with news of David by the Salt Sea he would set out to assail his son-in-law. He adventures on his 10th pursuit and makes himself an attempted murderer 10 times over. This was an all-out blitz on David. In those days there was no road by the sea—just defiles along the westward lip of the lake.

(12) TEXTUAL GAP 28.23 The significance is that he reclined to eat food. A rabbinic note attests that there was further communication. It was never easy to

compel Saul to do anything. He would possibly rather have died there and then. The nemesis or inevitability of circumstance had compellingly affected his mind. We get a picture of the king sitting on the couch of the witch. The footnote alludes to part or even half of the book at being oral "opening of the lips" – though critics urge it means half of it is lost. I adjudge that since there is a balance of historical action and reported conversation we can fairly say that half the book is conversation and we perhaps do not possess half of what was discussed but we have its drift and all that we need to know to understand the lessons the LORD has preserved for our learning.

May I express the hope that these observations will prove helpful and introduce the reader to a more positive and less destructive handling of written scripture and its oral haddadah or notes. We learn much more from what we have either side of the gaps than from imagining what might have been or could be and indeed may never have been where the gaps occur. I trust you others might come to such mind with joyous contentment.

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