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## DAVID AND HIS CIRCLE IN GENESIS XXXVIII

by

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Various scholars have correctly noted that much of Genesis mirrors the events of the United Monarchy of David and Solomon. This is borne out by similar story lines, allusions, and shared language. Among the paradigm passages which may be cited is Gen. xv 18 where the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham, *minn<sup>e</sup>har mišrayim ʿad-hannāhār haggādól n<sup>e</sup>har p<sup>e</sup>rāt*, correlate with those of the Davidic-Solomonic empire.<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Mazar has used this example and many others to demonstrate that "Genesis was given its original written form during the time when the Davidic empire was being established, and that the additions and supplements of later authors were only intended to help bridge the time gap for contemporary readers, and had no decisive effect on its contents or its overall character."<sup>2</sup>

Most scholars who have worked along these lines have concentrated on the material usually ascribed to J. The author of this strand, after all, is presumed to have lived during the United Monarchy. Important contributions are those of Joseph Blenkinsopp, Walter Brueggemann, Ronald E. Clements, Lothar Ruppert, and Peter F. Ellis. All these, to be sure, come in the wake of Gerhard von Rad's work which sought to demonstrate that the early monarchy produced two masterpieces of historiographic writing: the Succession Narrative and the Yahwist source.<sup>3</sup>

Stylistic comparisons were the focus of Blenkinsopp's article,<sup>4</sup> as

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<sup>1</sup> See C. H. Gordon, "The Patriarchal Narratives", *JNES* 13 (1954), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis", *JNES* 28 (1969), pp. 73-83, particularly p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Munich, 1958), pp. 58-81, and 148-88, E. tr. *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh and London, 1965), pp. 50-74 and 166-204, essays originally written in, respectively, 1938 and 1944.

<sup>4</sup> "Theme and motif in the Succession History (2 Sam. xi 2 ff.) and the Yahwist corpus", *Volume du Congrès: Genève 1965*, *SVT* 15 (1966), pp. 44-57.

he noted several motifs common to both the Succession Narrative of 2 Sam. ix-1 Kings ii and the mythological material of Gen. ii 4-iv 16. Among the most convincing of these is the fratricidal theme, viz., Cain's slaying of Abel and Absalom's slaying of Amnon, in both of which occurs *baśśādeh* (Gen. iv 8; 2 Sam. xiv 6).

Brueggeman saw in those portions of Gen. ii-xi attributed to J four stories (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel) closely paralleling four episodes from the Succession Narrative (David and Bathsheba, Amnon and Absalom, Absalom and David, and Solomon and David). He concluded: "While the theology of Gn 2-11 (J) is the special kerygmatic formulation of the Yahwist, perhaps it is the history of his time, the David story right before his eyes, that gives him the 'stuff' out of which he formulates his kerygma... The Genesis stories may be for the Yahwist another way of writing about the dynasty... Thus Genesis becomes quite clearly a theology for the monarchy."<sup>5</sup>

Clements stressed the covenant connection between Abraham and David, respectively, Gen. xv and 2 Sam. vii. I quote him at length: "We must recognize consequently that the account in Genesis 15 of the Abrahamic covenant has been influenced in its formulation by features drawn from the Davidic covenant of Jerusalem... our main contention [is] that there was a close connection, both in historical significance and religious interpretation, between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants... the Yahwist was very conscious of the existence of Israel as a monarchic state... This author intentionally related the patriarchal age to that of the Davidic-Solomonic empire under the scheme of promise and fulfilment in order to show the religious significance and sacred authority of the Davidic state... It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Yahwist himself saw an important connection between Abraham and David."<sup>6</sup>

Ruppert has noted a relationship between several pericopes in Genesis ascribed to J and several episodes from David's life. In one instance, the corresponding passages are seen as similar, namely, Jacob's prayer in Gen. xxxii 10-13 and David's prayer in 2 Sam. vii 18-29. In the other case, the related stories are seen as reverse

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<sup>5</sup> "David and his Theologian", *CBQ* 30 (1968), pp. 156-81, particularly pp. 175-6. He is apparently unaware of Blenkinsopp's work, though they touch on the same subject matter.

<sup>6</sup> *Abraham and David* (London, 1967), especially pp. 55-9.

images of one another: in Gen. xxxix 7-12 Joseph refuses the attempted seduction of his master's wife, in 2 Sam. xi-xii David commits adultery with the wife of one in his service. Ruppert concludes: "In diese Führung sieht der Jahwist auch das Leben der Erzväter und vor allem Josephs eingebettet als hoffnungsvolles Vorspiel der Geschichte des Volkes, aber auch als Warnung vor jeglicher menschlicher Überhebung in der dafür anfälligen Blütezeit des jungen, geeinten davidisch-salomonischen Reiches."<sup>7</sup>

In his study of the J source, Ellis pays particular attention to the audience of the author. He raises a number of interesting suggestions, of which I cite one which I find convincing. The emphasis on ultimogeniture in Genesis (Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, Perez instead of Zerah, Judah instead of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, etc.) may be "an antecedent apologia for Solomon who was God's choice over Adonijah".<sup>8</sup> One might add, of course, that David was Jesse's youngest son too.

Those who do not accept the Documentary Hypothesis, or at least do not stress it in their work, have gone beyond the bounds of J in relating Genesis to events from the life of King David. I have already referred to Mazar, some of whose examples come from strata other than J (e.g., Gen. xiv, several passages attributed to E and P as well). The same holds for Benno Jacob and Robert Alter, whose approaches have been mainly from the literary angle, the former a half-century ago and the latter quite recently.

Jacob compiled an impressive list of several dozen passages from Genesis and 2 Sam. xi-xiii. The remarkably similar language shared by these verses points to an interdependency. And although Jacob opted for Genesis being primary and 2 Samuel being secondary, he did not rule out the reverse as a distinct possibility.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Die Josephserzählung der Genesis* (Munich 1965), pp. 214-18, particularly p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> *The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* (Notre Dame, Indiana, and London, 1968), p. 134. Actually, I do not think it can be proved that "Solomon was the youngest of David's sons" (*ibid.*, p. 55). In the lists in 2 Sam. v 14-16 and 1 Chr. xiv 4-7, Solomon does not appear last. In 1 Chr. iii 5 he is listed as the last of Bathsheba's four sons, though of course 2 Sam. xii 24 implies he is the oldest of Bathsheba's surviving children. Regardless, I still concur with Ellis's overall conclusion: the supersession of the oldest or older brother by the youngest or younger brother in Genesis would seem to prefigure Solomon (and David).

<sup>9</sup> *Genesis: Das erste Buch der Tora* (Berlin, 1934), pp. 1048-9. Blenkinsopp cites an apparently similar work: T. Klaehn, *Die Sprachliche Verwandtschaft der Quelle K (2 Sam. 9 ff.) der Samuelisbücher mit J des Heptateuch* (dissertation, Rostock, 1914), but this volume is unavailable to me.

Alter has posited that 1 Sam. xviii contains allusions to Gen. xxxix and that 1 Sam. xix alludes to Genesis xxxi.<sup>10</sup> This is the reverse process to the one I am suggesting, but it once again affirms the close relationship between the narratives in Genesis and those centering on the career of King David.

It is against this background that we now proceed to a most remarkable chapter in Genesis, the story of Judah and Tamar.<sup>11</sup> I propose, regardless of the episode's historicity, that we should understand it to refer more to David and his family than it does to Judah and his. The story may still be relatively accurate—I do not wish to pursue here the involved question of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives<sup>12</sup>—and it may still tell us something about the early history of the tribe of Judah—this is another issue we may sidestep.<sup>13</sup> But its main purpose was to adumbrate for us events from the life of Israel's greatest king. The author of this chapter realized this goal by matching the characters of Gen. xxxviii with personalities from David's circle. The following chart illustrates this conveniently:

1. Judah = David
2. (*hyrh*) Hirah = Hiram (*hyrm*)
3. (*bt-šw<sup>c</sup>*) the daughter of Shua = Bathsheba (*bt-šb<sup>c</sup>*;  
variant: *bt-šw<sup>c</sup>*)
4. Er = deceased firstborn son  
of David and Bathsheba
5. (*ʔwnn*) Onan = Amnon (*ʔmnwn*)
6. (*šlh*) Shelah = Solomon (*šlmh*)
7. (*tmr*) Tamar = Tamar (*tmr*)

For the following analysis to be correct, we will have to assume, like Mazar, Brueggemann, Clements, and others, that the author

<sup>10</sup> *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), pp. 117-20.

<sup>11</sup> This episode has attracted considerable attention, including three articles by the learned editor of our journal. See J. A. Emerton, "Some problems in Genesis xxxviii", *VT* 25 (1975), pp. 338-61; "An examination of a recent structuralist interpretation of Genesis xxxviii", *VT* 26 (1976), pp. 79-98; and "Judah and Tamar", *VT* 29 (1979), pp. 403-15. These pieces are replete with valuable bibliography essential for the study of Gen. xxxviii. The third of these articles touches on some of the issues raised in the present article.

<sup>12</sup> On this issue, see R. de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne d'Israël* (Paris, 1971), pp. 157-220, E. tr. *The Early History of Israel* (London and Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 161-220.

<sup>13</sup> On this question, see de Vaux, pp. 503-4, 509-10, E. tr., pp. 542, 549.

of Gen. xxxviii lived during the 900s,<sup>14</sup> that he was telling us a story about current events of this century, and that his readership would easily have recognized this and presumably would have delighted in this. Let us proceed to point-by-point discussion of the above pairs.

1. David is obviously the most famous of Judah's descendants. The former is the *pater familias* in 2 Samuel, the latter plays the same role in Gen. xxxviii. Both are shepherds, who in their youth had actually tended flocks (Gen. xxxvii 2, 12 for Judah, 1 Sam. xvi 11, xvii 15, 34 for David), but who are now in positions of power where others care for their animals. Judah's sheepshearers appear in Gen. xxxviii 12. We do not have a specific statement as such for David, but it may be safely assumed; in 2 Sam. xiii 23, for example, David's son Absalom has sheepshearers in his employ.

Both characters commit major sins and are embarrassed into admitting their guilt. Judah is tricked by Tamar and must declare "she is more righteous than I" (Gen. xxxviii 26). David is tricked by Nathan's parable and must declare "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. xii 13).

A secondary connection is the locale of Judah's friend, Adullam, which reverberates in 1 Sam. xxii 1 in the story of King David (see also 2 Sam. xxiii 13). This nexus may be coincidental, especially since the other toponyms in Gen. xxxviii, Chezib and Timnah, do not appear in the Samuel-Kings narrative. On the other hand, Judah separates from his brothers to go to Hirah the Adullamite (Gen. xxxviii 1) and David has fled the Israelites to lodge with outsiders, first Achish of Gaza (1 Sam. xxi 11-16), then among the outlaws at Adullam (1 Sam. xxii 1-2), and then with the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxii 3-5).

2. David's great ally among the peoples of Canaan was Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Sam. v 11; 1 Kgs v 15). Judah's friend, the Adullamite, and thus also a Canaanite, is Hirah (Gen. xxxviii 1, 13). Their names differ only in the last consonant: *hyrh* and *hyrm*.

3. David's most famous and most important wife is Bath-sheba. Although her name appears as *bat-šeba*<sup>c</sup> throughout 2 Samuel and 1

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<sup>14</sup> Personally, I reject the JEDP Theory, preferring instead to see more unity in Genesis than is usually assumed and to date the book to the 900s; see G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Indiana, forthcoming), especially chs VI and VII. But these issues may be set aside, since both my approach and that of many upholders of the Documentary Hypothesis concur in dating Gen. xxxviii to the United Monarchy.

Kings, in 1 Chr. iii 5 we encounter the variant *bat-šúa*<sup>c</sup>. Judah's wife's name is not given, rather she is referred to by her patronymic *bat-šúa*<sup>c</sup> in Gen. xxxviii (2), 12. The connection is obvious.<sup>15</sup>

4. Er, the first child born to Judah and *bat-šúa*<sup>c</sup>, dies for no stated reason other than he offended the Lord (Gen. xxxviii 7). Presumably, he correlates with the first child born to David and Bathsheba, who dies in infancy (2 Sam. xii 15-19). Clearly there is a difference here: Er dies on account of his own sin, whatever it may have been, and the unnamed son of David and Bathsheba dies to punish the parents for their sin of adultery. But I am not pressing for perfection in my analysis here, on which see further below. Secondly, in numbers 2 and 3 above and in numbers 5, 6, and 7 below, there is an exact or similar correspondence of the names involved. None exists here, though naturally we are unable to put forward any since the firstborn of David and Bathsheba is unnamed. Tentatively, I suggest that *ēr* alludes to *na<sup>c</sup>ar* "lad" by which the infant is called in 2 Sam. xii 16. The difference in the consonantal text would not be great: *ēr* and *n<sup>c</sup>ēr*.

Alternatively, we may wish to disavow any relationship between Judah's firstborn and David's and Bathsheba's firstborn, and instead correlate Er and Absalom. Here there is no similarity of names whatsoever, but both die on their own account, Er for the unstated offense against God and Absalom for having rebelled against the Lord's anointed.

5. Onan mistreats his sister-in-law Tamar in Gen. xxxviii 9 by not fulfilling his levirate duty through the practice of *coitus interruptus*. Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar in 2 Sam. xiii 14. They both must have assumed that their sexual offenses would go unpunished, but both are killed, the former by God in Gen. xxxviii 10 and the latter by Absalom in 2 Sam. xiii 28-29. The similarity in names is again readily visible, especially in the consonantal Hebrew text: *ʔwnn* and *ʔmwn*. Here too we lack perfection because Onan is the second son of Judah and *bat-šúa*<sup>c</sup>, whereas Amnon is David's *b<sup>c</sup>kôr* by Ahinoam and is not a son of Bathsheba; again see below.

6. Shelah is being protected, saved by his father from the fate of his brothers (Gen. xxxviii 11), as if Judah has some specific role for him in mind. What this role might be we are not told, because

<sup>15</sup> This has already been pointed out by Blenkinsopp, p. 53. See also D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (Sheffield, 1978), p. 43.

Shelah is not an active participant in the story. Solomon also is a passive participant in the story of David's sons. His name is included in the list of princes in 2 Sam. v 14-16 and his birth is recorded in 2 Sam. xii 24. But throughout the affairs of Amnon and Absalom he is not mentioned, and not until 1 Kgs i-ii does he resurface. Even then it is Adonijah who is active and Solomon who remains behind the scenes. In the end, of course, we learn that David has had something special in store for Solomon all along. See especially 1 Kgs i 17, 30, where it is implied that David has pledged to Bathsheba some time ago that Solomon would be his successor. Again the consonantal text bears out the similarity in their names: *šlh* and *šlmh*.<sup>16</sup>

7. The two Tamars hardly require much comment.<sup>17</sup> One is the daughter-in-law of Judah, the other the daughter of David. Their names are identical. As noted above, one is mistreated by a brother-in-law, the other by a half-brother. Interestingly, it is Judah who commands Onan to make love to Tamar in Gen. xxxviii 8 and it is David who sends Tamar to visit the feigning Amnon in 2 Sam. xiii 7.

These seven correspondences invite further discussion. As stated above, I assume that the story was written in the 900s to inform its readership not so much about Judah and his family, but about David and his. The author's motive is clear: to poke fun at the royal family. Accordingly, I view the writer as a commentator who sought to entertain his audience.<sup>18</sup>

The stories in 2 Samuel are in a serious vein, describing in great detail the life of King David. The personal problems he faced, mainly with his wives and his children and chiefly brought on by his own failings, e.g., the sin of adultery, are presented in dramatic

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<sup>16</sup> Is it merely coincidental that the differences between *hyrh* and *hyrm*, *ʔwnn* and *ʔmwʔn*, *šlh* and *šlmh* is in each case a *mem*? Or is this significant? This would not hold for our postulated relationship between *ʕ* and *nʕ*, except that the differentiating *nun* is the next letter in the alphabet. Again, only coincidental or is this significant?

<sup>17</sup> This correspondence is noted by Jacob, p. 1049.

<sup>18</sup> The entertainment factor of Gen. xxxviii has been duly noted by G. W. Coats, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), p. 276, but he is off target with statements such as the following: "It is difficult to maintain that this story was preserved by circles primarily interested in the genealogy of David... The story in Genesis 38 thus had contact with Davidic interests, but the contact is thin... and no firm evidence supports the suggestion that the story itself circulated within Davidic circles" (p. 275).

fashion, evoking pathos. They allow us the portrait of a biblical character unduplicated in the corpus, perhaps in all of ancient literature.

Gen. xxxviii is in a lighter vein. There is a serious problem discussed: one should know not to violate God's law calling for levirate obligation. But at the same time there is an undeniable attempt to portray the characters, Judah especially, in a comical way. According to my analysis, this can be translated as mocking the king and his court.<sup>19</sup> Authors in many societies, especially free ones, elate in such writing, ranging from serious satire to jocular lampooning. For example, American readers will want to compare Art Buchwald or Russell Baker, Israeli readers will be familiar with Ephraim Kishon, and similar individuals are known in all the Western European countries.

Furthermore, by setting the story in Israel's distant past, the author can plead innocent if ever accused of directly insulting the royal family. This technique of setting a story in the past and yet speaking of the present is widespread in world literature. Here I may cite such pieces as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which Americans will recognize, and the plays of Bertolt Brecht such as *Threepenny Opera*, which readers everywhere should know.

Above I noted that my matching of characters is not perfect. One must, to be sure, allow the author of Gen. xxxviii some liberty in shaping his story. Presumably he had to work within the real history of the patriarchal period, a history which his readers knew and from which major divergencies would not be tolerated. Furthermore, at a distance of 3000 years from the chapter's composition, it is exceedingly difficult for us to ascertain what a 10th-century Israelite would have known or would have been expected to know by a writer. Accordingly, I have no sure explanation for the slight imperfections in the schema presented here.<sup>20</sup> But I am

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<sup>19</sup> A second possibility should be noted: the story might be an apologia for the royal family, stating in a sense that the clan has always suffered from familial problems.

<sup>20</sup> I am well aware that I have not addressed the issue of the birth of the twins Perez and Zerah *vis-à-vis* the life of David. Presumably, the author's point has already been made by the time one approaches the end of Gen. xxxviii. The birth of Perez and Zerah, of course, fits very well into the overall picture in Genesis, where the younger son supercedes the older (see especially J. Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong", *JRL* 96 [1977], pp. 27-44), but

certain that the readers of Gen. xxxviii, at least the educated ones, would have deduced the author's technique, would have realized the true intention of the chapter, and would have derived considerable enjoyment from its reading.<sup>21</sup>

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it does not rehearse a specific event from David's career. On the other hand, as noted above, all of these supercessions (Isaac, Jacob, Perez, etc.) foreshadow David's and Solomon's passing their older brothers.

<sup>21</sup> None of this should in any way be taken as a rejection of other postulated inter-biblical connections dealing with Gen. xxxviii, namely those with Gen. xlix 8-12 and Deut. xxii 9-11. The former, I am convinced, alludes to Genesis xxxviii throughout; see E. M. Good, "The 'Blessing' on Judah, Gen. 49:8-12", *JBL* 82 (1963), pp. 427-32; C. M. Carmichael, "Some Sayings in Genesis 49", *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 435-44, especially pp. 439-41; J. S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob", in K. R. R. Gros Louis, ed., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives II* (Nashville, 1982), p. 111; and Rendsburg, ch. V. On the relationship between Deut. xxii 9-11 and Gen. xxxviii, see C. M. Carmichael, "Forbidden mixtures", *VT* 32 (1982), pp. 394-415. If we also see Gen. xlix 8-12 as alluding to Dan—thus S. Gevirtz, "Adumbrations of Dan in Judah's Blessing on Judah", *ZAW* 93 (1981), pp. 21-37—we begin to realize the many facets and various levels of biblical literature. Are we to postulate something like the following: (a) the life of David gave rise to Gen. xxxviii; (b) the poetry of Gen. xlix 8-12 plays upon this story; (c) while at the same time it alludes to Danite history; and (d) Deut. xxii 9-11 presents laws reflecting upon the Judah and Tamar episode? Such interconnections boggle the mind, but I preclude nothing from the master craftsmen who were the literati of ancient Israel.