The question of whether God was originally in favor of the institution of kingship in Israel has received much attention among biblical scholars, but often the conclusions reached are less than satisfactory. This is at least partly because the biblical texts themselves would seem to point in opposite directions on the issue. On the one hand, a large body of texts portrays the Davidic kingship in very positive terms and a significant biblical theology arises around it. On the other hand, several texts, particularly in 1 Samuel, appear to be against the institution.

The conclusion usually reached concerning this state of affairs is that God was not in favor of this institution, and that whatever positive pictures of the monarchy are found in Scripture represent either his gracious accommodation to an inferior ideal or opposing (usually minority) viewpoints within Israel. Neither of these solutions is entirely satisfactory, however. This is particularly so in view of the predominantly positive view of the monarchy in most of the OT.1

Recently, Gerald Gerbrandt has produced a significant work2 that goes further than any treatment prior to his in resolving the tension found in the texts. He argues that the texts of the "Deuteronomistic History"3 reflect "a unified concept of kingship" (p. 192), one that is essentially pro-kingship. More precisely, he states (p. 41) that the correct question with which to confront the Deuteronomist ... is not whether he was antikingship or prokingship. Rather, we need to ask what kind of kingship he saw as ideal for Israel, or what role kingship was expected to play for Israel [emphasis added].
Gerbrandt's major contribution in this book is in detailing what type of kingship the Deuteronomist favored. He shows that the function of the God-fearing king was to lead Israel in keeping covenant and to trust God for deliverance. Israel's sin was in asking for a king who would be like those of the other nations, leading it in battle. As Gerbrandt states, the king was "to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator; then he could trust Yahweh to deliver. At the heart of this covenant was Israel's obligation to be totally loyal to Yahweh" (p. 102).

Gerbrandt's starting point for study is distinctive, and it provides him with a fresh perspective on the problem at hand. The usual starting point for studies on biblical attitudes toward Israelite kingship is in 1 Samuel 7-12. Gerbrandt, on the other hand, begins with 2 Kings 18-23. This text includes the reigns of the two good kings par excellence (after David): Hezekiah and Josiah. Thus, by studying the Deuteronomist's assessment of these kings, Gerbrandt has been able to formulate his conclusions concerning the proper functions of the king independently of the debated texts in 1 Samuel, and then to test these conclusions in the debated texts themselves.

Another contribution Gerbrandt makes is one that he does not set out specifically to make. However, it arises out of his major contention, and it lies in his emphasis on the proper role of the Davidic king: he was to lead his people in keeping the Torah.[1] In this emphasis can be seen a convergence -- in the role of the king -- of the theology of the Davidic Covenant and that of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, the tension between what are usually seen as the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant and the unconditional nature of the Davidic Covenant is eased.

The significance of Gerbrandt's work is at least twofold. First, he provides an effective counterargument to the widely held view that the Deuteronomist was antikingship. Thus, the way is opened for seeing the important theology that developed around the Davidic kingship as having been part of God's intent from the beginning, and not merely an afterthought, a concession to a second-best ideal, or a reflection of David's
political dominance. Second, he succeeds in clarifying -- in a way that had not been done
previously -- why Israel's request to have a king "like the nations" was so devastating to
her relationship with YHWH: it broke their covenantal relationship and "deposed"
YHWH as Israel's warrior. Due to the significance of Gerbrandt's work, this essay
reviews its major sections, with commentary, presenting its major argument.
Furthermore, it adds to a few lacunae in the work as further support for the thesis (see
especially the Judges section and the conclusion).

I. The State of the Field

Gerbrandt's survey of the literature on the composition of the Deuteronomistic
History (pp. 1-18) begins, as should be expected, with Noth's thesis of this work as the
product of a single author living in Palestine during the exile. For Noth, the purpose of
the work was to explain the events of 722 and 587 B.C. He saw the fall of both Israelite
kingdoms as the result of their religious apostasy and failure to keep the Law. Noth's
conclusions have received varying degrees of acceptance, and they have been
considerably modified. However, his basic insight concerning the unity of outlook and
theme of Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets remains relatively intact today, and
almost all scholars speak of the "Deuteronom(ist)ic History."5

Gerbrandt himself accepts the popular two-redaction theory as defended by R. D.
Nelson,6 which sees the primary edition of the Deuteronomistic History originating from
the time of Josiah (essentially, Deuteronomy through 2 Kgs 23:25a), and the second(ary)
edition dating to the exile (which has primarily added 2 Ks 23:25b-25:30). He accepts
Cross' explanation of the purpose and setting for the two editions: an upbeat, Jerusalemite
first edition and a more somber, exilic second edition.

Turning to the analyses of the Deuteronomistic view of kingship (pp. 18-38),
Gerbrandt begins with the classic critical formulation by Wellhausen. In his analysis of 1
Samuel 7-12, Wellhausen concluded that these chapters consisted of two parallel traditions: (a) a preexilic prokingship source (9:1-10:16; 11), and (b) an exilic or postexilic antikingship source (7-8; 10:17-27; 12). Wellhausen's work has undergone minor revision, but his basic formulation, like Noth's, has remained virtually intact in critical scholarship until very recently. Indeed, his conception of the antikingship source was seized upon by Noth as the key to the Deuteronomist's theme: it was a negative assessment of Israel's history.

However, recently many scholars have disputed or modified the Wellhausen-Noth analysis of 1 Samuel 7-12. They either have downplayed the Deuteronomist's opposition to the kingship, arguing that he was generally prokingship, or challenged the Wellhausen-Noth analysis in such a way that the door is left open to the type of reassessment that Gerbrandt proposes to do. Thus, Gerbrandt concludes (p. 38) that

Virtually nothing of the traditional position on kingship in the Deuteronomistic History can be accepted as it was originally proposed. . . . [These scholars] largely agree that the narratives of 1 Samuel 7-12 are not sufficient to show that the Deuteronomist was opposed to kingship.

With this state of affairs as justification, Gerbrandt presents his own thesis and lays out his approach (pp. 38-43), which already have been summarized above. He places the Deuteronomist in Josiah's time, as noted, but he does not see that any of the later additions -- which he regards as minor -- diverges significantly from the Deuteronomist's positive assessment of kingship (p. 39). Methodologically, he emphasizes the final product, downplaying the significance of whether particular verses actually sprang from the Deuteronomist's pen or came from one of his sources, since "The Deuteronomist's understanding would also have been reflected in the way he chose or rejected sources, and the way in which different traditions were bound into a whole" (p. 43). In this respect, he approximates Noth's view of a single Deuteronomist as author/historian, and he reflects the current trend toward unitary readings of the final forms of texts. Many scholars --
evangelical and nonevangelical alike -- would speak of several authors in the Deuteronomistic corpus, but they would nevertheless resonate with Gerbrandt's emphasis on the final form of the individual texts he considers.

II. Kingship in 2 Kings 18-23

In his second chapter, which constitutes the heart of his work (pp. 45-102), Gerbrandt evaluates the Deuteronomist's accounts of the reigns of Josiah and Hezekiah in two major sections, using these as the basis for getting at the Deuteronomist's view of the king's roles and of the kingship itself. This is because (1) these are the two greatest kings (2 Kgs 18:5; 23:25), after David, and so the Deuteronomist's evaluation of their reigns can provide the basis for understanding his views on kingship; and (2) since, for Gerbrandt, the Deuteronomist most likely lived in Josiah's time and wrote against the backdrop of the Josianic reforms, the content of these reforms undoubtedly influenced the Deuteronomist's writing or production of the Deuteronomistic History.9

1. Josiah

Of the 20 Judean kings, only eight are judged by the biblical writer to have been "good" kings, and, of these, six are said to have neglected to remove the high places. Thus, only Hezekiah and Josiah remain, clearly on a higher plane than the others. Of each of these it is said that there was none like him before or after (2 Kgs 18:5; 23:25).10

Gerbrandt now shows how Josiah is tied in with central themes in the Deuteronomistic History. First, he notes the centrality of the call to "turn (sûb) to YHWH" throughout the Deuteronomistic History, and observes that Josiah is evaluated in precisely this way: "he turned (sûb) to YHWH" (2 Kgs 23:25). Second, he notes that the specific phrase found in 2 Kgs 23:25 to describe how Josiah turned to YHWH --
"with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might" -- is found again in the Deuteronomistic History only at Deut 6:5, which instructs Israel as to how to love YHWH its God. Deuteronomy 5-11 present the fundamental requirements of Israel's law, and the Shema (6:4-9) represents the heart of this law. Thus, "By using this phrase the Deuteronomist was giving Josiah the highest marks possible. King Josiah had obeyed the law of Moses" (p. 55).

The basis for this high evaluation of Josiah was essentially that Josiah not only turned to YHWH in his private life, he acted upon this repentance in public, as well. The bulk of 2 Kings 22-23 is devoted to the specific reforms that Josiah instituted and how he led Judah in covenant renewal. In all his acts, he functioned as a true leader of Israel. In this respect, he "adopted a role similar to that which Moses and Joshua had earlier fulfilled" (p. 67). He was the administrator or mediator of the covenant in the same way that these two had been. Thus, even though (p. 68)

Josiah may not have been a charismatic leader exactly like Moses and Joshua, he certainly was seen by the Deuteronomist as a successor [in function] to Moses and Joshua. The difference between them in how they became leader is far less significant then [sic] the fact that both had been chosen by Yahweh to be leader of his people.

Here, then, the basis for Gerbrandt's thesis concerning the functions of the God-fearing king begins to emerge.

2. Hezekiah

Like Josiah, Hezekiah was in a category all his own (2 Kgs 18:5). However, the basis for the high evaluation of Hezekiah is not, as most scholars have supposed, his reforming activities. These are mentioned only twice in three chapters: in 18:4 and 18:22. The importance in 18:4 of the statement that "he removed the high places" is not so much
to emphasize the reform per se, but consciously to echo the formula concerning the first six good kings of Judah, who did not do so. Thus, the contrast between Hezekiah and these kings is highlighted even further. Reform as such, then, does not play a key role in the Deuteronomist's evaluation of Hezekiah.

Rather than his reforming activity, Gerbrandt well notes that the basis for the high praise is Hezekiah's trusting (bth) in YHWH. This term is found at the core of the Deuteronomist's evaluation (18:5). It is significant for several reasons. First, since the account in 2 Kings 18-20 is not a comprehensive history of Hezekiah's reign, but rather focuses on events in his 14th year, the key to the Deuteronomist's evaluation should be found in those things this account emphasizes. A significant emphasis is on the root dbq ("to cling"): it occurs ten times in this section (nine in chap. 18). Outside of this passage, the Deuteronomist uses the term only six more times, and none of these has anything to do with trusting in YHWH (p. 77). In this passage, however, that is precisely the thrust; the issue is in whom Hezekiah will place his trust: YHWH or Sennacherib. Hezekiah is clearly great because of his properly focused trust. It so happens that this great king also participated in reform, but he was not great because of this participation, but rather because of his trust.

3. Gerbrandt's Thesis

Gerbrandt ends this chapter with his own proposal concerning the role of the king according to the Deuteronomist (pp. 89-102). His conclusion is that the king's primary responsibility was to lead the people in keeping the covenant and that the nation's military success was to be left to YHWH.

In a review of the central motifs in the Deuteronomistic History as generally agreed upon by scholars, he shows that these are the land and the covenant (pp. 90-96):
The key question throughout the history is then whether Israel will follow the conditions set down for her for continued existence on the land, or whether Israel will renege upon the covenant it entered with Yahweh, and forfeit the land [p. 94].

In light of this,

the king's responsibility was to guarantee Israel's continued existence on the land, and ... this responsibility was fulfilled within Israel by being the covenant administrator due to the role of the covenant for Israel's existence on the land [p. 101].

When the king acted in this way, he could trust YHWH to deliver (p. 102). This motif of YHWH's deliverance is prominent in 2 Kings 18 and 19. The text is clear: Judah was saved by YHWH's intervention, not by any military display on the part of Hezekiah. This intervention was forthcoming because Hezekiah trusted in YHWH.

This conclusion is Gerbrandt's distinctive contribution, and it provides the important basis for his ensuing discussion of other "kingship passages" in the Deuteronomistic History. To this final substantive chapter (pp. 103-87) we now turn.

III. Kingship Previously in the Deuteronomistic History


This passage forms the obvious starting point for discussion. After his critical analysis of sources, Gerbrandt makes two basic contributions here. First, he points out (p. 109) that the people's potential request for a king was not necessarily wrong. In at least two other passages in the book (12:20 and 18:16), the people are seen as asking for something from YHWH, with no hint that the asking is wrong. Rather, here, the problem would prove to be the reason for the request: it was so that Israel might have a
king "like all the nations that are round about me" (17:14). Since Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (and, indeed, all of the OT) continually contrast the nations and Israel, and present these as a temptation and a snare to God's people, Israel's motivation in asking for a king emerges as the problem, not the asking per se or the office per se.

Second, Gerbrandt displays a particularly keen insight in noting (p. 110) that Israel had several institutions that were paralleled in surrounding pagan societies, such as a priesthood, a prophetic movement, and a sacrificial system. These are not condemned in Israel simply because pagan cultures had them. Rather, they are seen as God's gifts to Israel, and what is important is their adaptation or reinterpretation in the Israelite context. Thus, the fact that other nations had kings was not the true problem. The problem was that Israel wanted its king to be like those in the other nations. If Israel had asked for prophets who were "like all the nations round about," for example, doubtless this request would have been judged as sin as well!  

2. The Book of Joshua: A Model for Israel's Kings

Gerbrandt next considers Joshua as a model for the same type of leadership that kings were to exercise. While he was clearly not a king, the emphasis in Josh 1:1-9 on his keeping the Law, the fact that he was responsible for Israel's entering and keeping the land, and the very fact that there is a narrative devoted to his entering his office, all place him in the line of leadership which the kings eventually occupied, since all of these are characteristic of the kings.

Joshua's military leadership is downplayed in the book of Joshua. At Jericho, for example, it was clearly YHWH who gave the victory. In the Ai affair, his role was to determine where disobedience took place and to deal with it. In 1:1-9, Joshua was to keep the Law, in the same way a king was, according to Deut 17:18-19. The accounts of the covenant renewal ceremonies in Josh 8:30-35 and chap. 24, as well as Joshua's
exhortations in chap. 23, reinforce this view of his functioning as a leader in the same tradition as the kings.

3. The Book of Judges: Premonarchical Stirrings

Of critical importance in any discussion of God's attitude toward the institution of king in Israel are several passages in the book of Judges. The final form of the book presents a clearly sympathetic view toward the monarchy.

First, in Judg 8:22-23, Gideon refuses the offer by the men of Israel to rule over them, saying that it is YHWH (and no other) who is to rule over them. This passage is usually seen as one of the clearest statements in the OT against kingship. However, considering the final form of the text -- within vv 22-23 themselves, within chaps. 6-8, and within the entire book of Judges -- Gerbrandt correctly points out that "the message of 8:22-23 is not that kingship is incompatible with Yahwism" (p. 127). Rather, here again the problem is the motivation for the request; it is because "you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian" (v 22). Despite the consistent emphasis in chaps. 6-8 on YHWH's being the source of deliverance in this encounter, the Israelites saw only Gideon as their military leader. In this light (and perhaps also because it was not YHWH calling him to rule over Israel, but rather the people), Gideon had no responsible choice but to refuse.16

The second major passage on kingship in Judges is in chap. 9, containing the story of Abimelech's abortive kingship. Gerbrandt correctly observes that the purpose of the chapter in its present form is not to condemn the institution of kingship per se, but rather "to indict Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem" (p. 131). Nowhere is Abimelech condemned for becoming king. Rather, his crime is in killing his brothers (vv 24, 56), and he is cursed for this. The larger passage emphasizes the curse motif: the curse of fire that is to devour the bramble in the fable (v 15) is reiterated by Jotham concerning
Abimelech and the others (v 20), and the conclusion to the passage explicitly points to its fulfillment (vv 56-57). The point of the passage, then, is "not that kingship is a crime, but that when kingship is based on crime and the abuse of force, ... then the inevitable outcome of such a kingship will be destruction" (p. 132).

The third consideration in Judges concerning kingship is the set of editorial comments in the book’s "appendix," that "In those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). To the first and last of these references is added the phrase "every man did what was right in his own eyes." These statements are set against the backdrop of relatively chaotic conditions in the land. Regardless of the relationship of chaps. 17-21 to the rest of the book, and whether they came from the Deuteronomist, there is virtual unanimity among scholars that these comments imply that things would have been better had there been a true king in place. In this way, the appendix (and thus, for many, the entire book) constitutes a low-key apology for the monarchy. Thus, in addition to the arguments of Judges 8 and 9 in isolation, the final form of the book also argues in the same direction, namely, that the institution of kingship itself is not the problem. Indeed, things would have been better under a human king.17

Excursus: Further Studies on the Book of Judges

Given the importance of the book of Judges to the question at hand, it would behoove us to note here several alternative views to the majority's that Gerbrandt does not deal with to any significant degree.18 Three argue for a somewhat positive assessment of the end of the period of the judges, and a fourth sees YHWH as king referred to at the end of the book.

G. E. Mendenhall's is perhaps the voice arguing most strongly that the period of the judges is to be seen in a positive light (and thus, by extension, the editorial comments at the end of the book, as well).19 For him, the two-hundred-year period of the judges in
Israel was the paradigm of right living in antiquity (and even subsequently), in which every individual covenanted directly with God and with each other (in the tribal federation). The institution of monarchy in Israel represented the importation of abominable Canaanite political structures and ideologies, and David and Solomon were completely Canaanized ideologues.

However, in arriving at his conclusions (which had their germ in his early work on covenant), he does not deal with the specifics of Judges 17-21; he must strain to interpret these texts as showing the tribal federation functioning harmoniously and as intended. He furthermore dismisses large portions of Scripture (e.g., almost all of Samuel and Kings, as well as all of the royal Psalms) as mere political propaganda, only fit for our instruction as negative example. Thus, for Mendenhall, the negative examples are not only in the lives of many of the wicked characters in these portions of Scripture, but also in the authors of Scripture itself who have anything positive to say about the monarchy. That is, their judgment should be rejected whenever they speak of the virtues of the office of king and almost every time they speak of the virtues of any human king, because it is little (or nothing) more than Canaanized political propaganda.20

W. J. Dumbrell and R. G. Boling have argued that the editorial comments at the book's end, especially the one at 21:25, are to be interpreted at least somewhat positively. However, they are less sanguine about the period of the judges than is Mendenhall.

Dumbrell argues that the comment in Judg 21:25 is a postexilic reminder to Israel that no human institutions -- whether tribal confederation or centralized monarchy -- has yet succeeded.21 Israel's task is to get back to whatever it was that allowed the idea of Israel (though not any particular institutions) to survive the period of the judges; this essential factor was each individual's dependence upon YHWH.

His argument appears to interpret the verse in contradictory ways, however. On the one hand, he concedes that the verse points to the disintegrated, disordered conditions of the period, and the "blatant individualism" rampant then.22 Yet, on the other hand, he also
sees the verse (and the final form of the book) suggesting that the period was not so bad after all: for Dumbrell, these are postexilic, written to remind Israel that its survival was in YHWH's hands, just as it had been during the period of the judges. This he interprets as a positive sign. For example, see his comment on p. 31:

[the author of Judges] is suggesting [in 21:25] that the pattern of direct divine intervention, with theocratic leadership, upon which Israel's well-being had always hung, had been never so really demonstrated as it had been in the age of the Judges.

As such, he sees it as a message of hope, and he interprets the period somewhat more positively here than he has elsewhere in his essay. However, if the point is that YHWH was the key to Israel's survival during the period of the judges, despite the problems with the judges and others, then the same could certainly also be said of the period of the monarchy. That is, YHWH was the key to the monarchy's survival, too. The earlier period would not have been a priori more of a golden age than the later one, however. Neither institution -- judgeship or monarchy -- was the guarantee of Israel's survival; Israel's obedience and (especially) God's grace were the keys to this.

We should note that Boling's commentary on Judges forms the basis for some of Dumbrell's argument. There, and in an expansion of his work on this, Boling also argues for the positive nature of the comments in 21:25. However, among other things, we would argue that Boling draws the wrong conclusion from Deut 12:8 in seeing the phrase, "every man doing what is right in his own eyes," as a positive statement. There it comments on how Israel had functioned to date in the wilderness: most likely (since the context deals with cultic practices), some specific laws of sacrifice were not rigorously observed there, due to the demands of travel and survival. While this state of affairs conceivably may have been "appropriate prior to the conquest," the context makes it clear that this certainly was not to be so after the conquest; rather, Israel was to centralize and regularize its worship (vv 5-7, 11-14). The wilderness was not to function as the
paradigm for later worship; this was not some ideal condition to which Israel could later hark back, as Boling implies. In any case, in Judges, the phrase clearly would seem to address more than minor, technical violations of sacrificial law that might possibly be excused.\textsuperscript{27}

Furthermore, Boling reads the intent of the phrase inconsistently in Judges: in 17:6, he sees it as negative and in 21:25 as positive;\textsuperscript{28} there is no real exegetical warrant, however, for the shift. A weakness in both his and Dumbrell's position is that they place too much emphasis on the comments in 21:25, after the achievement of a fragile unity (which thus allows them to see the period as a relatively ideal one), and too little emphasis on those in 17:6, 18:1, and 19:1, which appear in the midst of situations in which there can be found no true redeeming features.

Another interpretation -- at least hypothetically possible -- would see the references to "no king in Israel" as referring to God as king -- or at least as intentionally ambiguous, referring both to a divine and human king. That is, it was because YHWH was not Israel's king in those days -- or, because there was no king of any kind in Israel, neither God nor man -- that things were so bad.\textsuperscript{29} This interpretation does not necessarily exclude reference to a human king,\textsuperscript{30} but it does include reference to YHWH's kingship. However, nothing in the book clearly makes this point. In fact, the nearest statement in the book to YHWH's reigning uses mäsal (8:22-23), and not mälak or melek; the latter are only otherwise used with reference to a human king, which would lend credence to the majority view.

4. 1 Samuel: The Rise of Kingship

The first reference in Samuel to kingship occurs in the Song of Hannah. Here, in 2:10 -- as well as in words of the man of God in 2:35 -- YHWH's king and anointed one are referred to. Their occurrence here reinforces the view that kingship is viewed
positively in the Deuteronomistic History. They function proleptically, since there was still no king at this juncture in the book, and they serve to signal at the outset the book’s interest in the chosen king. The work comes full circle at the end of 2 Samuel, with the reference to David as YHWH's anointed (23:1). As Childs notes, 1 Samuel 2 reveals the books' theocentric perspective: "The focus on God's chosen king, his anointed one, David, appears right at the outset, and reveals the stance from which the whole narrative is being viewed."31

Gerbrandt does not consider these early texts, but rather limits his discussion of kingship in 1 Samuel to the critical chapters where the monarchy is established, chaps. 8-15 (pp. 140-158). He concedes -- as standard critical scholarship has long noted -- that an antikingship sentiment undoubtedly is present in individual verses or fragments in 1 Samuel 8-12. However, he argues (again) that in the unified section the true problem is in the request for the king, and specifically in the reason for the request. To wit (p. 145):

In 1 Samuel 8-12 there is no larger unit which implies that kingship is totally wrong, or needs to be eliminated. Rather, within 1 Samuel 8-12 it is not the institution of kingship which is evil, but Israel's request for the institution. In their request Israel had demonstrated a total lack of faith in Yahweh's ability to successfully lead them in battle. In this way they had rejected Yahweh's kingship over them in the crucial area of defence.32

The request was not only for a king to govern "like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5). Israel wanted a king "so that we indeed [gam] might be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (8:20; my translation). YHWH would be "deposed" as king because his role as military protector was to be transferred to Israel's human king.33

Gerbrandt notes that 1 Samuel 8-12 performs two functions in the larger corpus. First, it clearly warns of the dangers of kingship, the most obvious being that it could easily become oppressive. Another danger was that it could undermine Israel's
understanding of YHWH as Israel's protector. The temptation would be to see the human king as the guarantor of Israel's national security, rather than YHWH. This is why Israel's request constituted a rejection of YHWH's kingship (1 Sam 8:7).  

The second function that 1 Samuel 8-12 performs is to integrate the idea of kingship into the rest of Israelite theology. While chap. 8 raises the problem of kingship, chaps. 9-12 serve to resolve it, while still reminding us of the problem. By the end of chap. 12, the theoretical problem of kingship has been resolved, and the duties of king and people are clear: to keep covenant. In this way, we can see how kingship theology/ideology is to be reconciled with that other great theological motif -- the Mosaic covenant.

1 Samuel 13-15 perform a two-fold function. First is the simple narrative function, describing how and why Saul's house was rejected, paving the way for David's rise. Second, here we can see in example some of the dangers of kingship that we have seen in speech in chaps. 8-12. The disqualification of Saul as king shows that even Israel's king was not exempt from keeping covenant. Again, the problem was with the type of king, and not the institution. As Gerbrandt says (p. 158): "After all, the rejection of Saul does not lead to an Israel without a king but to an Israel with a king who fulfills his proper function."

5. 2 Samuel 7: David and the Davidic Covenant

The next king -- David -- was clearly the paradigmatic king in Israel's history, and a disproportionate amount of space is devoted to him in the Deuteronomistic History and throughout the rest of Scripture. In view of the overwhelmingly positive view of David and the Davidic Covenant, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Deuteronomist was essentially in favor of the kingship as it was exemplified in this model king.
To support his thesis here, Gerbrandt focuses on the way that David is presented in the texts. It is significant to note that, while David was an important military figure historically, his military leadership and exploits are largely ignored (in relative terms) in the Deuteronomistic History. After his death, these are scarcely mentioned, whereas such things as David as a model king, the Davidic Covenant, and the linking of the promise of a dynasty with keeping of the Law are frequently mentioned. Furthermore, even in the accounts of David's military activities, YHWH -- not David -- is prominent as Israel's ultimate warrior. This can be seen, for example, in the language of 2 Sam 5:19: "Go up, for I will indeed give the Philistines[4] into your hand." It is also evident in the contrast between 2 Sam 5:24, where YHWH promises that "then I will go out before you to smite the camp of the Philistines," and 1 Sam 8:20, where Israel had asked for a king who would "go out before us and fight our battles."36

Since several texts speak of David's having been given the dynasty because he had obeyed,37 it is striking to note that this is not specifically mentioned in 2 Samuel 7. However, Gerbrandt notes that the whole context of chaps. 6-7 shows David leading Israel in the cult in obedience to the Law, by returning the ark to Jerusalem and desiring to build a house for it.

Thus we see David fitting precisely the role of the ideal king: by leading Israel in obedience to YHWH and in keeping the Mosaic covenant, and by allowing YHWH to fight Israel's battles.38

IV. Conclusion

To this reviewer's eye, Gerbrandt has had good success in arguing his case. To recapitulate: his argument is that the institution of the monarchy in Israel is viewed positively in Deuteronomy - 2 Kings. It is the kind of monarchy that is to exist or to be
exercised that is at issue. The godly king was one who led the people in worship and in keeping covenant, and who trusted YHWH to fight Israel's battles.

As noted at the outset, this view of the role of the ideal king in Israel considerably eases the tensions usually seen between the [5]Abrahamic-Davidic and the Mosaic Covenants. Almost every discussion of these covenants has noted the differences between the largely promissory -- i.e., unconditional -- nature of the former and the obligatory -- i.e., conditional -- nature of the latter.39 Very few of these discussions attempt any real harmonization between the two sets of covenants, but some do.40 Those that do for the most part emphasize that the Mosaic legislation dealt with the relationships between God and humans, and among humans themselves, and that individual -- or even national -- violations of this would not break the fundamental fact of God's intentions expressed in the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenants. Gerbrandt's work can take its place alongside these, in emphasizing that the ideal Israelite king was to keep the Mosaic Covenant, and to lead the nation in doing so.41 [6]

[7]We should note one significant lacuna in Gerbrandt's work. Since his point is that Israel was not to have a king like the nations in the matter of military leadership (and not that it was not to have a king at all), his discussion would have been much improved by a comparative study of various ancient Near Eastern conceptions of kingship, particularly to show how the military aspect of a king's rule was a central concern. Kings had many different functions, and they were described in diverse terms -- as "lord," "judge," "shepherd," "leader of the armies," and so on -- but it is on the military aspect of kingship that Gerbrandt has focused. To be fair, Gerbrandt is concerned only with the biblical materials, but certainly at 1 Samuel 8, at least -- where the disapproval of the people's request hinges on what type of kings the nations had -- his argument would have been strengthened by a comparative study, or at least by pointing to comparative studies that would support his thesis.
Relevant information is contained in all the ancient Near Eastern materials on kingship -- including Mesopotamia and Egypt -- but the closest parallels are closer geographically: from Ugarit, from the Canaanite city-states with their petty "kings," from federations such as existed in Philistia, and from the small nation-states to the east (Aram, Ammon, Moab, Edom). In all these cultures, the king as leader of the armies was a prominent motif in the literature and in practice. The ancient Near Eastern institution of kingship as a permanent, administrative office, occupied for life and (usually) with a dynastic succession, lent stability to the nation, which would thereby better enable it to meet military threats. The specific catalyst for Israel's request for a king is usually seen as the Philistine or Ammonite military threats to Israel's existence, based on the statements in 1 Sam 8:20 and 12:12, and on the general visibility of the Philistines and Ammonites throughout 1 Samuel. [8]

Despite this problem, Gerbrandt's work remains invaluable in pointing us to a way between the Scylla of seeing incompatible, contradictory "sources" within the biblical texts and the Charybdis of seeing a rich theology of kingship -- out of which spring the great messianic motifs -- being built on a concept that was anathema to God from the beginning. Rather, we should see that God's plan throughout Israel's history included the monarchy as a means of accomplishing his purposes for humanity, and nothing in the Deuteronomistic History contradicts this point. We are indebted to Gerbrandt for clarifying how it is that this corpus speaks to the issue.

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ENDNOTES

* Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt. *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. xv + 229 pp.; n.p.). Portions of this paper were read at the Midwestern Regional Meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, Upland, Indiana, April 8, 1988.

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1. I have surveyed elsewhere the remainder of the narrative corpus and the Psalms, noting the favorable attitude toward the monarchy found throughout these books. See D. M. Howard, Jr., "The Case For Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988) 19-35.

2. Originally a Th.D. dissertation at Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, completed in 1979 under the direction of W. Sibley Towner, and published in the SBLDS without revision.

3[0]. The term "Deuteronomistic History" refers to the books from Deuteronomy - 2 Kings. As used by Gerbrandt and most others, it also assumes some type of unified authorship for all of these books in one or more strata of the texts. I use the term here to refer to the same corpus, but I understand the term "Deuteronomistic" in a descriptive way -- i.e., to refer to those books or ideas reflective of the distinctive viewpoints found in Deuteronomy -- with no conclusions concerning authorship of Deuteronomy or the other books implicit in my use of the term. Similarly, Gerbrandt speaks of the "Deuteronomist" to refer to the author of this unified corpus. I would prefer to use a more neutral term, such as the "author(s)" or "editor(s)" of the final work. For convenience, however, I use Gerbrandt's term here throughout, to avoid the cumbersome device of constantly distinguishing Gerbrandt's use and my own.

4[0]. We should highlight here the too-little-noted work of J. Robert Vannoy (*Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of I Samuel 11:14-12:25* [Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1978]), who, in the course of a careful study of a more limited corpus, reaches essentially the same conclusions that Gerbrandt does concerning the relative military functions of YHWH and the human king, and the appropriateness of Israel's request for a
king (see especially pp. 34-40, 179-80, 227-32); see also below, n. 5. It appears that Gerbrandt and Vannoy reached their conclusions independently, since Gerbrandt's work was completed only a year after Vannoy's appeared, and he only cites it once, in an incidental way.

5. Most evangelical scholars are uncomfortable in dating most or all of Deuteronomy itself to the seventh or sixth centuries B.C. However, few would disagree concerning the basic unity of purpose and outlook among the books of Deuteronomy - 2 Kings. (See also above, n. 5.)


7[0]. For several scholars taking this view that Gerbrandt does not mention, see Vannoy, Covenant Renewal at Gilgal 228 n. 96.

8[0]. Within evangelical circles, a number of scholars have argued in the same direction. Note particularly W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter of Humanity," in The*Law and the Prophets (ed. J. H. Skilton; [Nutley, NJ]: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 298-318; "King of the Promise: Davidic Era," in Toward an Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 143-64; E. A. Martens, "The context of the Davidic covenant," in God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 142-46; E. H. Merrill, "The Demand for Kingship," in Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 189-92; and especially Vannoy, Covenant Renewal at Gilgal. Vannoy's larger concern is similar to that expressed at the outset of this paper: "Was kingship an aberration from the legitimate form of rule for the theocracy according to the Sinai covenant? Is kingship as conceived under David properly understood as a rejection of the covenant-kingship of Yahweh and in fundamental antithesis with it?" (p. 1). His answer to both of these questions is "no." His conclusion is that the covenant renewal ceremony at Gilgal had a twofold purpose: "First, it provided for the restoration of covenant fellowship between Yahweh and his people after the people had sinned in requesting a king 'as the nations' and thereby had in essence broken the covenant by rejecting the kingship of Yahweh.
Second, it provided for the possibility of establishing human kingship in Israel in a manner which demonstrated that the continued suzerainty of Yahweh was in no way to be diminished in the new era of the monarchy” (p. 259).

9. We would argue that Gerbrandt's thesis does not stand or fall -- here or elsewhere -- on the basis of his dating of the Deuteronomistic History. The author of Kings easily could have reflected the same high view of Josiah's reforms had he lived in a later period; similarly, the author of Deuteronomy also could have reflected a high view of keeping the Law (see especially Deut 17:18-19) had he lived in an earlier period than Josiah's.

10. The apparent contradiction between these two verses is easily resolved, as Gerbrandt correctly points out, by noting the basis for the author's praise in each passage: "Whereas there 'was none like' Hezekiah in that he 'trusted in the Lord the God of Israel,' Josiah was incomparable in that he 'turned to the Lord ... according to all the law of Moses.' Thus each was the greatest in his own particular way" (p. 53). He helpfully points to a similar passage not often noted in this regard -- 1 Kgs 3:12 -- where another king -- Solomon -- is also presented as incomparable, in this case with respect to wisdom.

11. We can add here that the second reference to Hezekiah's reform is only a passing one, in the mouth of the Rabshakeh, and so there is actually only one reference of significance to Hezekiah's reforming activity in the three chapters.

12. In 12:20 they are granted their desire to eat flesh, and in 18:16 reference is made to their request for a prophet.

13. A related point that we may add here is that it was not the office of king per se that blocked people's access to God. It was not as though the ideal was for there to be no spiritual leaders or intermediaries between God and the people. Prophets, priests, and kings could perform those intermediary functions. Indeed, we see this borne out in the history of the monarchy: as a rule, when the king trusted in
God and followed his law, so did the people; when he did not, they did not. Under the ideal kingship, the people were to be brought into close communion with God, not blocked from it, as is popularly supposed.

14. In contrast to the absence of such in the accounts of the prekingship charismatic judges.

15. Gerbrandt does not specifically note it here, but it is also instructive to notice that the heart of the commissioning of Joshua in 1:1-9 consists of "spiritual" responsibilities -- keeping the Law (vv 7-8) -- and not military ones, which we might expect, considering the military tasks that lay ahead.

16. That Gideon may have been less than sincere in refusing the offer of kingship is very possible in light of his ensuing actions in leading Israel into false worship (vv 24-27). Some have argued that Gideon actually became "king"; others, especially recently, have argued that he did not. (See Gerbrandt: 124 nn. 60, 61.)

17[0]. We must emphasize here that the mere office of king was no more guarantee of a godly nation than the mere office of prophet or priest, since any of these could be -- and was! -- misused and perverted. But, when the king was living in close accord with the ideals for a king (see David, and the eight good Judahite kings, especially Hezekiah and Josiah), then things did go better in the nation spiritually. The king's influence was felt in the nation in every generation, whether for good or for evil.

18. Gerbrandt briefly notes Mendenhall's views on p. 134 n. 95, but that is all.

20. See especially "The Monarchy"; see also "The Nature and Purpose of the Abraham Narratives," where he traces the Abraham and David traditions to the "old pagan urban [i.e., Canaanite] traditions" (p. 354).

21. W. J. Dumbrell, "'In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes.' The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," *JSOT* 25 (1983) 23-33.


23. And, I would concur with his analysis of the point here.


27. The phrase "to do right in X's eyes" occurs some 40 times in the OT: 30 times it refers to obeying YHWH; the remaining occurrences are with reference to individuals doing right in their own eyes. In addition to Deut 12:8, two references in Proverbs also indicate that this state of affairs is a bad thing. Prov 12:15 states that "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice," and 21:2 that "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart." In the remaining passages
outside of Judges, the phrase refers to individual decision-making in morally neutral areas, and it cannot be seen as making either a negative or positive statement (Josh 9:25; 2 Sam 19:6 [MT 7]; Jer 26:14; 40:4, 5).


30. Although it does cut against seeing the primary purpose of the appendix -- or the entire book -- as arguing for human kingship. B. G. Webb (The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading [JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987]) is one who sees that the book has other purposes; he is somewhat impatient with what he sees as an overemphasis on whether the book is pro or antimonarchical (p. 202).


32. See also Vannoy's trenchant analysis here (see n. ).

33[0]. We should note here that YHWH is often spoken of in Scripture as "judge," and yet the fact that Israel had judges -- judges who were given by YHWH! -- never indicates that he was deposed as judge. Thus, the mere fact that Israel was to have a king was not what deposed YHWH as its king; rather, it was the kind of king it wanted that constituted Israel's rejection or deposition of him.
34. It is hard to imagine Samuel's being as disturbed as he actually was if Israel had asked for a king to lead it in keeping the covenant! In rejecting YHWH as their king, they were rejecting the God "who saves (ys`) you from all your calamities and your distresses" (1 Sam 10:19); it was YHWH who was to be Israel's "savior," not a human king.

35. Gerbrandt notes (p. 158) that 40 chapters -- 1 Samuel 16 - 1 Kings 1 -- are devoted to him, whereas 46 are devoted to the entire remaining history of the two monarchies.

36. Note also that 2 Sam 7:1, 11 speak of YHWH's giving rest to the land under David. This is significant, Gerbrandt points out (p. 171, n. 186), in that this true rest from YHWH did not come under the judges, but only after the rise of kingship and the first king who did right in YHWH's eyes.

37. 1 Kgs 3:6; 11:38; 15:4-5.

38. Gerbrandt concludes his work by discussing a few remaining passages in 1 and 2 Kings that confirm his thesis, as should be expected (pp. 173-87). However, by this time, his point has been firmly made, and these texts do not add materially to the establishment of the thesis.


40. See Dumbrell, Kaiser, McComiskey, McCarthy, Waltke, and Youngblood among those cited in n. . McCarthy has a brief survey of others who have attempted this, too (Old Testament Covenant 49-52).

41. This convergence of Davidic and Mosaic Covenants -- or royal and Torah theology -- can be seen when considering the wisdom tradition, as well. The provenience of a major strand in wisdom thinking was the royal court (e.g., much of Proverbs). Furthermore, the king was to act according to the demands of Torah, which was a special focus in wisdom circles. (See, briefly, D. M. Howard, Jr., The Structure of Psalms 93-100 [Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986] 17-18, 215-17.)

T. Kleven, "Kingship in Ugarit (KTU 1.16 I 1-23)," in Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and other studies in memory of Peter C. Craigie (ed. L. Eslinger and G. Taylor; JSOTSUP 67; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 29-53.

43. Although 1 Sam 8:1-5 merely mentions the failures of Samuel's sons and Samuel's advancing age as the immediate catalysts for the request.