



2002

Three Biblical Beginnings

Michael Carasik

University of Pennsylvania, mcarasik@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/jewishstudies_papers



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Jewish Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Carasik, Michael. (2002). Three Biblical Beginnings. In Aryeh Cohen and Shaul Magid (Eds), *Beginning/Again: Towards a Hermeneutic of Jewish Texts* (pp. 1-22). New York: Seven Bridges Press.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/jewishstudies_papers/1
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Three Biblical Beginnings

Disciplines

Biblical Studies | Jewish Studies

Beginning/Again

Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts

edited by

Aryeh Cohen

University of Judaism

and

Shaul Magid

Jewish Theological Seminary



SEVEN BRIDGES PRESS
NEW YORK • LONDON

Seven Bridges Press
135 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010-7101

Copyright © 2002 by Seven Bridges Press, LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Publisher: Ted Bolen
Managing Editor: Katharine Miller
Composition: Rachel Hegarty
Cover design: Stefan Killen Design
Printing and Binding: CSS Publishing

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
[CIP data here]
Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER 1

Three Biblical Beginnings

Michael Carasik

HISTORY, LIKE LIFE, IS “just one damned thing after another.”¹ To begin telling a story with any particular damned thing is, by the very choice, inevitably to mark that thing as a starting point, just as an event can be marked ritually as an inauguration. “Finally, the beginning is an apparently arbitrary point: that place in the seamless web of events where the author chooses to begin his narrative.”² Arbitrary as this choice may be, however, it is not just a selection, but a shaping. “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily *appear* to do so.”³ The purpose of this paper is to highlight the process of literary shaping as it took place in the Bible, by a discussion of three biblical beginnings—a beginning at the beginning, a beginning in the middle, and a beginning at the end.

Genesis I

Let us turn first to the famous beginning that is at the beginning—that is, “In the beginning.” It might seem that the most obvious method for telling a story is to follow the immortal advice the King of Hearts gave to the White Rabbit: “Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” Given this guideline, to begin the Bible with the creation of the universe would seem the most apropos of all beginnings. As Aristotle explained,

A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something else naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the

contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by causal necessity or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. Plots that are well planned, therefore, are such as do not begin or end at haphazard, but conform to the types just described.⁴

Such a beginning is the necessary starting point for the complete story of our world; but most stories are of more limited scope than this. Consider the absurdity of following Aristotle's advice in the following situation:

- A: How did you come to be at the scene of the accident?
 B: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . .

True, every story that does not begin with this kind of ultimate beginning is in some sense an incomplete story, a mere episode. Thus films, plays, and novels have a "back story," an untold story that explains the existence of the situation and the circumstances at the beginning of the story that is actually told. Yet to begin most stories with the creation of the world would be to introduce an element of absurdity into the tale. Washington Irving exploited exactly this effect, for comic purposes, in his *A History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*. After a chapter-long description of the earth as "a huge . . . mass, floating in the vast ethereal ocean of infinite space," he begins the second chapter of his history this way:

Having thus briefly introduced my reader to the world, and given him some idea of its form and situation, he will naturally be curious to know from whence it came, and how it was created. And, indeed, the clearing up of these points is absolutely essential to my history, inasmuch as if this world had not been formed, it is more than probable that this renowned island, on which is situated the city of New York, would never have had an existence. The regular course of my history, therefore, requires that I should proceed to notice the cosmogony or formation of this our globe.⁵

That the Bible should begin *ab ovo*, then, rather than accepting Horace's advice to plunge *in medias res*, is (as noted long ago by Jewish exegetes) not to be taken for granted.

Yet even Gen 1:1, correctly understood, may not begin completely *ab ovo* (a distinction that belongs, almost literally, only to *Tristram Shandy*). It is curious that the most famous beginning in world literature is one whose meaning is not entirely certain. The grammatical obscurity of the phrase *bereshit bara* leaves open the question of whether, as is accepted by many modern

commentators, the traditional English rendering of the King James Version, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,” is not to be supplanted by an *in medias res* beginning: “When God began to create heaven and earth—”⁶

Naturally, the philosophical and theological ramifications of this distinction are immense. Yet from a literary point of view the difference between the two is fairly subtle. The *ab ovo* opening begins with the ultimate beginning of the universe, but at least the *in medias res* opening begins with the first thing that can be said to have actually happened. Even this distinction looms larger, however, through the lens of literary and cultural history. Mimicking the debate over whether human beings are qualitatively or merely quantitatively different from other animals, the understanding of *bereshit bara* places an interpreter on one side or the other of the debate about whether Israel’s contribution to the world represents a development of the ancient Near Eastern civilization in which it arose, or a radical break with that tradition. From this perspective, the translation that sounds contemporary to the ears of an English reader, “When God began to create,” is the “old” kind of beginning, like that found in the famous Babylonian epic of creation called (from its first words) the *Enuma Elish*. The traditional English of the King James Bible, “In the beginning,” would actually mark a radically new kind of cosmological beginning in the ancient Near Eastern context.⁷

In a larger sense, of course, even “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth” is an *in medias res* opening, for beginning always implies the existence of something before. A closed curve, like a circle, has no beginning; but a line, like anything else that starts, has to start somewhere. As the woman who believed that the world rests on the back of a giant turtle explained when asked what the turtle was standing on, “It’s turtles all the way down.” The mere fact that a narrative must begin puts it at odds with the infinite regression that seems to be built into the nature of time. Even the storyteller who wants to begin *ab ovo* can do no better than pick a particularly solid-looking turtle to start with. From this perspective—if it is not *lèse-majesté* to continue the metaphor for one more moment—the author of Gen 1:1 made a conscious decision to begin with the top turtle in the stack.

The sages anticipated this conclusion in Gen. R. 1:10, when they interpreted the three-sided shape of the *bet* that begins the Bible as a barrier blocking access to anything that happened “before” the beginning—a barrier, it must be said, which they themselves sometimes successfully evaded. The comparative material shows us clearly that placing the barrier at that particular point in the story was arbitrary, and therefore a deliberate choice to give the narrative a particular shape. The *Enuma Elish* picks up the thread somewhat earlier in the story:

When skies above were not yet named
 Nor earth below pronounced by name,
 Apsu, the first one, their begetter
 And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,
 Had mixed their waters together,
 But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;
 When yet no gods were manifest,
 Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,
 Then gods were born within them.
Enuma Elish i 1–9⁸

Here, as in Genesis, the story opens on a scene of watery chaos, the hyle of the philosophers. Yet the first thing that happens is not the creation of heaven and earth—that will have to wait five hundred lines or so—but that of the gods themselves. Interestingly, the first mention of creation here (line 9) is in the passive mood. Unlike Genesis 1, where the story is one of active creation by a God who is on stage when the curtain goes up, the *Enuma Elish* begins not with the first action of the gods, but with their generation. They arise naturally, as it were, out of the original conditions of chaos, like one-celled life in the primordial oceans of Precambrian Earth. The Egyptian creation story known as the Memphite Theology takes an even bolder step. Ptah, who (according to this text) created the Nine Gods of the Memphite pantheon, is described as “self-begotten.”⁹ In this telling, the creator-god wills himself into existence and then creates the rest of the universe.

The mention of these alternate cosmologies reminds us that it is not merely where one begins the story that is important, but which story it is that one begins. This point goes somewhat beyond what I wish to emphasize in this section—the effect of the very first words of the story—and it has been frequently discussed. Nonetheless, two aspects of the choice of story are worth highlighting here.

First is the nature of the story told in Genesis 1. Unlike the bloody battle that forms the plot of the *Enuma Elish*, no hint of struggle enters into the creation story of Genesis 1.¹⁰ The creation with which the Hebrew Bible begins, by contrast with the battle royal between Tiamat and Marduk, is almost business-like. This is the more remarkable because we know that the Israelites, too, had their stories of creation as the aftermath of battle. The discovery at Ras Shamra of the Ugaritic epics about the battle of Baal and Yamm (“Sea”) has only made it easier to see the remnants of a similar myth that existed all along in the Hebrew Bible. In the NJPS translation of Isa 51:9, when the prophet apostrophizes God’s arm,

It was you that hacked Rahab in pieces,
That pierced the Dragon

the Dragon is *tannin*, the same as the great sea monsters (*tanninim*) created by God, incidentally with all other kinds of marine life, in Gen 1:21. Again, Ps 74:13 has God splitting the sea by force as in the Baal epic, not calmly decreeing the separation as in Gen 1:9. The God we meet in Genesis 1 is very different from the God we might have met had the Bible begun with battle, not (as in Gen 1:28) with blessing.¹¹

So much for the road not taken; but, in Genesis 2, the Bible generously provides us with a road *also* taken. That is, the story of creation is told over again starting in Gen 2:4—not for the sake of those who missed it the first time, but in a totally different voice that simultaneously fleshes out and subtly alters the original story. In context, the motifs of the first story are transferred in the second story, like the themes of a symphony, to instruments of a different timbre. It is interesting, for example, to see how the cherubs and the flaming, ever-turning sword that block the expelled Adam and Eve from the garden mimic the temporal frame of Gen 1:1 (or, with Genesis Rabba, the *bet* of *bereshit*) that blocks us from any access to what came before. Again, this is a standard topic of biblical exegesis, and not our major concern here. Rather, it is the untold stories that are silenced by Genesis 1 that claim our attention.

We have spoken of Gen 1:1 as a verse behind which the mystery of God's own existence is hidden, but there is someone else hidden behind the frame of this verse as well: its author. "When God began to create the heavens and the earth . . ." As the vaudeville comedians used to say, in words similar to if more colloquial than those God addresses to Job in Job 38:4, *Vas you dere, Cholly?* On what authority do we have this description of events at which, by definition, no human being could have been present? To be sure, the scene could have been shown to a human being through prophecy, but in this case we would expect some introductory words to serve as a form of authentication:

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he envisioned about Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (Isa 1:1)

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, who had the word of the LORD in the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (Jer 1:1f.)

In this respect, the introduction to the Memphite Theology is quite interesting:

. . . This writing was copied out anew by his majesty in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, for his majesty found it to be a work of the ancestors which was worm-eaten, so that it could not be understood from beginning to end. His majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last. . . .¹²

One source of authority for this story is given, and a second is implied. First, the story has been passed down from the ancients, a tradition so old (and, thus, accepted for so long) that the physical manuscript that preserves it has seriously deteriorated. Second, the text is restored/recreated by the King of Egypt, who, as Horus, is himself a manifestation of Ptah, the “self-begotten.”¹³ My point is not that this is so convincing that we, too, must accept the truth of the Memphite Theology, but that the author of this text began it in a way calculated to lend the necessary authority to it.¹⁴ Genesis 1 has no such introduction.

We may cite one more example, where the very same story that begins the Bible is retold, but not before the following lines of introduction:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
 Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater man
 Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
 Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of chaos; or if Sion hill
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
 Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song. . .
 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, i. 1–13

Moses (“that shepherd who first taught the chosen seed”) was inspired by the Muse!

Regina Schwartz observes of Milton's work in *Paradise Lost*,

[H]e is not certain that beginnings are accessible, and, if they are, he is not sure that they can be expressed guiltlessly. His creation stories are always

mediated—by accounts and accounts of accounts—by Raphael, by Uriel, by angelic hymns, by the reconstructions of memory, and by a theory that casts doubt on the ability of language to convey origins at all.¹⁵

That comes through very strikingly here in the first few lines of the poem, where it is not clear whether the Muse's aid came to Moses from Sinai or from "Oreb" (Horeb, not Sinai, is the name of the site of revelation in Deuteronomy), and whether it will come to Milton from there or from Mount Zion in Jerusalem and "Siloa's brook that flowed / Fast by the oracle of God." This is not the only confusion that attends the beginning of the poem, for in line 17 Milton invokes a voice which may or may not be that of the Muse of line 7:

And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant. . . .

This is very far from the "natural" beginning of the Bible's Genesis. As if to emphasize the point, Moses' "In the beginning" does not find its way into *Paradise Lost* until line 10, and the "action" of Milton's own telling does not start until line 34, when, after being asked in line 28 to "say first what cause" moved Adam and Eve to disobey God, the Muse or Spirit at last begins to speak: "Th' infernal Serpent."

We have already seen biblical attribution of one's words to a heavenly source, in the introductions to prophecy; but a beginning like this one, which invokes self-conscious reference to the writer's own words, is equally biblical:

Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;
 Let the earth hear the words I utter!
 May my discourse come down as the rain,
 My speech distill as the dew,
 Like showers on young growth,
 Like droplets on the grass. (Deut 32:1–2)

My heart is astir with gracious words;
 I speak my poem to a king;
 my tongue is the pen of an expert scribe. (Psalm 45:2)¹⁶

Gen 1:1, by contrast, is extremely spare. It may be that the lack of an invocation or other introduction was simply meant to forestall a question about authority, which had no good answer. Ultimately, to ask how someone dared write the words *bereshit bara* touches upon the questions of the invention of creative writing and the role of the imagination in religion, both questions too vast to be explored here. We may still ask, however, why our author began his story *where* he did, with the creation of the universe.

Washington Irving's reason, at least, played no role. There is comedy in the Bible, but not here. Yet some of the other authors of Irving's era, to whom he was perhaps responding, may provide some clue. Terence Martin's *Parables of Possibility* describes the fascination with beginnings expressed by American writers in the early years of the country's independence. Thus Jeremy Belknap, in his *History of New-Hampshire* (1784), writes that Americans are fortunate in being able to fix precisely "the beginning of this great American empire"; the beginnings of other countries are "disguised by fiction and romance" or cloaked in "impenetrable obscurity." John Daly Burk, in *The History of Virginia, from Its First Settlement to the Present Day* (1804), "speculates at some length on the universal desire to know one's 'origins' and to believe them 'illustrious, or at least respectable'." Even the notion that God was involved in the nation's beginning finds its place in the title of Benjamin Trumbull's *A General History of the United States of America: Sketches of the Divine Agency, in their Settlement, Growth, and Protection* (1810).¹⁷ The Israelites' consciousness of their people as a new creation may have inspired them, too, to look deeper into the past for their origins.

In the end, the last word on the understanding of why the Bible begins as it does may belong to Rashi's R. Isaac,¹⁸ after all:

Why did he begin with *bereshit*? "He told his people the power of his deeds, to give them the nations' inheritance" (Ps 111:6). For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are thieves, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations," they would reply to them, "The whole world belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to whomever He thought best. According to His will He gave it to them and according to His will He took it from them and gave it to us."

If, as Goitein remarked, the Bible is the story of how the people of Israel won the land of Israel,¹⁹ then the notion of a lone creator God who would turn out to be the God of the people of Israel would be a very powerful one. Indeed, if an American historian could conceive of American history as being under the control of divine agency, why could an Israelite writer not do the

same? We know that such a view was held by the Deuteronomistic historian, of whom we are about to speak; it is not too much to assume the existence of an author who wished to trace Israel's history back into the pre-Israelite past—first ten generations from Abraham to Noah, and then ten more antediluvian generations from Noah to the first human pair (Gen 1:27). Here, as in Psalm 114, the schema of history links up to the schema of creation. For such an author, in all innocence, *bereshit bara* may have been a “natural” beginning after all.

1 Samuel

The second of our three beginnings—the beginning in the middle—is the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel, a choice that requires a bit of explanation. The physical center of a bound, one-volume Hebrew Bible is more likely to be close to the beginning of the book of Isaiah, not that of 1 Samuel. In one sense, Isaiah also lies in the conceptual center of the Bible, equidistant from the Torah and the Writings, and marking, and in the person of the prophet himself, even straddling, the boundary between the Former and the Latter Prophets. (The meaning of the acronym notwithstanding, the Tanakh is really composed of four, not three, equal-sized and conceptually distinct parts.) Moreover, the beginning of Isaiah has long been the subject of discussion. The fact that Isaiah's call to prophecy comes not in chapter one of the book but in chapter six is unique to the prophetic books.²⁰

Indeed, where in the hands of another author delaying the apparent beginning of the book might be a matter of careful structural design, there is no apparent narrative structure in the book of Isaiah. There are first, middle, and last words, but no beginning, middle, and end—none of the literary scaffolding that might have given the book the shape of a story. The fact that, like so many prophetic works, the book begins with condemnation and ends with consolation has implications for the history of the redaction of the book and of the Bible as a whole, but this is not really enough to provide a sense of plot. The beginning of the words of Second Isaiah, the anonymous prophet of the return from exile in Babylonia, is not even marked by an *incipit*; rather, in the first verse of chapter 40, a new voice simply begins to speak, again preceding the actual summons to prophecy in 40:6.

Perhaps most significant for the present discussion is the lack of prominence given to Isaiah's role in the failure of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. (Isaiah 36–37). This event—arguably the most important in Jewish history other than the destructions of the two Temples—might have given shape to the book of Isaiah just as Wallace Stevens' jar upon

a hill in Tennessee “made the slovenly wilderness surround that hill.” Instead, it is told in what is essentially an appendix to the book of First Isaiah, taken from 2 Kings 18–19.²¹ Second Isaiah, to be sure, locates Israelite history in between the two parallel events of the exodus from Egypt and the return from exile in Babylonia. But the details of history—the story line connecting these two events—are of no concern to him.

It is quite otherwise with the book of 1 Samuel, for with Samuel, of course, we enter the realm of the Deuteronomistic History. In extent, this corpus makes up the section of the Bible called the Former Prophets, the books of Joshua through Kings.²² Some of the ways in which this work structures the facts of Israelite history into a story are evident to even the most casual reader of the Bible: the frequent periodization of the era of the judges into chunks of twenty (e.g., Jud 4:3), forty (e.g., Jud 3:11), or eighty (Jud 3:30) years; or the formulaic recitation of the basic facts and Deuteronomistic evaluation of each reign in the contrapuntal chronology of the books of Kings (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:1–3, “In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah became king. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years; his mother’s name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. He did what was pleasing to the LORD, just as his father David had done.”). Yet the Deuteronomistic historian has shaped the narrative of the Israelite past in larger ways as well.

In the Deuteronomistic schema, the books of Samuel, and especially 1 Samuel, describe the transition between the period of the judges and that of the kings. When the book of Kings begins, David is on the throne and ready, for the first time in Israelite history, to pass the crown dynastically down to his son after him. By contrast, Judges ends with a clear statement of anarchy: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased” (Jud 21:25).²³ Samuel, then, is the Deuteronomistic narrative of the transition from the condition of there being no king to the condition of there being a king. Gen 36:31, “These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites,” shows that kingship was widely regarded as an innovation in Israel’s history.²⁴

It is frequently remarked that the material of Judges is arranged to show Israel gradually descending further and further into the chaos that made kingship necessary (or at least inevitable). It is less often remarked, though, that the very periodization of Israelite history into eras of judges and kings—a periodization still followed in political histories of ancient Israel—is a construct of the narrative of the Deuteronomistic History, and *not* the only possible way of looking at the Israelite past. It was, after all, not David or Saul who was the first king of Israel, but Gideon’s by-blow, Abimelech. He was proclaimed king

at Shechem (Jud 9:6), just as Solomon's son Rehoboam would later attempt to be (1 Kgs 12:1). That Abimelech's rule was on a national, not just a local, scale is indicated by Jud 9:22, "Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years."²⁵ There are even indications that Abimelech's rule was the result of a dynastic struggle, like Solomon's. In Jud 9:2 he asks the citizens of Shechem, "Which do you think better—that 70 men should rule²⁶ you, all the sons of Jerubbaal, or that a single man should rule you?" Jud 8:18 further hints that even Gideon/Jerubbaal was already recognized as a king.²⁷ It is probable that, like the rulers of Canaanite city-states in Genesis 14 and in the Amarna letters, other petty rulers in the groups that would one day comprise Israel also called themselves by the name "king." But the Deuteronomistic History was determined to present kingship as a new thing in Israel.

Yet Saul's kingship, shortly to be taken from him and transferred permanently to David and his descendants, was not merely a new beginning in Israelite political history. In its biblical literary context, coming as it does halfway through the Deuteronomistic History, it is very much what we have called it, a beginning in the middle. We have already seen that the book of Judges was literarily arranged (and chronologically rearranged when necessary) to paint Israelite history as a descent into anarchy, summed up in the book's final verse by the words "In those days there was no king in Israel"—a statement that, in context, cries out for a sequel. The sequel, of course, is provided by 1 Samuel.

Paradoxically, the continuity of 1 Samuel 1 with the period of the Judges that preceded it is emphasized by a break in the literary pattern. Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses, and the immediately following book of Joshua begins with the words *va-yehi acharei mot moshe*. Joshua ends with Joshua's death and the immediately following book of Judges begins with the words *va-yehi acharei mot yehoshua*. 1 Samuel ends with the death of Saul, and 2 Samuel begins with the words *va-yehi acharei mot sha'ul*. Admittedly the division of Samuel into two books was not part of its composition. Nonetheless, the comparison with Josh 1:1 and Jud 1:1 shows 2 Sam 1:1 to be an original structuring device of the Deuteronomistic History, a device deliberately not used in 1 Sam 1:1. For 1 Sam 1:1 ("There once was a man . . .") does not sound like the beginning of a book; it sounds like the beginning of a story.

This again becomes clear by comparison with other texts within the Deuteronomistic History. The parallel to the beginning of the story of Samson in Judges 13 is particularly clear. Both stories begin with the words "There once was a certain man from . . . whose name was . . ." (1 Sam 1:1, Jud 13:2²⁸). The plots of both stories begin with a barren woman who is promised

a child. Moreover, in both cases the promised son is not to be of the ordinary run of men, but dedicated in some fashion to God—Samson as a *nazir* from birth, avoiding alcohol and impure foods; Samuel, at his mother Hannah’s initiative, to be given to the LORD for life (once weaned). Of both it is said—in Samson’s case by an angel’s command, in Samuel’s by his mother’s promise—“No razor shall touch his head” (Jud 13:5, 1 Sam 1:11).²⁹ Most significantly, both of these holy children will grow up to be the leader of Israel (Jud 16:31, 1 Sam 12:2). Yet here the similarities end. Samson’s story is just that: an episode in the book of Judges. Samuel’s puts him in place to play a key role in the transition to monarchy.

There is another story in the material that concerns us that begins with a similar phrase: “There once was a man from Benjamin whose name was Kish” (1 Sam 9:1).³⁰ Again, the comparison is more than stylistic. It is Saul who, in this reading of Israelite history, will become the first king. Yet he makes a relatively late and inglorious entry into a story that might logically have begun with him—as, in another telling, it no doubt once did. This earlier telling still leaves its trace in the declaration of Saul’s superior qualities (NJV, “He was an excellent young man [*bachur va-tov*]; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he”) and his kingly stature (“taller from the shoulders up than all the rest of the people”; both 1 Sam 9:2). Yet despite this praise, the story that now introduces him to the page of history frames him as small, lost, and buffeted by the winds of chance. When we first meet him, he is sent looking for his father’s lost asses, a humble enough task. They are ultimately found, but not by Saul, presaging the lack of success and inability to complete a task which—in the eyes of the Deuteronomistic historian—will characterize Saul’s life. It is Saul’s servant, not he, who has some plan (1 Sam 9:6) and even has control of their money (v. 8); and of course it is Samuel who, already the day before, has been not only warned by the LORD of Saul’s arrival, but instructed to anoint him as ruler of Israel.

This is all the more curious because the actual beginning of 1 Samuel, the beginning of the story of Samuel himself, has Saul’s name written all over it. I mean this, of course, in the most literal possible way. The root שָׁל, “ask” (in a variety of senses), appears too frequently in this story to be coincidental. It is found nine times, all in connection with the child whose birth is the focus of the chapter. In 1 Sam 1:17, after realizing that Hannah was not drunk but praying from the depths of her heart for a child, Eli the priest tells her, “Go in peace. May the God of Israel grant the request [*shelatekh*]³¹ that you have made [*asher sha’alti*] of him.” Eli’s statement is recalled when, in v. 27, Hannah brings the child to Shiloh, “This is the boy I prayed for, and the LORD granted the request [*she’elati*] which I made [*asher sha’alti*] of him,” and again

in 2:20 when Eli blesses Elkanah and Hannah, wishing her children of her own, saying to Elkanah, “May the LORD grant you offspring from this woman in place of the loan [*ha-she’elah*] which she made [*asher sha’al*]³² to the LORD.” The child’s very naming (in 1:20) highlights the discrepancy: “She named him Samuel, for ‘I requested him [*she’iltiv*] from the LORD’.” NJPS³³ explains this name as connected with “*sha’ul me’el* ‘asked of God’,” but the use of “LORD” rather than “God” in the etymology seems, in context, to deliberately emphasize the inappropriateness of the link with Samuel and, as a consequence, the true connection with Saul.³⁴ Finally, as if this were not enough, the chapter ends by Hannah’s telling Eli about her son, “I hereby lend him [*hish’iltihu*] to the LORD. . . . He is lent [*hu sha’ul*] to the LORD” (1:28). It is impossible not to read the words *hu sha’ul* as also meaning what they say in plain Hebrew: “He is Saul.”

Two points emerge from this echoing of Saul’s name throughout the birth narrative of Samuel. The first is that, in an earlier version of the story than the one we have, it was most likely Saul, not Samuel, who was compared to Samson. We have already noted that Saul, too, is introduced into the story with a notice about his father (1 Sam 9:1) like those given to the fathers of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1) and Samson (Jud 13:2). It is Saul, not Samuel (a mere bystander in 1 Samuel 13), who leads Israel against the Philistines, Samson’s enemies. Moreover, it is Saul of whom we read three times “the spirit of God rushed upon him” (1 Sam 10:10, 11:6, and, slightly variant and to different effect, 18:10), just as we do of Samson (Jud 14:6, 14:19, and 15:14). The only similar phrase anywhere else in the Bible is used, in our book, of David when he is anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13). It is worth noting that the notion of Saul-as-Samson has been completely reintegrated into the larger story. In 1 Sam 11:6, the “spirit” that possesses Saul turns him into a berserker, as Samson’s did to him, but elsewhere it refers to something less like the rage of a fighter and more like mental illness. Note, too, that everywhere else the phrase is used, even in 1 Sam 10:6, where Samuel tells Saul what will happen to him, it is “the spirit of the LORD.” But when this spirit actually comes upon Saul it is always “a divine spirit” [*ruach-elohim*], not specifically that of the Lord. The barrier between Saul and the Lord, in contrast to the Lord’s closeness to David, is very apparent.³⁵

The fact that an apparently original story likening Saul to Samson has not been eliminated, but rather reworked into a larger literary scheme, brings us to our second point about the reverberation of Saul’s name in the birth narrative of Samuel. Again, this is not the work of a haphazard redactor who did not understand the point of the repetition of the root š’l; if anything, we must suspect our redactor of laying it on even thicker than the original story had done.

The deliberate overlay of Samuel and Saul achieves a number of different purposes.³⁶ First, it lets the reader know that this is, indeed, the part of the history in which Saul's story will be told, but it eliminates the possibility of framing that history in such a way that Saul himself will be, as he might well have been, the hero of it. Long before he appears on the scene in 1 Samuel 9, Saul already has been given the same now-you-see-him-now-you-don't quality that belongs to his kingship as seen by the Deuteronomistic historian of the Israelite monarchy. The usurpation of the story of Saul's miraculous birth by Samuel foreshadows the usurpation of his throne by David.

Second, Samuel too, from his very birth, is haunted by the ghostly presence of Saul. True, despite the promise of an eternal dynasty to Eli (1 Sam 2:30), Samuel will supplant his sons in the Israelite leadership. But Samuel's own sons will prove no more wholesome than Eli's (compare 1 Sam 2:12–17 with 8:1–3, Samuel's attempt to make his sons judges, immediately followed by the people's demand for a king who will turn out to be Saul). Saul's son Jonathan will in turn be displaced, not, to be sure, because of his own unworthiness, but because the promise of an eternal dynasty will at last devolve upon David. It is the establishment of David's descendants on his throne in perpetuity that is the *raison d'être* of the Deuteronomistic History.

Finally, the beginning of 1 Samuel is not merely the beginning of the story of Samuel himself. It is the start of the story that tells of the beginning of the Israelite monarchy. The literary positioning of Samuel in uneasy balance between Samson and Saul matches the historiographer's positioning of him in uneasy balance between the era of the judges and that of the kings. In the view of Deuteronomy, from which the Deuteronomistic History drew its inspiration, the ideal leader of Israel is Moses—a prophet and a judge, not a king. Yet when the Deuteronomistic historian wrote, the kingship of which Deuteronomy and Samuel were so suspicious (Deuteronomy 17, 1 Samuel 8, 10, 12) was an established fact. What is more, David was both the founder of the dynasty and possessor of a divine promise that his descendants would sit on the throne forever. How to bridge this gap between the real and the ideal was the essential problem of the Deuteronomistic History. 1 Samuel 1 represents a key point in the solution to that problem. Monarchy was indeed, according to this ideology, a new thing in Israel, but it was not an utterly new beginning. Rather, like the story of Samuel, it was a beginning in the middle.

2 Chronicles 36

We come at last to the beginning that is at the end; that is, to 2 Chr 36:22–23, the last two verses in the Hebrew Bible. I emphasize “Hebrew”

Bible here because these verses are in the middle of the Christian Old Testament, not at its end. Indeed, even within the Masoretic tradition, Chronicles was sometimes placed at the beginning, not the end, of the Writings. Nonetheless, in the dominant tradition of the Hebrew Bible, these verses constitute its ending, and that is how we will discuss them.³⁷

It may seem strange to call an ending a beginning (though biblical scholars have made stranger claims), but in this case, it is strictly accurate: The end of the book of Chronicles is the same as the beginning of the book of Ezra.

²²And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by³⁸ the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia and he had heralded throughout his kingdom, and in writing too, as follows: ²³Thus said Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has instructed me to build him a house in Jerusalem, Judea. Whoever there be of you from all his people, the LORD³⁹ his God be with him, and let him go up.

Curtis in his ICC commentary to Chronicles of 1910 says of these verses:

They are not the proper close of a history, but the introduction; hence their true place is in Ezr. 1^{1-3a}. 1 and 2 Chronicles originally formed with Ezra one work, and in the separation this paragraph was allowed to remain in each either by chance, or as an evidence that the two writings were originally one, or with less probability, it may have been appended to 2 Chronicles to give a more hopeful close to the book (even as 2 Kings closes with a notice of the release of Jehoiachin).⁴⁰

The assumption that these verses are indeed a beginning and not a conclusion, though Curtis does not say so, is no doubt based on the fact that the phrase “In the *n*th year . . .” (usually of a king) is not merely used for dating purposes, but serves some fifty or sixty times as the beginning of a biblical passage. This can be so even when, as in our passage (both in Chronicles and in Ezra), the word begins with a conjunction: “*And* in the first year. . .”.⁴¹ Hence one cannot rest too great an interpretive burden on this *and*; it is the overlap of words, not the conjunction, that seems to emphasize the historical continuity between Chronicles and Ezra.

The assumption that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah form a single historical work is still current, but it is no longer (as it was in Curtis’ day) the scholarly consensus.⁴² It would seem, then, that this was not an original link that was subsequently broken, but that the Chronicler (or someone later) de-

liberately copied these phrases from Ezra 1. A second, somewhat different, Aramaic version of this decree is found in Ezra 5:13–15 and 6:3–5, which might have been used instead; so it is clear that the link with Ezra 1 was deliberately forged.

There is another somewhat unusual beginning to be remarked on in these verses. That is the identification of the decree as having been promulgated “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia.” But Cyrus had been king of Persia for twenty years before he conquered Babylon and with it the power to issue a decree concerning the Judeans exiled there. Yet all four of the biblical sources for the decree, including the Aramaic versions of it in Ezra 5:13–15 and 6:3–5, the latter purporting to be a copy of an official Persian government document, all date it to the *first* year of King Cyrus. To be sure, the citation in Ezra 5:13 gives the clue to the idea underlying the dating of the decree to Cyrus’ first year, for it calls him “Cyrus king of Babylon.” The years before Cyrus stepped onto the stage of biblical history, before he became King of Babylon, are unimportant.

This would be a simple enough solution to the problem if all four texts called him King of Babylon, but they do not. It seems likely that there is something else going on here. Rather, the deliberate combination in 2 Chr 36:22 and Ezra 1:1 of the “first year” with Cyrus’ identification as King of Persia suggests that the decree was understood to mark the beginning of a new historical era, the one we now call the Persian period of Jewish history. From the perspective of its author, however, this period must have looked somewhat different. If the Chronicler himself added these words to conclude his book, then it was almost certainly done during the period of Persian rule. If a later author added them, however, this would most likely not have happened until the Persian period was over. Indeed, though the latest texts in the Bible were written almost two centuries after Alexander conquered the province of “Beyond the River” from the Persians, there is, surprisingly, no mention of this fact, or of Alexander, in the biblical text. The biblical perspective, then, was that the historical period inaugurated in “the first year of Cyrus king of Persia” was considered to be ongoing—the contemporary period, if you will. Simply put, it was the era of the Return to Zion.

I say the Return to Zion, not the Second Temple period, even though the explicit purpose of the decree is the achievement of what Cyrus owed to “the God of Heaven” for giving him “all the kingdoms of the earth”: “He charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, Judea.” (The addition of “Judea” here is a nice touch. Perhaps it was intended to lend authenticity to the decree, as if there were as many Jerusalems in Persia as there are Springfields in the United States, and Cyrus had trouble keeping track of them all.) Indeed, the

context of the Aramaic reference to the decree is a challenge (in Ezra 5:3) by Tattenai, the provincial governor, and his colleagues to the legality of the rebuilding. The memorandum retrieved from the government files at Ecbatana (Ezra 6:2) goes into specific detail: “Let the house be rebuilt, a place for offering sacrifices, with a base built up high. Let it be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, with a course of unused timber for each three courses of hewn stone. The expenses shall be paid by the palace” (Ezra 6:3 f., NJV translation).

Nonetheless, the placement of this “beginning” at the end of Chronicles has something other than the rebuilding of the Temple in mind. One is not immediately aware of it when reading the passage in Chronicles, but comparison with Ezra 1:1–4 shows instantly that the Chronicles citation of the decree is truncated. Not that it is merely an abbreviated version of the Ezra passage, it is literally cut off in the middle of a sentence. Picking up near the end of the overlap, the Ezra text reads, “Whoever there be of you from all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, Judea, and let him build the house of Yahweh, God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:3). It continues with instructions for the support of the returnees. But the Chronicles text breaks off abruptly after the word *wěyā’al*: “Whoever of you from all his people, the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up—” The book of Chronicles, and hence the entire Hebrew Bible, ends in the middle of a sentence.

It is not that the Chronicles text wanted to omit any mention of the Temple. As we have already pointed out, the building of the Temple is referred to in 2 Chr 36:23, before the truncation, as the purpose of the decree from Cyrus’ viewpoint. Indeed, this may well have been so. The famous Cyrus Cylinder makes clear that it was very much part of Cyrus’ policy—and, for all we know, of his sincere personal belief—to attribute his success to whoever was worshipped as chief god by the various groups under his rule, and to reconstruct their temples.⁴³ But by eliminating Jerusalem as the indirect object of the verb, the Chronicler (if indeed it was he) focuses attention purely on the process of “going up.”

Clines interprets the phrase “go up to Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:3), found in the fuller version of the decree, not in the typical sense of going up to Jerusalem as an elevated place, but (following a suggestion of G. R. Driver with reference to occurrences of the verb in four narrative passages) to mean “go up country,” that is, north, “following the Euphrates route northward before striking out to the west.”⁴⁴ Apart from the difficulties in Driver’s original suggestion—it is difficult to see why “up” should mean “north” in a geographical conception where east is in front and south to the right—this shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what voice is speaking in at least this version of

the decree. It is not Cyrus the head of the Persian empire telling the exiles, “Go north, young man!”; the Aramaic versions of the decree make no explicit reference to the return. Rather, the speaker of the decree is Cyrus to whom Yahweh gave “all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Chr 36:23), that is, Cyrus who is the LORD’s “anointed” (Isa 45:1). Thus, the religious-metaphorical use of *alah* is completely appropriate and was certainly intended. It is the same as is found in Ezra 2:1 (= Neh 7:6), 2:59 (= Neh 7:61), and Neh 7:5, a further indication that Ezra is the original source of the passage.

The truncation of the beginning of Ezra at the end of Chronicles, then, points to the return from exile as the focus of this passage. Like the wedding that precedes the “happily-ever-after” ending of a fairy tale, the return to Zion is a culmination that implies a new beginning. Like the marriage that follows the fairy-tale wedding, what will happen after the return is a different kind of event, not part of the “story.” I do not mean to suggest that the selection of such an ending is entirely arbitrary, only to point out that the composition of a frame changes how we look at what is inside the frame and what is outside.⁴⁵

A moment’s consideration of Second Isaiah makes clear why the beginning of the return to Zion makes such a good frame for a story. One of the things we look for in a frame is symmetry. If the exiles had thought of themselves as people who had been uprooted from a land where they had lived since time immemorial, the most satisfying conclusion would have been the first sight of the recovered homeland, or the first footfall on its soil. But their story was that of a people whose identity was forged on the foreign soil of Egypt and tempered in the heat of a desert journey to a land promised to their immigrant ancestors. Second Isaiah explicitly frames the return from Babylonia as a second exodus. Thus it is appropriate for Chronicles to end as the story of the original exodus does, with the Israelites not home, but on the point of going there.⁴⁶

The Torah ends with Moses’ death. If anything is appropriate as a narrative conclusion, certainly the end of a human life is. Yet the circumstances of Moses’ death demand a sequel, a new beginning. This we find in the book of Joshua, where the Deuteronomistic History describes the Israelite conquest of the land and allocation of it to the various tribes. Just as with the deterioration into anarchy during the period of the Judges, this was a structure artificially imposed on a real history that was considerably more chaotic. In the case of Chronicles, we do not know at what point the concluding words were added or, indeed, when Chronicles itself was written. Certainly the Temple had already been rebuilt,⁴⁷ and yet that renewal—a different and in some ways more obvious point of new beginning—was not made the conclusion of Chronicles. It seems likely, then, that this ending was a response to literature,

not history. The return from Babylonian exile is the end of the long story that began with the command “Get thee up” to Abraham (Gen 12:1)—or perhaps, indeed, with the command “Let there be light,” which, according to Gen 1:3, inaugurated the world under the control of the one who would ultimately be God of Israel. With the end of that story, the “contemporary” period could begin.

One final beginning (if that is not an oxymoron) must occupy our attention before this survey is over. It is indicated by the reference to Jeremiah in 2 Chr 36:22, indicating a rereading of earlier literature as a guide to history. This is certainly not the earliest reuse of a biblical text; inner-biblical allusion had gone on even before the exile. Yet its use here nicely synchronizes the return to Zion and the end of the Bible (as a piece of literature) with the beginning of the tendency that has characterized Judaism ever since as a religion of the book, of the rereading of earlier texts for contemporary inspiration. The same beginning, that is, that marked the end of the “biblical” period from the standpoint of Second Temple historiography also marks the inception—if as yet only in embryo—of the rabbinic period. In this final sense too, then, the ending of the Bible—like every ending that shapes a story—marks a beginning as well.

Notes

1. It is not clear who is responsible for this witticism; the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (3rd ed., 365:5) cites an attribution to the American writer Frank Ward O'Malley but reports another to Elbert Hubbard.
2. Francis M. Dunn, “Introduction: Beginning at Colonus,” in *Beginnings in Classical Literature*, edited by Francis M. Dunn and Thomas Cole, Yale Classical Studies 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 11 f.
3. Henry James' preface to *Roderick Hudson*, cited by Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 176.
4. Aristotle, *Poetics*, vii, 1450b, trans. C. S. Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic*, 148 f., cited in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 184.
5. Chapter Three of the book goes on to explain, in the same vein, that Noah allotted Africa, Asia, and Europe to his three sons; the fourth quarter of the globe, the Americas, would not have escaped discovery so long if only Noah had had a fourth son to give it to. For further discussion of this aspect of Irving's book, see Terence Martin, *Parables of Possibility: The American Need for Beginnings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 18 f.

6. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). NEB and NRSV combine both readings: "In the beginning, when. . ." The Jewish translators were less bound to the traditional English translation, and they had traditional support of their own for the "new" translation in Rashi's commentary. For the argument that the implicit understanding of the text in this fashion long preceded Rashi, see P. Schäfer, "Berēšit bārā' 'ēlōhīm: zur Interpretation von Genesis 1,1 in der rabbinischen Literatur," *JSJ* 2 (1971): 161–66.
7. For a recent defense of the "In the beginning" translation and its radical uniqueness, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, translated by John J. Scullion (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1984), 93–98. He associates Gen 1:2 with the old kind of beginning with a temporal clause; unfortunately for his argument, the only word in the Hebrew text that could actually serve this function is **בְּרֵאשִׁית** which of course comes at the beginning of v. 1, not v. 2.
8. This translation is from Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 233.
9. For this text, see Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–80), 1:51–57.
10. The Memphite Theology may also suggest that creation began with a struggle; see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:52, ll. 7–8.
11. For a fuller discussion, see Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Gen. R. 1:10, too, notes that the story begins with blessing, in its observation that the first letter of the text is the **ב** of **בְּרֵאשִׁית**, not the **א** of **אֲדִירָה** ("cursing").
12. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:52, ll. 1–2.
13. *Ibid.*, 56 n. 2.
14. This statement of authority was so successful that Egyptologists, too, were convinced by it; Lichtheim herself (*ibid.*, 3:5, citing F. Junge, *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 29 [1973]: 195–204) has now been persuaded that the Memphite Theology is actually pseudepigraphic and to be dated to the New Kingdom.
15. Regina M. Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.
16. Both translations are those of the NJPS. Ps 45:1 is a title or technical note; thus v. 2 is the actual beginning of the poem.
17. Martin, *Parables of Possibility*, "Fixing a Beginning," 3–43.
18. See similarly *Tanhuma Ber.* (Buber) 11. The subject is addressed somewhat differently in *Cant. R.* 1:28.
19. S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Scripture* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh Press, 1957), 18 (Hebrew).
20. Amos alludes to his call in Amos 7:15, but this is an aside to Amaziah, not a structural element of the book.
21. Even on the view of Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), esp. 47–118, who sees these chapters as original to Isaiah and "the pivot

- on which the entire tradition process turns” (208), the events of 701 give the book viewed synchronically as literature only the most rudimentary structure.
22. Noth’s original proposal includes Deuteronomy as part of the Deuteronomistic History, and many still follow this definition. In practice, however, the term is often used as a scholarly-sounding substitute for the Hebrew **נְבִיאִים רְאִשׁוֹנִים**. In any case, it would seem that the framing of Deuteronomy as Moses’ farewell address sufficiently distinguishes it from the other books as to suggest that the name “Deuteronomistic History” be reserved for Joshua-Kings only. Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 153 n. 18, points out the remarkable fact that the job of matching Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic editorial strata remains to be accomplished.
 23. See also Jud 17:6, as well as 18:1 and 19:1.
 24. The fact that one of the Edomite kings is named Saul (Gen 36:37 f.) is probably a coincidence, not significant for an evaluation of 1 Samuel.
 25. Modern scholars find this verse in conflict with implications elsewhere in the story that Abimelech’s rule was geographically quite limited. Many attribute the verse to the Deuteronomistic historian. This, of course, would mean that the latter (whether correctly or not) recognized Abimelech’s kingship over Israel but denied it. The verb used in 9:22 is **וַיִּשַׁר** (NJV “held sway”), not **וַיִּמְלֹךְ** (“reigned”). On the deliberate avoidance of the latter word, see Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, VTSup 63 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 269 f. n. 3, and references there.
 26. The verb used is **מָשַׁל**, not **מָלַךְ**, “reign.”
 27. See further G. Henton Davies, “Judges VIII 22–23,” *VT* 13 (1963): 151–57, for the suggestion that Gideon, in those verses, accepts rather than rejects the kingship.
 28. Jud 13:1 is one of the “round-number” statements that chronologically structure the book of Judges: “The Israelites continued to do what the LORD considered evil; and the LORD gave them into the power of the Philistines for 40 years.” Jud 13:2 then begins a new Masoretic paragraph. Jud 17:1 follows a similar pattern, but without the word **אָחֵר**, translated above as “certain.”
 29. The Septuagint and perhaps 4QSam^a suggest that the parallel may have originally been even closer at this point. See P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel*, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 53 f.
 30. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 303, suggests that, before being integrated into the story of Samuel and Saul, 1 Sam 17:12 once introduced David in the same way: “There once was a man from Bethlehem of Judah whose name was Jesse.”
 31. The **א** has been dropped from this spelling, a not uncommon phenomenon. See GKC 23f.
 32. The MT has **אִשָּׁר שָׂאֵל** which is impossible if the following **ל** of **לֵה** is correct. The preferable reading is **הַשְּׂאִילָה**, following what was most likely that of 4QSam^a; see BHS ad loc. and McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 80. In any case, the repetition of the root **שָׂאֵל** is clear.

33. Ad loc. n. g.
34. Against this, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 62.
35. Some manuscript and versional evidence has “Lord” rather than “God” with Saul too, in 10:10 and 11:6; but this is more likely to be a deliberate correction to the phrase as used in Judges.
36. See Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 24–26.
37. For the place of Chronicles in the Bible, see Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 2.
38. Ezra 1:1, “from.”
39. Ezra 1:3 has יהי instead of the Tetragrammaton, “May his God be with him.”
40. Edward Lewis Curtis, *Chronicles*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 525.
41. E.g., 1 Kgs 15:1 and 9, 2 Kgs 8:16, and Dan 2:1.
42. See especially Sara Japhet, “The Relationship between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah,” in *Congress Volume: Leuven 1989*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 43 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 298–313.
43. For an argument that this policy was in fact limited to Babylon, see Amelie Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83–97.
44. D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 38.
45. Jack Sasson remarks about the creation story, “we may imagine ourselves in a photographic exhibit where we can only see what the camera can frame.” See Sasson, “Time . . . to Begin,” in “*Sh’arei Talmon*,” ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 189.
46. Marc Brettler of Brandeis University points out to me that Genesis, too, ends with a comparable reference, Joseph’s request that the Israelites “bring up [והצלתם]” his bones out of Egypt (personal communication). Thanks to him also for a number of other helpful comments.
47. For an argument against this, see Mark A. Throntveit, *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles*, SBLDS 93 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 97–107.