

Saul's Wars Against Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Zobah¹

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ABSTRACT

According to 1 Sam 14:47-48 Saul fought against Moab, Ammon, Edom and the kings of Zobah. In addition he fought against the Philistines and the Amalekites. Not much is said about the wars against Moab, Ammon, Edom and the kings of Zobah. Thus, in order to see if indeed Saul fought against these people we will analyze the geopolitical and economic factors which led him to fight these wars. We will demonstrate that by his battles in the east, he expanded the border of his young monarchy to Trans-Jordan and eliminated the threat that came from the alliance between David, the Ammonites, and Moabites. Since the land was very limited the new territories that Saul conquered ensured the livelihood of the people in Israel who were looking for territories to settle. By fighting within the borders of Israel the war against the Amalekites came to protect the tribe of Judah from the Amalekites. By defeating the Amalekites, Saul incorporated an important tribe into his emerging monarchy. Furthermore his victory insured a monopoly on the Arabian trade. Saul's aim in fighting against the Philistines was to break the Philistines oppressions, to liberate large territories which would connect the Israelites tribes. The battles took place at important strategic locations which were important to the two parties and connected the different parts of the country and also had economic significance.²

Key words: 1 & 2 Samuel, Saul, wars, strategic locations, monarchy, trade.

A INTRODUCTION

A summary of Saul's battles against the nations with whom he fought (1 Sam 14:47-48) follows his war with the Philistines. According to the list, Saul fought against Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the kings of Zobah. In addition he fought against the Philistines and the Amalekites. These names are mentioned according to their geographical order. The list refers to nations that are located in Transjordan such as Moab, Ammon and Edom to the east, and Zobah to the north east, an Aramean city state, on the western slope of the Anti-Lebanon mountains. The Philistines and the Amalekites are located on the other side of the Jordan River. This list resembles the list of nations David fought (2 Sam

¹ Dedicated to the memory of Frances Evensky, a righteous woman.

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8:2, 3-5, 12-14).³ Therefore, it is believed the names of these nations were taken from that list and inserted into the story of Saul.⁴ Why was this done? Klein argues that the Deuteronomistic historian wanted to stress the point that despite losing his kingship (in chs. 15-16), Saul remained just as adequate a saviour as David.⁵ However, as we will demonstrate later (contra Klein) there is a historical basis to Saul's wars. While Saul's wars with the Philistines, the Amalekites, and Nahash the king of the Ammonites are described in detail, this is not the case with the wars against Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the kings of Zobah. Hence, this article will concentrate mainly on the wars against Edom, Moab and Zobah which took place outside the land of Israel. In addition we will examine the wars against the Philistines and the Amalekites. Whereas the scholarly work on Saul's wars is descriptive in nature without a serious attempt to see the reasoning behind them, we believe that there is a need to examine the rationale behind his wars. We will try to understand if there were any economic or geo-political advantages that Saul tried to gain from these wars. In other words, what motivated Saul to fight against these people?

B THE WARS AGAINST THE PHILISTINES AND THE AMALEKITES

Examination of the narratives describing Saul's wars reveals that he was mainly fighting on the western side of the land of Israel. Saul fought against the Philistines, his most formidable enemies. He had three major battles against them (chs. 13-14; 17; 28-31); plus battles on a smaller scale (18:27, 30; 19:8; 23:1, 27). The Bible is very laconic in describing these battles because they probably were less significant. Saul's aim was to remove the oppressive military presence of the Philistines. The first battles against the Philistines are described in chs. 13 and 14. Both chapters describe surprise attacks by Jonathan. In ch. 13, Jonathan attacked the Philistine garrison at Geba and in ch. 14 he attacked the Philistine garrison at Michmas. In both, Jonathan fights his father's battles, replacing his father as a leader. Jonathan uses guerrilla tactics with small forces, surprising the enemy from different location. The first attack at Geba signaled the beginning of the bitter war against the Philistines that lasted all of Saul's life. This attack was committed with Saul's knowledge and approval. Since his election, the people of Israel were waiting to attack the Philistines, and one of the reasons Saul was elected was to confront the Philistines' threat. Following the initial attack by Jonathan at Michmas Saul joined the attack. He not only defeated the Philistines in Michmas, but chased them to Aijalon, the modern Yalu, some 30 kilometers to the west of Michmas to the edge of the hill country. The battle of Michmas was decisive; it removed the

³ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 141.

⁴ Indeed, the Lucianic recension of the LXX adds Beth-rehob to our list which resulted from comparison with the list of David's battles.

⁵ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 141.

presence of the Philistines from the territory of Benjamin. The hill country was now dominated by Israel. It was the first in a long series of battles against the Philistines that came to end their oppression, and to free the rest of the land of Israel. The military strategy, the site identification, and topographical description all show that the story reflects historical events, even though in some cases due to theological views the story was exaggerated.⁶

The famous battle between David and Goliath took place at the valley of Elah. A shepherd boy who overcomes the giant is believed to occur in fairy tales. The same is true with rewards promised by the king to the man who will defeat the giant.⁷ In addition, theological elements were added to the story where the defeat of the Philistines does not point to the superiority of the shepherd's slingshot over the battle armor, but to David's faith. In spite of the literary and theological elements that were added to the story, examination of the battle shows that the story has some kernels of historicity. The sling was a shepherd's weapon but armies in the ancient world used it as well. Moreover, the geographic details of the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines in the Valley of Elah reflect knowledge of the terrain. The valley was strategically important to the two parties. Important routes from the Shephelah to Judah traversed this valley. Thus, the battle was to seize control over this important valley, thereby winning the allegiance of Judah.

After the Philistines saw their hero Goliath dead, they fled. The men of Israel and Judah pursued them past Shaaraim to Gath, the hometown of Goliath, and to Ekron. Shaaraim has not yet been identified but it is mentioned in a list of towns in the northern Shephelah district (Josh 15:33-36). Driver suggests that Shaaraim "was presumably some place down the valley between Sochoh and Tell eš-Šāfiyeh. Its actual site can, however, only be conjectured."⁸ Na'aman concurs with Driver and suggests that the site be sought near Naḥal Elah, and an important road that led from Sochoh and Azekah to Gath.⁹ It was the last Judahite site on the way to Gath, and thus received the name Shaaraim "the gate" to Philistia. According to 1 Sam 17:52, Saul and his warriors continued their pursuit westward along the Shaaraim road towards the gates of Gath

⁶ Zecharia Kallai, "The Wars of Saul," in *The Military History of the Land of Israel in Biblical Times* (ed. Jacob Liver; Jerusalem: Marrachoth, 1964), 134-138; Moshe Garsiel, "The Battle of Michmas: A Historical Literary Study (1 Sam 13-14)," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis, Arie Toeg in Memoriam* (ed. Uriel Simon and Moshe Goshen-Gottstein; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1985), 15-50.

⁷ Alexander Rofé, "The Battle of David and Goliath: Folklore, Theology, Eschatology," in *Judaic Perspective on Ancient Israel* (ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 117-51.

⁸ Samuel R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2nd ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha, 1984), 147.

⁹ Nadav Na'aman, "Shaaraim – The Gateway to the Kingdom of Judah," *JHScr* 8 (2008): 4.

and Ekron. In his pursuit of the fleeing Philistines, Saul restored the same territory that was previously added by Samuel (7:14).

Saul went to his last battle against the Philistines at Mount Gilboa with the knowledge that he would die: "Tomorrow your sons and you will be with me" (28:19). According to McKenzie, the location of the battle on Mount Gilboa does not make sense historically. Why both armies went so far to fight, thus the setting of the battle seems fictional.¹⁰ However, by capturing the Jezreel Valley, the Philistines split the central tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, and the tribes in Galilee. Further, by penetrating as far as Beth-Shan Valley and the Jordan Valley they severed the main routes connecting the Israelite tribes on the east and west side of the Jordan. Capturing the Jezreel Valley and Beth-Shan Valley gave the Philistines control over the "Costal Highway," an important link that connected Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Valley of Jezreel was of strategic and economic importance. It played a crucial role in trade as well as connecting the Israelite tribes from the two sides of the Jezreel Valley. Thus, not surprisingly Saul fought against the Philistines there but it ended with heavy defeat when Saul and his three sons as well as many Israelites were killed there.

The war against the Amalekites was another major battle described in ch. 15. This campaign took place in the Negev region. The Amalekites, who were a semi-nomadic tribe, raided Israelite territories during the time of the Judges (Judg 3:13; 5:14; 6:3, 33; 7:12; 10:12; 12:5). David also fought against them (1 Sam 27:8; 30; 2 Sam 8:12). Since the Amalekites occupied the territory south of Judah, they raided Judah. Military actions were needed to protect the tribe of Judah from them. The objective was to bring security to the new settlements that were established by the tribe of Judah. This was also a good opportunity for Saul to expand his rule and influence outside of the central hill country. By protecting the tribe of Judah, he incorporated an important tribe into the emerging monarchy. Indeed, the people of Judah, Maon, Carmel, and Ziph became loyal to Saul after this campaign (1 Sam 26:1; 23:13; 25:2-11) and hostile to David, their own tribesman. Later the Ziphites even tried to hand him over to Saul (23:19-24).

The Amalekite stronghold, Ir Amalek, which Saul attacked, was identified with the site Tel Masos in the Beersheba basin.¹¹ Further archaeological excavation shows that the place was a regional trade center in the Iron I period.¹² The conflict between Amalek and Israel centered on control of the Arabian trade. Saul wanted to control the lucrative trade routes in the south.

¹⁰ Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.

¹¹ Moshe Kochavi, "Rescue in the Biblical Negev," *BAR* 6 (1980): 27.

¹² Israel Finkelstein, "Arabian Trade and the Socio-Political Conditions in the Negev in the Twelfth-Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.," *JNES* 47 (1988): 247-52.

The Amalekites were aware of the growing power of Saul's monarchy and the threat it posed to their trade monopoly. Saul had good reason for destroying the Amalekites. By fighting them, he removed a major threat against the tribe of Judah, and gained control of the Arabian trade. Following the Amalekites defeat, Saul built fortified settlements in the south to protect Israel against future Amalekite raids, which evidently occurred at Hatira, Refed, Har-Boqer, and Atar Haroah.¹³

Saul demonstrated political savvy; the defeat of the Amalekites insured a monopoly of the Arabian trade for him. This was Saul's only total victory in war; he even captured the Amalekite king. Therefore, when the narrator describes Saul's other wars, he uses the word "he waged war" but with the war against the Amalekites he uses the word "destroyed" (1 Sam 14:48; 15:7).

It is noteworthy that the battle against the Amalekites is the only battle God ordered Saul to carry out. Saul was forced to fight major battles against the Philistines and the Ammonites while the wars against Moab, Ammon, and Zobah were Saul's initiative. Nevertheless the religion of the Saulide state was born in the army. Thus, on his military campaigns, he did not go anywhere without a priest. More so, Saul decided to fast during the battle, and ordered the death penalty for its violation (1 Sam 14:24; 7:6; 2 Sam 23:16). Before battle he sacrificed (1 Sam 13:9). He prevented the people from eating flesh with blood (1 Sam 14:33-34).

1 Wars Against Moab, Ammonites and Edomites

In contrast to the detailed description of Saul fighting against the Philistines, Amalekites, and the Ammonites in Transjordan, there is no testimony besides 1 Sam 14:47 that Saul fought against the Moabites. However reading the biblical narrative gives us some clues to Saul's war against Moab. We have to remember that David had familial ties with the Moabites; his great-grandmother, Ruth was a Moabite (Ruth 4:13-17). 2 Samuel 22:3-4 tells that the Moabite king allowed David, his father and mother, and his people to stay in Moab. This hospitality was probably motivated by political calculations; the king of Moab tried to weaken Saul by collaborating with David. Later David found refuge in the court of Achish the Philistine, one of Saul's enemies (1 Sam 27:4-5). It was customary to provide sanctuary for adversaries of enemies (1 Kgs 11:17-18; 12:2; 2 Kgs 25:26). Thus, it is indeed possible that Saul fought against the Moabites in order to extend the eastern borders of his kingdom, and to defeat the coalition between Moab and David, which threatened his rule.

¹³ Ze'ev Herzog, "Beer-Sheba of the Patriarchs," *BAR* 6 (1980): 22; Zeev Meshel, "Horvat Ritma-an Iron Age Fortress in the Negev Highlands," *TA* 4 (1977): 110-35. In contrast, Cohen dates the settlements to the time of David and Solomon. See Rudolph Cohen, "The Fortress King Solomon Built to Protect His Southern Border," *BAR* 11 (1985): 56-70).

The war against the Ammonites probably continued the battle to save the people of Jabesh-Gilead, signifying the beginning of Saul's wars in Trans-Jordan which strengthened his rule (1 Sam 12:12). The two Israelite tribes, the Gadites and Reubenites, were being oppressed by the Ammonites. It is not clear, however, what stands behind the conflict between Nahash and the tribes of Gad and Reuben. Furthermore, why did Nahash gouge out the eyes of every male Israelite in Transjordan? The severe punishment of gouging out the right eye was noted by Josephus who said: "for he cut out the right eyes of all who either surrendered to him under oath or captured by right of war. This he did with intent—since the left eye was covered by the buckler to render them utterly unserviceable."¹⁴ In other words, the shield covered the left eye, so gouging out the right eye made fighting impossible. As for the conflict itself, Oded raised the possibility that the reason for the quarrel between the two sides stemmed from territorial conflict.¹⁵ The kings of Ammon saw the territory that was held by Gad and Reuben an occupied territory. Indeed, this echoes the ensuing conflict between these sides in Judg 10:6-9, 11. In the war against the Ammonites, Saul demonstrated his ability to save Israel. He rushed to save the tribes in Trans-Jordan delivering them from oppression. Saul's battle against the Ammonites is the continuation of the territorial dispute, which started with Saul saving the tribes of Gad and Reuben. However, there was another important reason for Saul to continue his conflict with the Ammonites. Like his ties with the Moabites, David also had ties with the Ammonites. David says, "I will keep faith with Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father kept faith with me" (2 Sam 10:2). Evidently, Nahash allied himself with David during the reign of Saul in order to offset the threats against his nation. The alliance between David and the Ammonites was another reason for Saul to continue his battles against the Ammonites.

As for the war against the Edomites, it was part of Saul's wars in Trans-Jordan which included the wars against Moab and Ammon. The fact that he fought successfully against Edom can be inferred from the presence of Doeg the Edomite at his court (1 Sam 22:9, 18); it is possible that Doeg was an ex-prisoner of war who served in Saul's court.¹⁶ Edom was missing from the wars mentioned in the book of Judges (10:6, 11, 12). The mention of Edom signals the arrival of a new power close to the Israelite border. Family ties between the

¹⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 6.5.1.

¹⁵ Bustanay Oded, "עמון," *EMiqr* 6 (1971): 254-71.

¹⁶ It states that Doeg the Edomite was an official of Saul *niššāḥ 'al 'abdî Š'ûl*. The verb can be interpreted in two ways. Doeg was standing by Saul's courtiers, as the JPS translated, along with Hertzberg and Smith. McCarter says that Doeg was presiding over Saul's servants. See Hans W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. J. S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 360; Henry Preserved Smith, *The Books of Samuel* (ICC; New York: Scribners, 1899), 206-207; P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 360.

Amalekites and the Edomites already existed. The Amalekites were descendants of Timna, the concubine of Eliphaz, the son of Esau (Gen 36:12; 1 Chr 1:36). In the ancient world blood ties were very important, therefore the Edomites turned to the Amalekites. The Edomites probably exerted influence on the Amalekites and controlled them where they lived in the Negev. Thus, a war with the Edomites removed a threat from the eastern border and also a threat from the Negev.

Brooks raises the possibility that since the Amalekites were connected with Edom, the narrator meant to write Amalek, not Edom. However, she points out that the campaign against Amalek was in the Negev, whereas Edom was in the opposite direction, to the east.¹⁷ Furthermore, the following verse (v. 48) mentions that Saul fought against the Amalekites, thus creating duplication. Brooks raises another possibility, that the campaign against Edom was motivated by economic factors.¹⁸ The King's Highway passed through the territory of Edom, which was a very significant route for trade. Edom also controlled the maritime industry at the port of Ezion-Geber –Elath. Evidently Saul wanted to control the trade possibilities in the Gulf of Aqaba. Archeological surveys suggest that at the end of the 14th century B.C.E., and the beginning of the 13th century B.C.E. there was a renewal of agricultural development among the Edomites, the Moabites, and Ammonites. Prosperity and growth, mainly material, took place between the 13th to 8th centuries B.C.E. which was followed by a period of decline that came to an end in the 6th century B.C.E. Since Edom was known for its wealth, not surprisingly, David made Edom into a province, which rendered tribute. Similarly during most of King Solomon's time, Israel controlled the rich caravan trade. The Israelites were able to make use of the copper and iron mines in this area and Solomon constructed a port at Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Aqabah, where he could trade with Ophir and Arabia (1 Kgs 9:26; 2 Chr 8:17).

Edom was a flourishing, wealthy country with many villages and cities. Edom was also known for its copper and iron mines. During this period, people in Israel were looking for territories to settle to ensure their livelihood. The boost in population and growth in agriculture needed to be accommodated.¹⁹ The use of iron and plastered water cisterns allowed the expansion of agriculture in the hill country, and thus led to population growth. The production of surpluses required complex management beyond the family unit; this led to social changes.²⁰

¹⁷ Simcha Shalom Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy: A New Look* (SOTS; Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 114.

¹⁸ Brooks, *Saul*, 114.

¹⁹ Frank S. Frick, *The Formation of State in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Models and Theories* (Decatur, Ga.: Almond, 1985), 26, 66, 138, 191-204.

²⁰ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (New York: Orbis, 1979), 655-658.

By the end of the 11th century the population in the central hill country more than doubled, and other regions of the highlands followed this pattern.²¹ The growth in population increased the growth in agricultural productivity, which transformed the Israelite social structure. Population growth within the current social structure of the Israelite society, where only the oldest son received double the inheritance, deprived many young men from relying solely on farming for a livelihood. The land in the highlands was very limited, thus many young, unmarried males looked for other economic opportunities. The social changes offered a "safety valve," enabling careers in the military, government, or priesthood.²² It is possible that, in addition to protecting his eastern borders, social changes led Saul to fight in Transjordan. Indeed in his rebuke of his fellow tribesman, Saul said: "Hear now, O Benjaminites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?" (1 Sam 22:7). The implication here is that Saul, in return for their loyal services, compensated his soldiers with fields and vineyards.²³ When David became a professional military serviceman of Achish he received the city of Ziklag for his services (1 Sam 27:6). David, no doubt, distributed this territory among the warriors of his troops.

In the ancient world Kings bestowed the gift of land to their servants and soldiers for loyal service. Samuel, in his speech against the kingship criticizes, the future king for taking the best fields, vineyards, and olive orchards to give to his servants. A similar description is found in ancient documents from Ugarit: "From this day Niqmaddu son of 'Ammittamru, King of Ugarit, has taken up the estate of Sinarāna in Ma'raba and has given it to Ibri-šarri, his servant, in perpetuity. In the future no one shall take it from the hand of Ibri-šarri forever. (It is) a gift of the King."²⁴ Similarly, in several Hittite land grant documents from the 15th and 14th centuries B.C.E. we read that a king gave estates, land, and property to his officials as a reward for services or for ensuring their loyalty.²⁵

²¹ Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of the Monarchy in Israel: Environmental and Socio-Political Aspects," *Cathedra* 50 (1988): 21; Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of the Monarchy in Israel: The Environmental and Socio-Economic Aspects," *JSOT* 44 (1989): 59.

²² Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 25-27; Gottwald, *Tribes*, 655-658.

²³ Royal redistribution of fields and vineyards is an echo to one of the abuses Samuel predicted for kingship (1 Sam 8:14).

²⁴ Anson F. Rainey, "Institution: Family, Civil and Military," In *Ras Shamra Parallels* (vol. 2; ed. Loren R. Fisher; AnOr 50; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972), 97; Isaac Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of the Akkadian Documents from Ugarit," *BASOR* 143 (1956): 19-20, nn.11, 13-15.

²⁵ See: Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 92,

Still the question remains: where did Saul acquire the land to give to his soldiers? One possibility is that Saul inherited most of his property. We read that Kish, his father, was "a man of substance" (1 Sam 9:1). In addition, Saul probably confiscated land from David's family after they escaped from Bethlehem (1 Sam 22:1) on charges of treason. Also he probably confiscated the land of the city of Nob, which he destroyed. Wars were a source of fields and vineyards, yet most of Saul's wars were defensive in nature. He expelled the Philistines, but did not conquer the land of the Philistine. The Amalekites, which Saul defeated, had sheep and oxen but not fields and vineyards as they were nomadic.²⁶ Therefore it is possible that the land that Saul acquired and gave to his soldiers were the new territories that he conquered in his wars against the Moabites, Ammonites, and kings of Zobah.

2 Zobah

The Kings of Zobah were the other enemies that Saul fought in Trans-Jordan. However the question to be raised here: Saul did not even control the Jezreel Valley so how could he campaign against the Arameans of Zobah? It is possible that this information was not available to the author of the book of Samuel. Among modern scholars Raviv does not accept the historicity of this episode, since the kingdom of Aram Zobah was established after Saul.²⁷ Budde also does not accept the mention of Zobah, asking if Saul had time to fight the Arameans, since he was constantly fighting the Philistines.²⁸ The LXX changes to king Zobah, in the singular instead of the plural as found in the MT version. The mention of kings of Zobah reflects the historical reality of King Saul's era when the Kingdom of Zobah was loosely connected with different kings ruling at the same time. It was only afterwards, during the Davidic era, that one king exerted his authority over all the Arameans.

Another piece of information that might point to Saul fighting against Zobah can be found in 2 Sam 8:3: "David defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, who was then on his way to restore his power at the river Euphrates" (RSV). There is uncertainty about the expression "*l'hāšîḥ yāḏô*" לְהָשִׁיב יָדוֹ to restore his authority or literally "...his hand" which means to restore his monument as the JPS, NEB and NJV translate. Interestingly, King Thutmose III in his description of crossing the Euphrates and fighting against "that enemy of the wretched Naharin" boasts that he erected a stela on the bank of the Euphrates near Carchemish next to another stela erected a generation earlier by Thutmose I.²⁹ Nevertheless we believe that the first interpretation is

footnote. 85.

²⁶ Ariele Bartal, *The Kingdom of Saul* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982), 116.

²⁷ Hanoah Reviv, *From Clan to Monarchy: Israel in the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 110.

²⁸ Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Tübingen/Leipzig: J. C. Mohr, 1902), 105-106.

²⁹ "The Asiatic Campaigns of Thutmose III," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*,

correct. Rashi (Acronym for Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac 1040-1105) interpreted this as retrieving the territories that he conquered to expand its borders. Indeed, the expression *להשיב ידו* is also found in Ezek 38:12 *להשיב ידך* where it denotes extending one's power for Gog.³⁰ In Isa 1:25 *ואשיבה ידי עליך* "I will turn my hands against you" is an idiom for taking a stronger measure against. Further, the expression "I will turn my hand against you" appears in the HB as a pure threat against the enemies of Israel (Amos 1:8b; Zech 13:7; Ps 81:15). But the question still remains: since when did Israel control this territory? The fact that David went to restore the territorial situation leaves us with the possibility that those territories were conquered during the time of Saul.

To the general statement about Saul's war, one should remember a verse from Chronicles, which describes the sons of Reuben: "And in the days of Saul they made war on the Hagarites, who fell by their hand; and they occupied their tents throughout all the region east of Gilead" (1 Chr 5:10). The biblical prophetic books and Psalms barely mention Saul, and sometimes even ignore him as they do in Pss 78:59–72; 89:20–39. We must remember that the book of Chronicles was not sympathetic towards King Saul. Thus, if it mentions him it is more likely that there is kernel of historicity in this description. The Hagarites were a semi-nomadic people who lived in Trans-jordan. Verse 19 tells their names: Jetur, Naphish and Nodab. The first two names are similar to the names of the two sons of Ishmael (Gen 25:15), and the name Hagarites is derived from their matriarch, Hagar. Though, according to Ps 83:7, the Hagarites were allied with Edom, Ishmael and Moab. The war against the Hagarites describes the expansion eastward. Verses 18-22 describe a war by the sons of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh against the Hagarites. According to Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah*, it appears that this is the same war as described in v. 10.³¹ It is not clear who fought this war. Was Saul's army victorious? Or could Reuben's sons claim triumph? This war resulted in the Reubenites settling in their tents throughout all the land east of Gilead. In other words, the Israelite tribes were expanding their territories beyond Joshua's instructions. This is also obvious from the description of the wars that were waged by the sons of Simon in 1Chr 4:34-44.

C PSALM 83

There is another piece of information that can bolster our study. Psalm 83 is a lament and protest where the Psalmist mentions the names of the enemies that God delivered Israel from in the past. The author hopes that God will deliver Israel in the present. Among the nations that were defeated in the past are Edom, Ishmaelites, Moab, and Hagarenes. These nations were nomadic, thus pointing to an earlier period. Verse 8 continues to describe the enemies among

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³⁰ LXX "my hand" continues the quotation.

³¹ *Gen. Rab.* 98:15.

them: Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, and Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre. Some commentators suggest that Gebal is the Sidonian city of Gebal in Lebanon that is mentioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel (27:9).³² However, it is possible that Gebal is in the area near Edom. Indeed Targum Yonatan translates Genesis 32:4 "to the land of Seir" as "to the land of Gebal." Josephus, speaking of the descendants of Esau says: "These dwelt in the portion of Edom called Gebal."³³ In his writings he spoke of the Gobolitis as part of Idumea. Gebal was an Edomite territory north of Petra known also as Teman. It is mentioned in the 6th century B.C.E. ostrakon found in Hesbon. The *bny gbl*, "the men of Gubla," "the Gublites," the tribe or people of Gēbāl are mentioned in the ostrakon. According to Cross these people are mentioned living in conjunction with the territory of Edom as it appears in the Bible (Ps. 83:8), where they are mentioned in parallel with the Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagarites, Ammonites, and Amalekites.³⁴

Verse 9 mentions Assyria as one of the enemies. If the verse speaks about the historical Assyria, it refers to the end of 8th century B.C.E. which evidently does not coincide with the other enemies and events in the psalm. Here Assyria is not the strong and big empire but a small tribe of descendants of Dedan which is mentioned in Genesis: "And the sons of Dedan were Ashurim and Leummim" (25:3). The fact that Assyria joined with the other nations and fought alongside them, shows that at this stage in history it is a small tribe which appears in the Balaam oracle (Num 24:24). The last historical events in the Psalms are the victories of Gideon against the Midianites: "Make their princes like Oreb and Zeev, and all their chiefs like Zebah and Zalmunna" (Ps 83: 12).

Psalms 83 mentions enemies from the distance past when God saved his people. Thus, he hopes that God will save them again. The Psalms mention 11 enemies, and they surround Israel from all its sides. It is difficult to say with certainty to which period the Psalm allude.³⁵ The Amalekites and the Ammonites

³² Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 274; William H. Shea, "Ostrakon II from Heshbon," *AUSS* 15 (1977): 217-222.

³³ Josephus, *Ant.* 2.1.2; see also A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (vol. 2; Greenwood: Attic Press, 1972), 598.

³⁴ Frank M. Cross, "Hesbon Ostrakon II," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 126-131.

³⁵ The identification of the particular historical situation is difficult. If Assyria in v. 8 refers to the Assyrian Empire then the Psalms should be dated between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C.E. (so Weiser). Reddick on the other hand said the Psalms is concerned with the war that took place in the days of Jehoshaphat, when Judah was attacked by the children of Seir, Ammon, and Moab (2 Chr 20:1). While according to Zenger the Psalms acquired its final form only in the postexilic period. Leslie placed the Psalms between the time of Nehemiah (444 B.C.E.) and that of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.E.) See Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 562-563; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

are mentioned together. This linkage reminds us of the period of the Judges when Eglon King of Moab ". . . brought the Ammonites and the Amalekites together under his command, and went and defeated Israel and occupied the city of Palms" (Judg 3:13). Nevertheless, at the beginning of his reign Saul fought against the Ammonites and their king Nahash. In the war against the Ammonites, Saul demonstrated his ability to save Israel. The Israelite tribes, the Gadites and Reubenites, were being oppressed by the Ammonites. Saul also crushed the Amalekites who were bitter rivals of Israel, after his victory against them they could not harm Israel any more. As the reader recalls the war against the Hagarites took place during Saul's reign and they are not mentioned after David's time (1 Chr 11:38; 27:31). Similarly the last mention of the Ishmaelites is during the time of David (27:30). Psalm 83 mentions Philistia, the name of the land that the Philistines occupied. The Philistines were the arch enemies of Saul who fought them all his life till his death. Most of the names of the enemies of Israel which are mentioned in Ps 83 appear also in the verses from the book of Samuel, which describes Saul's wars. In the light of all these consideration we can say that the Psalms refers to the times of King Saul. Thus it is more likely that the Psalms refers to the enemies against whom Saul fought.

D CONCLUSION

In conclusion, examination of the biblical text reveals that Saul's wars against Moab, Ammon, Adom, and Zobah came to protect his new kingdom from eastern threats. By fighting in the east, he expanded the border of his young monarchy to Trans-Jordan and eliminated the threat that came from the alliance between David, the Ammonites, and Moabites. In addition, he incorporated the Israelites tribes of Trans-Jordan into his kingdom. More so, by the end of the 11th century the inhabitants in the central hill country and the highland regions more than doubled in population. During this period, people in Israel were looking for territories to settle to ensure their livelihood. The land was very limited, thus many young, unmarried males looked for other economic opportunities. The new territories that Saul conquered offered such opportunities. In addition to the single passage in 1 Sam 14:47-48, reading 2 Sam 8:3 shows it is possible that Saul fought against the king of Zobah. Other passages such as 1 Chr 5:10 and Ps 83 are testimonies to Saul's war in Trans Jordan. As for the wars within the land of Israel, by defeating the Amalekites in the south Saul protected the tribe of Judah from the Amalekite and incorporated an important tribe into his emerging monarchy. Saul expanded his rule and influence outside of the central hill country. Furthermore by defeating the Amalekites, he insured a monopoly on the Arabian trade. Saul's main foe was the Philistines against whom he fought three major battles and many skirmishes. Saul's aim was to break the Philistines oppression by liberating large territories and by doing so

connecting the Israelites tribes. The battles took place at important strategic locations which, were important to the two parties and connected the different parts of the country. The battles also had economic significance, such as the last battle of Saul at Mount Gilboa. Capturing the Jezreel Valley and Beth-Shan Valley gave the winner control over the "Coastal Highway," an important link that connected Mesopotamia and Egypt. It played a crucial role in trade as well as connecting the Israelite tribes from the two side of the Jezreel Valley.

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