I. INTRODUCTION

The book of Chronicles has in recent decades become an important source for historical reconstructions of the Persian period. The availability of the Chronicler’s main sources—the books of Samuel and Kings—allows us to speculate as to the Chronicler’s context and goals through his adaptation of this material.

This presentation will examine the portrait of Saul’s household in the books of Samuel and Chronicles, with an eye to understanding the relationship between Judahite and Benjaminite inhabitants of Yehud in the late Persian period.

The paper will focus on the rhetorical value (rather than historical value) of the characterizations of Saul’s house in both Samuel and Chronicles. What was the Chronicler trying to communicate through the Saul material to those who identified as Benjaminites in his own day, and how successful might his rhetorical strategy have been?

I will attempt to demonstrate that the Chronicler sought to bolster Benjaminite support for Judah, Jerusalem and the temple cult 1) by omitting most of Saul’s reign, and 2) by minimizing or omitting key moments of conflict between Saul’s descendants and David’s house. This subordinate rhetorical goal may help explain some of the Chronicler’s more intriguing editorial decisions.

II. BENJAMIN, JUDAH AND THE CHRONICLER’S CONTEXT

Brief Historical Background: Benjamin and Judah

A brief history of the tribe of Benjamin will serve as the backdrop both for the narratives of Saul and David and for the Chronicler’s own context.1 Benjamin’s historic location made the tribal region a scene of conflict and compromise.2 During the amphictyony and united monarchy, Benjamin was a midway point between the

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southern faction led by Judah and the larger northern faction led by Josephite tribes. During the divided monarchy, key Benjaminite towns and regions were sometimes associated with the North, sometimes with the South. During the exilic period, Benjamin again rose in importance as the lone Judahite region that had been mostly unaccosted by the Assyrians or Babylonians. Recent studies by Oded Lipschits and others have indicated that the Benjaminite regions of Judah—unlike Jerusalem and its environs—prospered under Babylonian rule. The stage was then set for conflict between Benjaminites and the returning golah elites, who wanted to see Jerusalem regain its former primacy.

It is not surprising, then, that the Hebrew Bible—shaped by Persian-era concerns—would reflect the tribal identities and rivalries of the inhabitants of Yehud. In the Persian period, tribal identities were still relevant and caused conflict between returnees and the descendants of those left in the land.

**Saul-David in Samuel and Chronicles: Different Phases of Benjamin-Judah Relations?**

With this background in mind, we turn now to the subject of Saul in the context of the Persian period. What might have been the motivations for the Deuteronomist’s and Chronicler’s portraits of Israel’s first king, and how might those portraits have been received?

In a 2001 essay, Diana Edelman asks, “Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?” Edelman considers several scenarios in which the stories of Saul and David as found in the book of Samuel could have been used as pro-Davidide (or even anti-monarchic) propaganda in the early Persian period. Edelman speculates that the book of Samuel might have been the pro-David submission to the Persian court by the golah community to justify Judahite leadership in Yehud: “Since the golah community gained political ascendency in the province, their version has been preserved; whether the Benjaminite opposition also wrote a version of the past to justify their claims to Saulide legitimacy is not known.”

In the 2006 edited work entitled, *Saul in Story and Tradition*, Steven McKenzie, Marsha White, and Yairah Amit present different perspectives on the portrayal of Saul in book of Samuel. McKenzie’s view is that the Deuteronomist’s Saul can do nothing right as king, but serves merely as a foil for David. White, on the other hand, believes the pro-Saul rhetoric forms an original

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3 Apparently, Simeon was later absorbed into Judah: “The pattern of Judahite domination over and even absorption of Simeon is strongly suggested by the Deuteronomistic work” (Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9* [Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 2004], 372).
coherent story of Saul’s rise and pious rule. Amit balances the pro-Saul and anti-Saul material and argues that the Deuteronomist presents Saul as a sympathetic but tragic hero, in contrast to the Chronicler’s one-sided portrayal.

One significant conclusion shared by these interpretations of Samuel’s story of David and Saul is that the story mirrors some sort of conflict between the descendants of these two figures at a later date—probably the Babylonian or early Persian periods. It is reasonable to consider, then, whether the Chronicler’s presentation of these two figures might reflect a different stage of this important intertribal relationship.

What might have been the difference between the contexts of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler? What would be at stake in the Chronicler’s adaptation of Saul and David material from Samuel? Amit suggests that the Chronicler’s “sharpened polemic against the House of Saul” might have been a response to a rivalry with Benjaminites leadership at Mizpah. I agree with Amit’s suggestion as to the historical context of Chronicles, though I will disagree with her reading of the Chronicler’s presentation of Saul. Edelman argues that while the Deuteronomist’s presentation of these two figures is motivated by a struggle between the two houses in the early Persian period, the Chronicler’s limited portrait of Saul is related not to a revived royal rivalry but to the legitimacy of Jerusalem as a cultic center over against Gibeon. Edelman’s observation seems closer to the mark: the royal houses themselves were no longer in play in the late Persian period, but cultic centers were.

Louis Jonker brings both of these factors—leadership and cultic location—into his interpretation of the Saul narrative in Chronicles, but adds an important dimension: self-identity in Yehud in the context of the Persian Empire. Chronicles reflects a stage in the process of Yehudite self-identification, not within a single socio-historical context but within multiple contexts—imperial, regional, ethnic, and cultic. Reflecting on the evidence of this process in Chronicles, Jonker writes:

> It is important to emphasise that these levels never functioned in isolation. The inhabitants of Yehud, and particularly the literati who were responsible for the writing of another historiography, the books of Chronicles, were exposed to all these contexts, and were active participants in all of them.

In his evaluation of 1 Chr 10, Knoppers proposes to synthesize three approaches: those that view Saul as a foil for David; those that emphasize continuity between the narratives; and those that propose Saul as merely an introduction to David narratives. Jonker broadens Knoppers’s synthesis on three levels:

Firstly, the Benjaminites link of Jerusalem and the Second Temple can be integrated into his discussion of the prominence of the tribe of Benjamin. Secondly, the relationship between the themes of monarchy and temple can be further developed, but should also be brought into relation to the theme of rest/peace which is so prominent in Chronicles. And thirdly, the international backdrop

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of Persian royal ideology should also be taken into account in the interpretation of the first two aspects mentioned here.\(^{14}\)

Jonker suggests that the Chronicler’s Persian royal ideology affected his portrayals of Saul and David, “an ideology that stressed the reciprocity of royal care and loyalty of the subjects.”\(^{15}\) The Chronicler was a staunch supporter of Judah and the Davidic house, but he sought Benjaminitesupport for a cult centered near Benjaminites territory. The Chronicler believed that seeking YHWH and supporting YHWH’s chosen king would lead to the desired peace for Yehud, symbolized by Solomon’s reign. The Chronicler’s views of Judah and Benjamin, combined with his theology and royal ideals, are reflected in his portrayals of Israel’s kings—including Saul.

Jonker’s approach, building on Knoppers’s synthesis, offers a rich interpretation of the Saul narrative that takes account of the multi-dimensional context of the Chronicler and his audience. I propose to take this thesis to the next step by examining the Chronicler’s use and omission of the Samuel material pertaining to the members of Saul’s household.

The dangers inherent in an argument from silence need to be acknowledged from the outset. However, it is important to distinguish between an argument from absence and an argument from what appears to be purposeful omission. The Chronicler purposefully adapted the Deuteronomistic material,\(^{16}\) and that adaptation includes prominent omissions—deafening silence, for example, in 1 Chr 20:1—“In the spring, when kings go out to battle.” Suggestions based on the Chronicler’s omissions from the Vorlage can be legitimate, if made tentatively and cautiously.

**III. SAUL’S FAMILY IN CHRONICLES**

In this section, we will contrast the Chronicler’s treatment of Saul and his house (or lack thereof) with the Deuteronomist’s. We will see that the Chronicler’s account of David’s accession to the throne adroitly reworks the order and emphases of certain events relevant to Saul’s offspring.

**Recollections of Saul and His Reign**

I have already mentioned briefly the contributions of Amit, Knoppers and Jonker regarding the Chronicler’s minimalistic account of Saul’s death (1 Chr 10). Knoppers’s synthesis provides a compelling interpretation of the Chronicler’s delicate balance: “Given the prominence of the tribe of Benjamin in the Chronicler’s own day, a prominence the author affirms [in 1 Chr 8:1-9:1], Samuel’s stories about Benjaminites Saul’s demise and Judahite David’s rise were likely sensitive issues.”\(^{17}\)

Saul’s leadership is repeatedly denigrated in 1 Chronicles. At Hebron, all Israel affirms that David was the true leader even while Saul was still king (11:2). Numerous Benjaminites from Saul’s own clan had begun to defect to David while Saul was still alive (12:1-18). Before the assembly, David expresses regret that the people had not “sought the Ark in the days of Saul” (13:3).\(^{18}\)

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16 Source- and text-critical considerations are important, but beyond the scope of this study. Each relevant case will be considered individually.
17 Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10-29*, 528.
The first mention of Saul in Chronicles is the passing mention of the Reubenites’ conquest of the Hagrites, which is said to have occurred “in the days of Saul” (1 Chr 5:10). Knoppers and Klein hesitate to allow this to reflect positively on Saul, since no evidence is given of Saul’s direct involvement. Yet in 1 Chr 20, Joab’s victories over Ammon are considered a feather in David’s cap. The Reubenite campaign could be viewed as a positive reflection on Saul’s reign.

Arguably the only overtly positive reference to Saul in Chronicles is a passing mention of his war spoils contributing to the treasury for the building of the House of YHWH (1 Chr 26:27-28). Klein astutely contrasts this brief positive allusion to Saul’s conquests with Samuel’s condemnation of Saul’s decision to spare the Amalekites’ animals for sacrifice to YHWH (1 Sam 15:9-35). Here, at least, the Chronicler replaces a negative memory—“Saul, conquest and sacrifice”—with a positive one.

*Jonathan’s Love for David*

The Chronicler only mentions Jonathan son of Saul in the genealogies, and in his death (1 Chr 10:2). Given the Chronicler’s pro-David stance, his omission of the stories of Jonathan’s support for David’s succession (especially 1 Sam 18:1-4 and 20:12-17) is somewhat surprising—couldn’t he have crafted a succession narrative that included the support of Saul’s own son? The Chronicler evidently felt that the risk of including these stories was too great.

Knoppers observes, “Omitting all of the stories of David’s relationships with Saul, Jonathan, and the members of Saul’s house gives the writer a free hand to dissociate David from Saul.” By prefacing the narrative of Saul’s demise with the genealogy of Saul’s clan traced to the postexile (9:35-44), the Chronicler exonerates David of any wrongdoing toward the tribe of Benjamin and isolates the cloud of suspicion over Saul and his family, rather than on Benjamin as a whole. Only Saul’s faithfulness to YHWH is tarnished—Benjamin, Jonathan and David go untainted.

*David’s Reign: Saul’s Household and Relatives*

The Chronicler’s story of David’s reign draws selectively from the period of his rise to power (2 Sam 2-10) and the appendix of David stories (2 Sam 21-24), while excluding completely the stories of David’s failures with Bathsheba and Absalom (2 Sam 11-20). The Chronicler, in pursuing one of his main goals—portraying David’s reign as favorably as possible—conveniently excises nearly all potentially contentious references to Saul’s descendants and extended family. Indeed, the Chronicler edits 1 Sam 31:6—which states that Saul died with his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all his men—to state: “all his house died together” (1 Chr 10:6).

*Eshbaal/Ishbosheth*

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19 Knoppers observes that Reuben’s campaign is independent of the rest of Israel; however, he admits that all these independent campaigns mentioned in the genealogies is successful, in contrast to the independent campaigns of Jdg 1 (1 Chronicles 1-9, 398). Ralph W. Klein writes of 5:10: “Such a war is not attested in other biblical passages, nor is it clear how the Reubenites related to the authority of King Saul himself in this battle” (1 Chronicles: A Commentary [Hermeneia series; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006], 163-164).

20 Klein, 1 Chronicles, 495-496.

21 Knoppers, 1 Chronicles 10-29, 530.

22 “The Chronicler settles the matter of David having any chance to profit personally from his father-in-law’s ruin historically by showing that the Jeielite lineage continued well beyond the United Monarchy. In this context, the author can freely acknowledge that the tribe of Benjamin furnished Israel with its first king. The Chronicler can also stress the contributions that the Benjaminites made to the establishment of David’s kingdom (1 Chr 11:31; 12:2, 17-19, 30; 27:12, 21). The lineage and tribe of Israel’s first monarch are given their due” (Knoppers, 1 Chronicles 10-29, 530).
The Chronicler quite prominently omits the war between the houses of Ishbosheth/Eshbaal and David after Saul’s death (2 Sam 2-4). The war of succession would certainly be considered one of the low points of Judah-Benjamin relations in DtrH, so its omission would not be surprising if the Chronicler were concerned about tribal unity.

Chronicles instead replaces the civil war narrative with the account of David’s mighty men from the “David appendix” in 2 Samuel (1 Chr 11:10-47//2 Sam 23:8-39), along with an account of large-scale defections to David prior to his accession (1 Chr 12:1-23). This has the effect of pushing the period of tribal conflict back into Saul’s reign, rather than extending the conflict into the first seven years of David’s formal reign from Hebron (cf 2 Sam 5:5). The Chronicler records David’s gathering forces at Hebron (1 Chr 12:24-41), but glosses over any ongoing strife between the two houses following Saul’s death (12:30). In the Chronicler’s presentation, all Israel was in the process of defecting to David while Saul was alive, but immediately upon Saul’s death, all Israel gathered to crown David king (1 Chr 12:38-40). The “civil war” between Judah- and Benjamin-led factions belongs strictly to Saul’s reign.

Eshbaal is only mentioned in the Chronicler’s genealogies among Saul’s sons—and no offspring are listed (1 Chr 8:33//9:39). The standard view is that the Benjaminitic genealogies serve as declarations of Benjamin’s important role within larger Israelite identity in the Chronicler’s own context. By this measure, Eshbaal is merely a short horizontal branch in this largely vertical list, since only the line of Jonathan continues.

Eshbaal represented for the Chronicler both a blemish on David’s reign and a dark period of hostility between Benjamin and Judah. Omitting Eshbaal from his narrative served the dual purpose of minimizing conflict between the two important tribes and improving David’s image.

Michal

The Chronicler’s lone reference to Michal, daughter of Saul and wife of David, is a single verse in the narrative of the ark’s successful journey to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15; 2 Sam 6). In 1 Chr 15:29, Michal looks out the window as the ark approaches the tent which David has set up for it, and she despises David for “leaping and dancing.”

The Chronicler omits, however, the later conversation between David and Michal, noted twice in these verses as “Michal the daughter of Saul” (2 Sam 6:20-23). Michal’s rebuke and David’s humble response are implicitly connected with Michal’s barrenness (2 Sam 6:23).

Japhet notes that the Chronicler makes two changes to the story designed to diffuse criticism of David. In anticipation of Michal’s accusation of immodesty, the Chronicler adds “a robe of fine linen” to the rather sparse ensemble David sports in the 2 Samuel version (2 Sam 6:14//1 Chr 15:27). The Chronicler also omits that David “danced with all his might.”

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23 Gary N. Knoppers, “Israel’s First King and ‘the Kingdom of YHWH in the hands of the sons of David,’ The Place of the Saulide Monarchy in the Chronicler’s Historiography,” in Saul in Story and Tradition (ed. Carl S. Ehrlich and Marsha C. White; FAT 47; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006), 188.
24 Knoppers, 1 Chronicles 1-9, 492.
25 This section will not address a possible reference to Michal in 2 Sam 21:8b, which is a text-critical problem. The author’s view follows the standard reading of the MT “Michal” as a corruption which should read “Merab,” Saul’s other daughter.
26 Knoppers observes that Michal is not listed among David’s wives in 1 Chr 3:1-9. This may be because she did not bear David any children (2 Sam 6:23)—but it also has the effect of dissociating the houses of David and Saul. Likewise, Saul’s genealogy does not mention his son-in-law, David (Knoppers, “Israel’s First King,” 195).
changes to the story are somewhat puzzling, given that the Chronicler omits their conversation later in the story.

Perhaps the omission of Michal’s rebuke is meant to balance out the necessary omission of previous episodes that would have put her in a positive light. The Chronicler has already chosen to exclude the account of David’s rise in Saul’s court, so he cannot mention Michal’s love for David (1 Sam 18:20) and her assistance in his escape from Saul (1 Sam 19:11-17). Because he cannot include these positive recollections of Michal, he at least softens a negative recollection of her (the ark narrative).

Kindness to Mephibosheth

The Chronicler’s omission of the story of David’s kindness to Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson (2 Sam 9; would have been between 1 Chr 18 and 19), is consistent with the complete demise of Saul’s house in 1 Chr 10:6, and the decision to omit the story of David’s relationship with Jonathan. The Chronicler’s pro-David agenda is trumped here by the importance of avoiding any reminder of Saul’s reign and David’s role in its downfall.

Role of Saul’s Family in the Absalom Crisis

2 Samuel 11-20 is perhaps the most damning material concerning David in all of DtrH. Not only does David commit adultery and murder (2 Sam 11-12), but as his punishment from YHWH he also loses control of his family (2 Sam 13-14) and eventually his kingdom (2 Sam 15-20). It is not surprising, then, that the Chronicler would omit this material entirely. The omission of the role of Saul’s house in these affairs is a happy consequence for the Chronicler.

David encounters two members of Saul’s family during the Absalom crisis. In his flight from Jerusalem, David is apparently betrayed by Mephibosheth, who allegedly hoped that the house of Israel would “restore the kingdom of his father to him” (2 Sam 16:1-4). David is also harassed by Shimei, “a man of the family of the house of Saul” (2 Sam 16:5), who believes that David’s troubles are YHWH’s punishment for usurping Saul’s kingdom (16:7-8). David’s response follows his pattern of humility in all his dealings with Saul’s house.

After Absalom’s death, David returns to Jerusalem and is met and welcomed by Shimei, Ziba and Mephibosheth (2 Sam 19:16-30). David shows mercy to both Shimei and Mephibosheth. Saul is mentioned twice: Ziba as “servant of the house of Saul,” and Mephibosheth as “son of

28 This single mention of Michal is consistent with the Chronicler’s pattern of focusing the criticism on the religious failings of Saul’s family, diverting criticism away from Benjamin as a tribe. Japhet remarks: “Michal’s attitude in this matter reflects the traditional position of the house of Saul: a negative stand toward the ark of the Lord (1 Chr 13:3). Even at the very last moment, when the ark arrives in ‘the city of David,’ the living representative of the house of Saul sticks to this negative, despising attitude – in contrast to David, who does whatever is in his power to ‘seek God’” (1 & 2 Chronicles, 308).

Knoppers comments: “The text should be read in the context of Chronicles, which presents its own distinctive perspective on Saul, his household, and the tribe of Benjamin, from which Saul stems. The fall of Saul results from Saul’s own apostasy (10:13-14; 13:3). The transfer of the kingdom to David results from a divine decision (10:14; 12:24). Recognizing the presence of Yhwh with David, members of Saul’s own tribe defect to David (12:1-8, 17). The decision to retrieve the Ark stems from its neglect during the regime of Saul (13:3). Given the Chronicler’s recontextualization and recasting of older material, a different perspective emerges from that found in Samuel. In Samuel, Michal has legitimate grounds for complaint. But in Chronicles, which depicts David as properly attired and well-behaved, Michal’s contempt is baseless. Her reaction to David, however, is consistent with her father’s earlier posture toward the Ark. In Chronicles, Michal’s attitude reflects badly on her and the fallen Saulide house she represents” (1 Chronicles 10-29, 626).
Saul.” Mephibosheth recalls the deadness of his father’s household but for David’s kindness (19:28).

**Revenge of the Gibeonites**

2 Samuel 21:1-14 is another potentially divisive text omitted by the Chronicler. David allows the Gibeonites to avenge Saul’s betrayal of the Josh 9 covenant on seven of Saul’s grandsons. The Deuteronomist paints this action in the best possible light: David responds appropriately to YHWH’s action and word, and David’s covenant-keeping toward Mephibosheth contrasts sharply with Saul’s covenant-breaking. But it is difficult not to view this action—through Benjaminites eyes—as an attempt to destroy potential Saulide challengers to the throne. Though this story falls outside the “untouchable” tumultuous section of David’s reign (2 Sam 11-20), the Chronicler is careful to avoid this story as well.

**IV. ANALYSIS: THE PERSIAN IMPERIAL CONTEXT**

**An Irenic Rhetorical Strategy toward Benjamin**

The Chronicler’s reasons for his editorial handling of the Deuteronomist’s Saul material were, no doubt, complex and multi-dimensional. We have seen instances in which the Chronicler’s goals conflict with one another, and choices were made to adopt, to alter, or to omit source material. In his handling of the Saul material the Chronicler was sensitive to his Benjaminites audience that formed the primary constituency of “all Israel” beside the royal and priestly tribes of Judah and Levi in the Persian period.

Material evidence from this period would suggest that the Jerusalem cult was heavily reliant upon the participation of wealthier areas to its north. Knowles states, “In a situation where most members of the population of Yehud were subsistence farmers living in small unwalled villages, these individual offerings were probably small, so the temple would need the support of a large number of people.” One of the Chronicler’s goals may have been expanding the temple’s constituency, and thus its revenue and relative prominence. The historically Benjaminites and southern Josephite regions, more prosperous than Jerusalem’s immediate vicinity, would have been an attractive audience for the Chronicler’s message.

In such a context, Knoppers observes that the Deuteronomist’s accounts of Saul “would provide Benjaminites readers with plenty of ammunition to claim that their most famous ancestor and his house were treated poorly by Judah’s hero.” The Chronicler hoped to avoid this conflict by dissociating the two houses and focusing all the criticism on Saul himself, rather than on Benjamin as a whole. The Chronicler focused on the works of David’s public career that had ongoing religious and political significance for the Chronicler’s own context. Saul’s career, in the

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29 Interestingly, the Chronicler—in omitting the conflict and bloodshed surrounding Solomon’s succession—also excludes David’s request that Solomon avenge him on Shimei (1 Kgs 2:8-9), and Solomon’s fulfillment of this request (2:36-46).

30 Knoppers, “Israel’s First King,” 205.

31 Knowles, *Centrality Practiced*, 117.

32 This message appears to be embedded in many of the direct-speech passages in Chronicles. A prime example would be David’s appeal in 1 Chr 29. Knoppers writes (in his comments on 1 Chr 26:20-32): “Major benefactors, whose dedications make their way to the treasury, include Samuel the seer, Saul son of Qish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah (26:28). It seems that in Chronicles any Israelite contemporary of David who was of any consequence and who ever waged war makes a dedicatory gift. In his speech to the entire assembly (29:1-5), David makes a concerted pitch to enlarge this elite circle of benefactors” (*1 Chronicles 10-29*, 886).

33 Knoppers, “Israel’s First King,” 209.
Chronicler’s estimation, had not furthered the administrative or cultic organization of Israel, and was therefore worthy of no more attention than that given to one of the wicked kings of Judah.

The suggestion that an inclusive rhetorical strategy vis-à-vis Benjamin was a primary goal of the Chronicler’s handling of Saul could certainly be overstated. Each of the omissions from DtrH that have been highlighted could perhaps have its own isolated explanation based on other themes or goals of the Chronicler. Considered all together, these omissions—in addition to other evidence from Chronicles that cannot now be expounded in detail—could be the result of a careful rhetorical strategy.

**Reconciling through Renegotiating the Past**

In the early Persian period, Yehudite identities underwent significant renegotiation. The returnees came into conflict with the now-prominent Benjaminite establishment. Intertribal relationships meant that self-identities were complex and multi-dimensional, based to varying degrees on (perceived) ethnic identity, regional ties, tribal/clan affiliations, and ties to various cultic sites.

In this multi-dimensional context, the Chronicler attempted to marshal support for the Jerusalem cult among Yehudites in the more affluent Benjaminite region. To this end, the Chronicler’s portrait of Saul and his household was part of a careful balancing act: acknowledging the contributions of this important Benjaminite figure, while also maintaining Judah’s primacy.

Amit is quite critical of the Chronicler’s portrait over-against the Deuteronomist’s:

> The indictment of Saul in the Book of Chronicles contrasts with the delicate balance of his characterization in the Book of Samuel, where the reader can discern the positive sides of the first chosen king, while at the same time understanding why the kingship was taken from him. In other words, Saul may be criticized while feeling sympathy for him.  

Amit is certainly correct that the Chronicler’s portrait of Saul is one-sided—but so is the Chronicler’s portrait of David. The Deuteronomist’s story presents more complex characters, so that David and Saul both receive a more balanced (if not completely impartial) portrayal. But my point is that the Chronicler also excised quite a bit material that could have made Saul look even worse! I would prefer to say that the Chronicler’s portrait of Saul and his house is *minimalistic*, rather than *one-sided*. This is not “an unambiguously sharpened polemic against the House of Saul,” as Amit contends, but rather an adroit avoidance of a piece of contentious history. By cutting out Saul’s offspring and key moments of tension between Saul’s house and David, the Chronicler would prefer to “let sleeping dogs lie”: to move forward toward an ideal of tribal unity surrounding a purified, materially-supported Jerusalem cult.

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34 This is the subject of the author’s dissertation. Jonker, for example, observes: “An overwhelming number of occurrences of Benjaminite terminology in Chronicles belong to the writer’s Sondergut….The term ‘Benjamin’ occurs almost exclusively (with the exception of five occurrences in Rehoboam’s narrative) in the narratives about those kings who were evaluated positively by the Chronicler (namely David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah)” (“Of Jebus, Jerusalem, and Benjamin,” 8).


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<tr>
<td>Merib-baal/</td>
<td>Kindness to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“punishment” (2 Sam 6:20-23).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mephibosheh</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Chr 8:34//9:40 – Saul’s line traced to the postexile through Merib-baal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kindness would reflect positively on David, but narrative would be an</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unnecessary reminder of Saul-David conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absalom</td>
<td>David opposed by Mephibosheth and Shimei (16:1-8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chr omits David’s troubles (2 Sam 11-20);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>David shows mercy to Mephibosheth and Shimei (19:16-30)</td>
<td></td>
<td>omission of Saulide material—representing intertribal conflict—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibeonites’</td>
<td>David permits Gibeonites to kill 7 of Saul’s grandsons to avenge Saul’s</td>
<td></td>
<td>is a happy consequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>breaking of the Josh 9 covenant (2 Sam 21:1-14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dtr casts David in best possible light, but Chr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full text: [www.thinkhardthinkwell.com](http://www.thinkhardthinkwell.com)
[benjamingiffone@gmail.com](mailto:benjamingiffone@gmail.com)
SLEEPING DOGS: BENJAMIN-JUDAH RELATIONS IN THE PERSIAN PERIOD AND THE CHRONICLER’S PORTRAIT OF SAUL

Benjamin D. Giffone
University of Stellenbosch

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