

## **A Literary-Canonical Theology of the Dynastic Oracle in Samuel-Kings**

### **Abstract**

**Jeffry D. Karber**

Much of the scholarly discussion of the dynastic oracle in the past century has centered on the attempt to identify the various textual layers that lie behind 2 Sam 7:1-17. Therefore, the most widely accepted explanation for unity is to see in 2 Sam 7 evidence of the hand of a Deuteronomistic editor. In terms of its larger literary context, it is often understood as a fragment that has been placed, along with other smaller fragments, between two larger narratives, the History of David's Rise (1 Sam 16-2 Sam 5) and the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2).

The present thesis is an attempt to understand the role of the dynastic oracle within its canonical context, an approach that is here identified as a "literary-canonical theology." This approach is based on the recognition that the dynastic oracle in 2 Sam 7 is found in the midst of a body of narrative often referred to as Samuel-Kings (i.e., "literary") that was received as authoritative by a community of faith (i.e., "canonical") and is theological in nature. The present thesis understands the relationship between Samuel and Kings to be one of a narrative and its sequel. Thus, each book contains its own self-contained plot structures, while at the same time Kings continues the storyline that begins in Samuel.

Given this approach, it becomes clear that the dynastic oracle in 2 Sam 7 forms the literary-rhetorical center of the book of Samuel. The question concerning the leadership of the nation of Israel during the nation's transition from a tribal society to a monarchy reaches its climax in the dynastic oracle in 2 Sam 7, where Yahweh confirms his choice of David as king by promising him a perpetual dynasty composed of his descendants. The rhetoric of the oracle itself

emphasizes Yahweh's active role in making David king over Israel. Its form somewhat resembles the ancient Near Eastern land grant, though there are sufficient divergences from the grant form not to identify the oracle specifically as a land grant. The oracle emphasizes the unconditional nature of the promise, though it contains some elements that indicate negative consequences should the Davidic heir sin. The remainder of Samuel completes the story of David's reign, especially highlighting the consequences for David's personal indiscretions, though the dynastic promise remains intact.

Echoes of the dynastic oracle that occur in Kings apply the oracle to the subsequent Davidic heirs, especially Solomon. The versions of the oracle embedded in the speeches of David, Yahweh, and Solomon highlight the condition of adherence to the Law of Moses for the Davidic dynasty to continue to experience the fulfillment of the dynastic promise. David's righteousness is held up as the standard by which all subsequent heirs would be measured, especially his wholehearted devotion to Yahweh alone. Solomon made use of the dynastic oracle to provide the theological basis for his legitimacy as king and for the legitimacy of the temple that he built for Yahweh. Ultimately, it was the failure of the Davidic heirs to consistently meet the condition of keeping the Law of Moses, especially the command to worship Yahweh alone and to rid the land of idols, that led to the demise of the Davidic dynasty. Yet, even at the end of the narrative, there is a glimmer of hope that the nation and the Davidic dynasty might one day be restored.

The theological perspective that is presented in the theme of the dynastic oracle in Samuel-Kings is that the failure of God's people to respond agreeably to Yahweh's initiative creates a tension in their relationship to God. On one hand, he seeks to extend loyalty and stability to his people, but on the other hand, his people's lack of loyalty and devotion requires

him to correct their behavior by providing negative consequences. The question remains unanswered in the narrative: will God's grace or human sin prevail?