

I Samuel 2:8: The Interpretive Key to I, II Samuel

Biographical Word Study:

In I Samuel there are 2 keywords which revolve around Eli, the High Priest, the first is כֹּסֶס (Kee-Say) “throne” and the other is the family of כְּבוֹד/ כָּבֵד (Ka-Vodh/ KVDh or Ka-VeyDh) “glory, weight, honor”/ “to glorify, make heavy OR heavy, weighty, difficult”.

Eli the priest demonstrates poor leadership and a failure to properly honor God, but instead to insist on his own honor. We first see Eli seated on a כֹּסֶס or throne. He is seated there as he rebukes the righteous Hanna – then he is seated on a throne when his own כָּבֵד glory/ honor/ weight, kills him when he falls off his throne. Eli’s judicature is marked by failure to properly honor God and it is because he honors his sons more than God, the line of Eli is cursed and destined to be wiped out.

In the same way Saul seeks his own honor, but does not properly seek the honor of God. When Samuel rebukes Saul – just as Samuel rebuked Eli, both parties seem to merely accept the judgment of God with no attempt to correct their behavior or repent or seek restoration with God. Eli says: “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes”.¹ Saul admits his failure, but instead of killing Agag or asking how to properly repent, knowing that Yahweh was going to give his kingdom to another, Saul merely requests that Samuel honor him in front of the people. Thus, Saul did not accept that his kingship was lost, and wanted Samuel to reaffirm Saul’s position in front of the army and nobles – from whom Saul had, at best, tenuous loyalty.

The irony is that כֹּסֶס is never used in conjunction with Saul! Fulfilling the words of Hannah, in 2:8, Yahweh gives thrones of glory to the humble. Eli had taken a “throne” to himself and made himself glorious/ heavy. But these were his undoing. Saul on the other hand was given a kingship but was never seated on a throne. He sought to establish a dynasty for Jonathan, but his own self-seeking desire for honor prevented him from attaining a throne for himself or his lineage. Indeed, the word throne does not

¹ This expression mirrors the words of the ineffectual Elkanah when discussing the future of Samuel. In both scenes Elkanah and Eli forfeit any willingness to take an active role in their own lives. Their passivity demonstrates not humility before the wisdom of others (Hannah and God) but a refusal to take the responsibility that rightly falls upon them. Neither of them will take an active role in the spiritual upbringing of their sons! See 1:23 and 3:18.

appear again until it is used in II Samuel 3 when it speaks of the transfer of the kingdom from the Saulide dynast to the THRONE of David.

As the narrative continues into II Samuel the theme becomes more diffuse, but certainly important. There is less overt overlap with the themes of thrones and honor, but it is implied. Two people are significant in the themes of honor and kingship, in a negative light.

First Michal (who is explicitly called a daughter of Saul) rebukes David for dancing and not displaying proper honor. David responds by saying that he will make himself look even more undignified. But the slave girls – the humble – those who Yahweh gives thrones of honor – they will hold David in honor! Then, we are immediately given a summary of Michal's life – she was barren. Her barrenness, of course, is considered a curse, which hearkens back to Hannah and her prayer. Michal was proud and so Yahweh does not give her a throne of honor, but rather, she is disgraced through her barrenness.²

Second, Absalom is referenced concerning the throne, when the wise woman of Tekoa attempts to reconcile David and Absalom. She wants David's throne to be free of guilt and uses this as a way of effecting a reunion. When Absalom had murdered his brother, David had told Absalom that the whole family oughtn't to go with him to the shearing, because they would be a burden (heavy, כבד) to Absalom and hinder his work.

Joab, using the wise-woman, was able to secure a meeting between David and Absalom. In chapter 14, we get both the word throne, in reference to the inheritance, which was supposed to go to Absalom – and a seemingly pointless comment about Absalom's hair, which he would cut when it became too heavy! Thus, Absalom has been spoken of with heavy twice and throne once. In chapter 14 we learn of the thronal inheritance and Absalom's hair. His hair that would doom him – for in his rebellion he was caught by his hair – that thing that gave him too much honor! In Chapter 14, his hair is his honor, but

² This is not, of course, to imply that I believe that barrenness is, necessarily, a curse from God, but in the context of this narrative Hanna is contrasted with Michal – both women are barren, but Hannah is humble and therefore God opens her womb, Michal is proud and her stays shut.

sometimes it grew too heavy; in chapter 18 it becomes entangled in a tree and he is killed by Joab, who sought to secure the throne for him.

We also learn at the end of chapter 18, that Absalom he erected a pillar in his own honor³ because he was childless. His impotence mirrors the barrenness of Michal and is the inverse, like Michal's, of Hannah's barrenness. Instead of humbling himself and praying for children, Absalom erects a pillar in his own honor. Absalom, like Eli, and Saul, demonstrates a desire to honor oneself, instead of God, which causes him to lose the throne he sought. Indeed, all three are undone by a throne! Eli falls off of it; Saul dies in his defense of it; Absalom dies trying to secure it.

Is it possible to use I Samuel 2:8 as the interpretive key to these books? The verse says: He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

Perhaps, not alone. But in conjunction with the biographical sketches, we see that there are 2 kinds of people, the humble and the proud. The humble: Hannah; Samuel; and David, are honored by God because they honor God; the proud: Eli; Saul; Michal; Absalom are doomed to a disgraceful fall because they honor themselves more than God. Others with less clear characterizations can also be sorted using this rubric. Men like Elkanah and Joab can be understood as ultimately self-honoring, though at times they seem to act with loyalty and humility. Abigail, though a minor character, creates a *mise-en-abyme* wherein she and Nabal are a characterization of the struggle between the humble David and the self-honoring Saul. David learns through the strife with Nabal that he needn't take justice into his own hands – that God was capable of that. Abigail teaches this to David; thus, the humble teach the humble and the wicked are brought down by God.

Over and over again we see this pattern throughout I, II Samuel – God honors the humble and seats them on thrones, the wicked are overthrown. The pattern continues in pericope after pericope. As important as it was for the author of I, II Samuel to point to

³ The word honor is not used, but implied.

the coming Davidic Dynasty, it was also important to remind and teach the people of Israel of the importance of humility and honoring God.

If Israel were to honor God – then she would be seated as queen among the nations. If she were to honor herself rather than God, she would be brought low.

Thus, the theme in I Samuel 2 which Hannah puts into her poetic prayer based upon her own life experience in I Samuel 1, typifies the ideal behavior of people and nations. Humility yields honor and rulership – pride brings destruction. This theme is played out in the proverbs between the wise and the fool. It is seen in the Kings between the good kings and bad kings, between Israel and Judah, between true and false worship. We see it in the Kings and Prophets when we see true and false prophets. This dichotomy of humble and proud is set in many ways all throughout the scriptures. And all throughout God is telling us that when we honor Him, we are honored; when we honor ourselves, even the honor we have is lost.

Uses of אִוֹן in I Samuel:

1 Samuel 1:9

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house.

1 Samuel 2:8

⁸ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor.

1 Samuel 4:13

¹³ When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

1 Samuel 4:18

¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

Uses of the adjective כָּבֵד in I Samuel:

1 Samuel 4:18

¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was **heavy**. He had led Israel forty years.

Uses of כבוד in I Samuel:

1 Samuel 2:8

⁸ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
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and has them inherit a throne of **honor**.

1 Samuel 4:21

²¹ She named the boy Ichabod, ⁿ saying, “The **Glory** has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.

1 Samuel 4:22

²² She said, “The **Glory** has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

1 Samuel 6:5

⁵ Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and give **glory** to Israel’s god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land.

Uses of the verb כבד in I Samuel:

1 Samuel 2:29

²⁹ Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you **honor** your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’

1 Samuel 2:30

³⁰ “Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who **honor** me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

1 Samuel 5:6

⁶ The LORD’s hand **was heavy** on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumors. ^z

1 Samuel 5:11

¹¹ So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, “Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people.” For death had filled the city with panic; God’s hand **was very heavy** on it.

1 Samuel 6:6

⁶ Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When Israel's god ***dealt harshly*** with them, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

1 Samuel 9:6

⁶ But the servant replied, "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is ***highly respected***, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take."

1 Samuel 15:30

³⁰ Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please ***honor*** me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God."

1 Samuel 22:14

¹⁴ Ahimelek answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and ***highly respected*** in your household?"

1 Samuel 31:3

³ The fighting ***grew fierce*** around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

Uses of אִוֵּן in II Samuel:

2 Samuel 3:10

¹⁰ and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's ***throne*** over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba."

2 Samuel 7:13

¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the ***throne*** of his kingdom forever.

2 Samuel 7:16

¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your ***throne*** will be established forever.' "

2 Samuel 14:9

⁹ But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "Let my lord the king pardon me and my family, and let the king and his ***throne*** be without guilt."

Uses of the verb כָּבַד in II Samuel:

2 Samuel 6:20

²⁰ When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has ***distinguished*** himself today,

going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”

2 Samuel 6:22

²² I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in **honor**.”

2 Samuel 10:3

³the Ammonite commanders said to Hanun their lord, “Do you think David is **honoring** your father by sending envoys to you to express sympathy? Hasn’t David sent them to you only to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?”

2 Samuel 13:25

²⁵ “No, my son,” the king replied. “All of us should not go; we would only be a **burden** to you.” Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go but gave him his blessing.

2 Samuel 23:19

¹⁹ Was he not held in greater **honor** than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.

2 Samuel 23:23

²³ He was held in greater **honor** than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

Uses of the adjective כבד in I Samuel:

2 Samuel 14:26

²⁶ Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too **heavy** for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.