

Notes on 1 Samuel

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Introduction

TITLE

First and Second Samuel were originally one book called the Book of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (made ca. 250 B.C.) was the first to divide it into two books. The Septuagint translators titled these books 1 and 2 Kingdoms. That division has persisted ever since and has even been incorporated into subsequent editions of the Hebrew Bible (since the Venetian printer Daniel Bomberg's first edition of the Hebrew Bible about A.D. 1516).¹ The title "Samuel" was given by Jerome in his Latin translation, the Vulgate (ca. A.D. 400). The Jews gave the name "Samuel" to it because Samuel is the first major character in the book. Samuel anointed both Saul and David, so in this respect he was superior to both of them.

DATE AND WRITER

The writer did not identify himself. Statements in the Book of Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel) imply that someone who had witnessed at least some of the events recorded wrote it. However someone, or more than one person, must have written most of it after Samuel's death (i.e., 1 Sam. 25—2 Sam. 24) and some of it even after the division of the kingdom following Solomon's death (e.g., 1 Sam. 27:6). These features have made it difficult to date the book.

"Our guess is that the author was a high state official in frequent attendance at the court, enjoying the full confidence of David and his household, who served David throughout his reign in Jerusalem and also Solomon during the early years of

¹John J. Davis, in *A History of Israel*, p. 182.

his reign, and whose duties may have been connected with literary work."¹

Most conservative scholars prefer the view that Samuel may have written or been responsible for noting the record of earlier events in the book (chs. 1—24). Then some unidentifiable writer or writers put it in its final form later, perhaps soon after Solomon's death.² Critical scholars tend to believe it was the result of much more piecing together, and some of them date its final form as late as 500 B.C.³ The Babylonian Talmud (a Jewish commentary dating from about A.D. 500) attributed authorship of 1 Samuel 1—24 to the prophet Samuel, and the rest to Nathan and Gad (cf. 1 Chron. 29:29).⁴ It is unlikely that Samuel wrote both books.⁵ One conservative estimate of the final date of composition is about 960 B.C.⁶ Another guess is near 920 or 900 B.C.⁷

SCOPE

The Book of Samuel covers the period of Israel's history bracketed by Samuel's conception and the end of David's reign. David turned the kingdom over to Solomon in 971 B.C.⁸ David reigned for 40 and one-half years (2 Sam. 2:11; 5:5). This means he came to power in 1011 B.C. Saul also reigned for 40 years (Acts 13:21) so he became king in 1051 B.C. We can estimate the date of Samuel's birth fairly certainly, on the basis of chronological references in the text, to have been about 1121 B.C.⁹ Thus

¹M. H. Segal, "The Composition of the Books of Samuel," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 55 (1964-65):334.

²See Brian N. Peterson, "The Authorship of Samuel: The Deuteronomist 70 Years after Noth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:688 (October-December 2015):416-32, who suggested that Abiathar the priest did this..

³For a refutation of this view, see Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 284-85.

⁴*Baba Bathra* 14b, 15a.

⁵See David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 142-43.

⁶Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 204.

⁷Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 709.

⁸See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 51-52.

⁹See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 149-50.

the Book of Samuel spans the years 1121-971 B.C., or about 150 years of history.

The first part of 1 Samuel overlaps historically with the end of the Judges Period that we find recorded in the Book of Judges. Josephus wrote:

"Now after the death of Samson, Eli the high-priest was governor of the Israelites."¹

Apparently Samson was born just a few years before Samuel. Samson's 20-year judgeship evidently began shortly before the battle of Aphek (1104 B.C.) at which time Eli died (1 Sam. 4:18).² It ended not many years before the battle of Mizpah (1084 B.C.) when the Philistine domination of Israel ceased temporarily (1 Sam. 7:13). Samuel's ministry, therefore, probably ran concurrent with that of Samson until Samson died. Saul began to reign about 35 years after Samson died (i.e., 1051 B.C.). Samuel evidently lived about 30 years after that.³

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY	
Events	Biblical References
Creation to Israel's move to Egypt	Genesis 1—50
The Exodus	Exodus 1—18
Israel at Mt. Sinai	Exodus 19—Numbers 10
The Wilderness Wanderings	Numbers 11—21
Israel on the Plains of Moab	Numbers 22—Joshua 2

¹Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5:9:1. Josephus' statements are not always in harmony with the biblical text and reflect a certain element of Jewish tradition that was common when he wrote, i.e., in the first century A.D.

²Leon J. Wood, *Israel's United Monarchy*, p. 23, wrote that the battle of Aphek happened about 1075 B.C. Though Wood is helpful in many respects, I do not think his dates are as accurate as those of Merrill and Thiele.

³Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 149-50.

The Conquest and Division of Canaan	Joshua 3—24
The Amphictyony (rule by judges)	Judges 1—1 Samuel 7
The Reign of Saul	1 Samuel 8—31; 1 Chronicles 10
The Reign of David	2 Samuel 1—24; 1 Chronicles 11—29
The Reign of Solomon	1 Kings 1—11; 2 Chronicles 1—9
The Divided Monarchy	1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17; 2 Chronicles 10—31
The Surviving Kingdom of Judah	2 Kings 18—25; 2 Chronicles 32-36
The Return under Zerubbabel	Ezra 1—6
The Return under Ezra	Ezra 7—10
The Return under Nehemiah	Nehemiah 1—13

PURPOSE

A main purpose of the Book of Samuel seems to have been to record the establishment of kingship in Israel and to explain its theological significance. It deals with the Israelites' initial request for a king, the establishment of that king (Saul), and the tragic results of that king's reign. It then explains the consolidation of power under a second king (David), God's promises to him, and his decline in his later years. The climax of the book comes in 2 Samuel 7, where God promises David an everlasting dynasty. The writer (or writers) clearly wanted to legitimize the Davidic monarchy and dynasty. Whether and how the monarchy should be established are main subjects of 1 Samuel, and the question of who should be Israel's king dominates much of 2 Samuel.¹

As with all the historical narratives of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit's purpose in giving us the books of 1 and 2 Samuel was not just to record events that transpired. It was primarily to teach spiritual lessons to the

¹Howard, pp. 141, 146-47.

original readers, and to readers of all time, by revealing the causes and effects of various human responses to God's grace.¹ God guided the inspired writers of Scripture to teach theology as well as to record history. This is clear in all the so-called historical books of both Testaments. We can see this as we examine the reasons God selected the particular events and facts that He recorded, through the biblical writers, for inclusion out of the mass of possible data that He could have set forth.

Scholars have disputed what it was that the writer chose to emphasize primarily in the Books of Samuel. Some have felt his unifying purpose was to demonstrate the sovereignty of God.² Some believe it was to show that God provides leadership for His people.³ Others have seen the purpose as something else. I believe those who see the record of what happens to individuals and nations, when they trust and obey God's Word or fail to do so, have identified the primary purpose.⁴

For the Israelites, their commitment to obey the Mosaic Covenant out of trust in God, and gratitude for His calling them to receive His grace, would result in God blessing them (Deut. 28:1-14). However if they despised His grace and departed from His will, as expressed for them in the Mosaic Covenant, He would curse them (Deut. 28:15-68). Moses had explained God's "blessing" in Deuteronomy. It included fertility for the Israelites personally as well as for their herds and crops, and it included the ability to defeat their neighbor enemies and to enjoy peace and prosperity (rest) in the Promised Land. It also included other material and social advantages, as well as the enjoyment of an intimate spiritual relationship with God. God's "curse," on the other hand, would be barrenness, defeat, oppression, and many other undesirable conditions.

In Samuel we have a record of how commitment to the will of God results in blessing for individuals, groups of individuals, and whole nations. This commitment should arise out of an appreciation for God's initiative in reaching out to undeserving sinners in grace. We also see how disregard

¹See Steven D. Mathewson, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming Old Testament Narratives," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):410-35, for help in preaching narrative portions of the Old Testament.

²E.g., Ludwig Kohler, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 94.

³Stanley D. Tucker, "The Theology of the Book of Samuel: A Study Of God's Humiliation or Exaltation of Leaders," *Biblical Viewpoint* 12:2 (1978):152; and David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 5.

⁴E.g., Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:26.

for God's Word, because of a failure to appreciate God's grace, inevitably leads to blasting, a curse from God. These lessons are not new; the Books of Samuel are not emphasizing these things for the first time in Scripture. The Book of Joshua is a positive lesson that people who trust and obey God succeed and even accomplish supernatural feats and prosper. The Book of Judges gives the other side of that coin: People who disregard God fail, become unproductive, suffer defeat, and sometimes die prematurely. The Books of Samuel continue the emphasis begun in Genesis and Exodus that Deuteronomy clarified, namely, that people's response to God's grace determines their destiny.

GENRE

The Books of Samuel are mainly narrative (stories) with some poetic sections interspersed. The main genre (type of literature) is theological history.

"No book of the Bible has been the object of such intense interest to literary analysts as has Samuel."¹

THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Longman and Dillard have identified several major themes in 1 and 2 Samuel, including the reversal of fortune, David as king, David as a man, and the LORD's anointed. To these one could add: prayer, the rise of Israel's kingdom, and the increasing role of the prophet in Israel.² David Firth identified the central themes as: the reign of God, kingship, and prophetic authority.³ Some of the characteristic compositional techniques include: the repetition of key words, irony, and repetition.⁴ Three important theological concerns of Deuteronomy play prominent roles in these books: the anticipation of a king for Israel, the anticipation of rest for Israel, and

¹Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 158.

²J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 2:121.

³David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 42-45.

⁴Longman and Dillard, pp. 159-61, 165.

the anticipation of blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience.¹

TEXT

There are more textual corruptions in the books of Samuel than in almost any other Old Testament book.² The text has not been well preserved, though by comparing Samuel with Chronicles, we can arrive at what the original text probably was. This is especially true with numbers.

OUTLINE

- I. Eli and Samuel 1:1—4:1 a
 - A. The change from barrenness to fertility 1:1—2:10
 1. Hannah's deliverance ch. 1
 2. Hannah's song 2:1-10
 - B. The contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons 2:11-36
 1. Eli's sons' wickedness 2:11-17
 2. Hannah's godly influence on Samuel and its effect 2:18-21
 3. Eli's lack of influence on his sons and its effect 2:22-26
 4. The oracle against Eli's house 2:27-36
 - C. God's first revelation to Samuel 3:1—4:1 a
 1. Samuel's call 3:1-18
 2. Samuel's ministry 3:19—4:1 a
- II. The history of the ark of the covenant 4:1b—7:1

¹Ibid., pp. 163-64. Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, has provided what he believes is the "big idea" and some theological themes for each major section of the text that are designed to help modern Bible teachers and preachers identify the timeless lesson of these books.

²Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 169.

- A. The capture of the ark 4:1b-22
 - 1. The battle of Aphek 4:1b-11
 - 2. The response of Eli 4:12-18
 - 3. The response of Phinehas' wife 4:19-22
 - B. Pagan fertility foiled by God ch. 5
 - C. The ark returned to Israel by God 6:1—7:1
 - 1. The plan to end God's judgment 6:1-9
 - 2. The return of the ark to Beth-shemesh 6:10-18
 - 3. The removal of the ark to Kiriath-jearim 6:19—7:1
- III. Samuel and Saul 7:2—15:35
- A. Samuel's ministry as Israel's judge 7:2-17
 - 1. Samuel's spiritual leadership 7:2-4
 - 2. National repentance and deliverance 7:5-14
 - 3. Samuel's regular ministry 7:15-17
 - B. Kingship given to Saul chs. 8—12
 - 1. The demand for a king ch. 8
 - 2. The anointing of Saul 9:1—10:16
 - 3. The choice of Saul by lot 10:17-27
 - 4. Saul's effective leadership in battle 11:1-11
 - 5. The confirmation of Saul as king 11:12—12:25
 - C. Kingship removed from Saul chs. 13—15
 - 1. Saul's disobedience at Gilgal 13:1-15
 - 2. Saul's struggle against the Philistines 13:16—14:23
 - 3. Saul's cursing of Jonathan 14:24-46
 - 4. Saul's limited effectiveness in battle 14:47-52
 - 5. Yahweh's final rejection of Saul ch. 15
- IV. Saul and David chs. 16—31
- A. David's rise as the new anointed 16:1—19:17
 - 1. God's selection of David for kingship ch. 16
 - 2. The reason for God's selection of David ch. 17

3. The results of God's selection of David 18:1—19:17
- B. David driven out by Saul 19:18—20:42
 1. God's deliverance in Ramah 19:18-24
 2. Jonathan's advocacy for David ch. 20
- C. David in exile chs. 21—31
 1. David's initial movements chs. 21—22
 2. Saul's pursuit of David ch. 23
 3. David's goodness to two fools chs. 24—26
 4. The end of Saul's reign chs. 27—31

(Continued in notes on 2 Samuel)

MESSAGE

First and Second Samuel are really one story. The translators divided them into two books for convenience, not because of subject matter. This is also true of Kings and Chronicles.

First Samuel records Israel's transition from amphictyony (leadership by judges) to monarchy (leadership by kings). The key passage that explains this transition is 8:4-7. Two statements from this passage are especially significant:

The human desire that produced the transition expressed itself in verse 5: "Now appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations."¹ God had brought Israel into existence as a nation to be *unlike* all the nations (Exod. 19:5-6). The essence of its uniqueness was Yahweh's rule over it as King. God wanted Israel to be a demonstration for all the world to see how glorious it can be to live under the gracious sovereign of God.

The real meaning of the people's request comes out in verse 7: "... they have rejected Me from being King over them." During the period of the judges, religious apostasy spread and characterized Israel. The people refused to obey their heavenly King. It is this attitude that finds expression

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the NASB (*The New American Standard Bible*), 2020 ed., unless otherwise indicated.

in verse 5. This is the essence of sin, and it results in idolatry. Every idol is a witness to man's need of God. When people reject the true God, they must put something in His place to meet that need. Human beings must have a god. That is just how God made us.

Israel turned from Yahweh (the LORD) as her King in 1 Samuel. She demanded a king like the other nations. This book shows the immediate effects of that demand.

One of the great revelations of 1 Samuel is how, from the human viewpoint, God adapts in order to continue His reign. He adapted from using judges to lead His people to using a king to lead them.

The statement that "God adapts to continue His reign," may appear to contradict 8:7, but it does not. The people rejected Yahweh, but they did not dethrone Him. The first act is possible, but the second is not. This is a major lesson of 1 Samuel. The great revelation of this book is not primarily its three central figures: Samuel, Saul, and David. It is Yahweh, reigning by adapting to human situations, and moving—surely and steadily—toward the fulfillment of His purposes. In spite of disobedience or obedience, failure or success, rebellious or loyal people, the reign of God moves on. We see this great lesson in the history of 1 Samuel's three central figures: Samuel, Saul, and David.

The writer introduced Samuel's story with his mother Hannah's experience with God. Hannah was a great woman of faith who lived in the Judges Period. Her faith became God's foothold for Israel's advance. Her song reveals a profound appreciation for Yahweh as the God who reigns over all (2:6-8, 10).

Samuel was a prophet. In one sense, he was the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24). Of course, Moses was a prophet, and so was Abraham, but Samuel was the first of the order of prophets who mediated between God and the Israelites during the monarchy. The kings of Israel and Judah were never "mediators" between God and the people—in the sense of speaking for God to the people. When the Israelites rejected Yahweh as their king, He withdrew from close communion and intimate fellowship with them. He never recognized their kings as standing between Himself and them to mediate His Word to the people. He chose their kings for them. He allowed their desire for a human king to work itself out in ultimate disaster through the years that followed. Yet He never spoke to the people through the king.

He always spoke to them through the prophets. Samuel was the first of these. David, of course, was both a king and a prophet. The role of the kings was to govern the people. The role of the prophets was to convey God's messages to them.

With Samuel, the office of prophet in Israel emerges as that of Yahweh's authoritative representative to His people. Samuel became the kingmaker, finding and anointing both Saul and David. From Samuel on, when God had a message for the people, it normally did not come directly to the king, but to the king and the people through a prophet. The prophet's office was always superior to that of Israel's kings. Christians have the privilege of speaking for God to our generation. We have a high calling similar to that of Israel's prophets.

When Israel rejected Yahweh as her king, God chose Samuel, the child of a woman's simple faith, trained him in the tabernacle, and called him when he was only a boy. Then He gave him a message to deliver, and sent him first to anoint Saul as the king after the people's own heart, and later David as the king after God's own heart. The prophets became God's mediators, His messengers, and the interpreters of His will.

Thus Yahweh reigned, though He adapted His methods of ruling by raising up the prophets. He called Samuel as the first of these mediators. During the monarchy, God provided guidance through two offices rather than through one, which He had done previously. The kings provided political leadership, and the prophets gave the people spiritual leadership. God had previously provided both types of leadership through single individuals, namely: Moses, Joshua, and the judges.

Saul's story is one of the most tragic in Scripture. It is unusually fascinating and has tremendous power in its appeal to our lives, because most Christians can identify easily with Saul. When God placed Saul on Israel's throne, He answered the prayer of His rebellious people in 8:5: "He gave them their request, but sent a wasting disease among them" (Ps. 106:15).

Saul was a revelation to the Israelites of what the possession of a king like the nations really meant. He had unusual physical strength, but he was weak spiritually. He was humble at first, but he became proud. Having rejected Yahweh's authority over him he became moody and eventually turned into a madman. He paid little attention to the prophet Samuel, and

eventually sought guidance from a witch. Instead of subduing Israel's enemies, he destroyed himself by committing suicide.

Saul's reign was also a disaster. At the beginning of his reign, Israel was virtually without a leader. At its end, it was under the control of an enemy neighbor: the Philistines. Saul was never able to expand the borders of Israel, because he never was strong enough to dominate his enemy neighbors. David, on the other hand, did both of these things. At the end of Saul's reign, Israel had almost destroyed itself through its wars with the Philistines.

In contrast to Saul's story, David's story is one of the most glorious in Scripture. After Saul, God gave His people another king, but this time he was a man after God's own heart.

God prepared David for the throne by putting him through training as a shepherd in the fields, a courtier in the palace, and an "outlaw" in exile. (By "outlaw" I do not mean that David was lawless but that King Saul could not control him.) His shepherd training prepared him to care for and protect the Israelites under his charge. His courtier experience prepared him to deal with governmental leaders in other nations. His "outlaw" years perfected the disciplines that enabled him to become a strong ruler. These disciplines included relying on God in every situation, practicing self-restraint, and leading his people.

In all of David's training, God was reigning, moving forward to the fulfillment of His plans and purposes. God had previously done this by making the child of faith, Samuel, His prophet. He had also done this by making outwardly promising Saul a revelation to the nation of her sins in turning away from Himself.

The second great revelation of this book is that people cooperate or fail to cooperate with God by either being loyal or by being disloyal to Him. Regardless of people's response to Him, Yahweh accomplishes His plans and purposes through them.

In Samuel's case, he had opportunities to glorify God—because of his parentage, his call by God, and his appointment as God's prophet. He responded obediently, with loyalty to God. Consequently, God's messages got delivered, and God's work moved ahead. Samuel was an instrument of blessing to Israel.

In Saul's case, he had opportunities to glorify God too. His opportunities came in his call by God, his anointing by Samuel, his friendship with Samuel, his popularity with the people, and his divinely given personal abilities. But he responded disobediently, with disloyalty to God, as seen in his vacillating behavior and self-will. Consequently, he failed as a king, and he died under the judgment of God. His life was a failure in the eyes of God and the Israelites.

In David's case, his opportunities were his call, his anointing, his preparation for the throne, and his sufferings, which God used to refine him. David responded obediently, with loyalty to God. Consequently, he became God's instrument of progress and blessing. He was a success.

Each man had his opportunities, made his responses, and experienced the consequences of his responses. Two obeyed, and one disobeyed. All three cooperated with God in fulfilling His ultimate purposes, either to his own blessing or to his own blasting.

As a result of these two major revelations, I would summarize the message of 1 Samuel as follows: God will accomplish His purposes regardless of people's personal responses to Him. However, people's responses to God's revealed will determine their own success or failure in life, from God's perspective.

First Samuel teaches us the methods of the sovereign God. All territory is within God's jurisdiction, every person is under His control, and all events are in His hands. All of God's plans and purposes are moving toward accomplishment. He makes use of all antagonistic facts and forces, as well as all cooperative facts and forces. He also makes use of all the agents whom He has chosen to use, regardless of their responses. Paul's comments in 2 Timothy 2:20-21 are very much to the point here: God uses both vessels unto honor and vessels unto dishonor.

First Samuel also teaches us that God's ultimate victory is independent of the attitudes and actions of individuals and groups of people toward Him. Nevertheless, the ultimate destiny of individuals and groups of people depends on their attitudes and actions toward Him.

Samuel was obedient, was God's instrument, and experienced distinction. Saul was disobedient, was God's instrument, and experienced destruction. David was obedient, was God's instrument, and experienced deliverance.

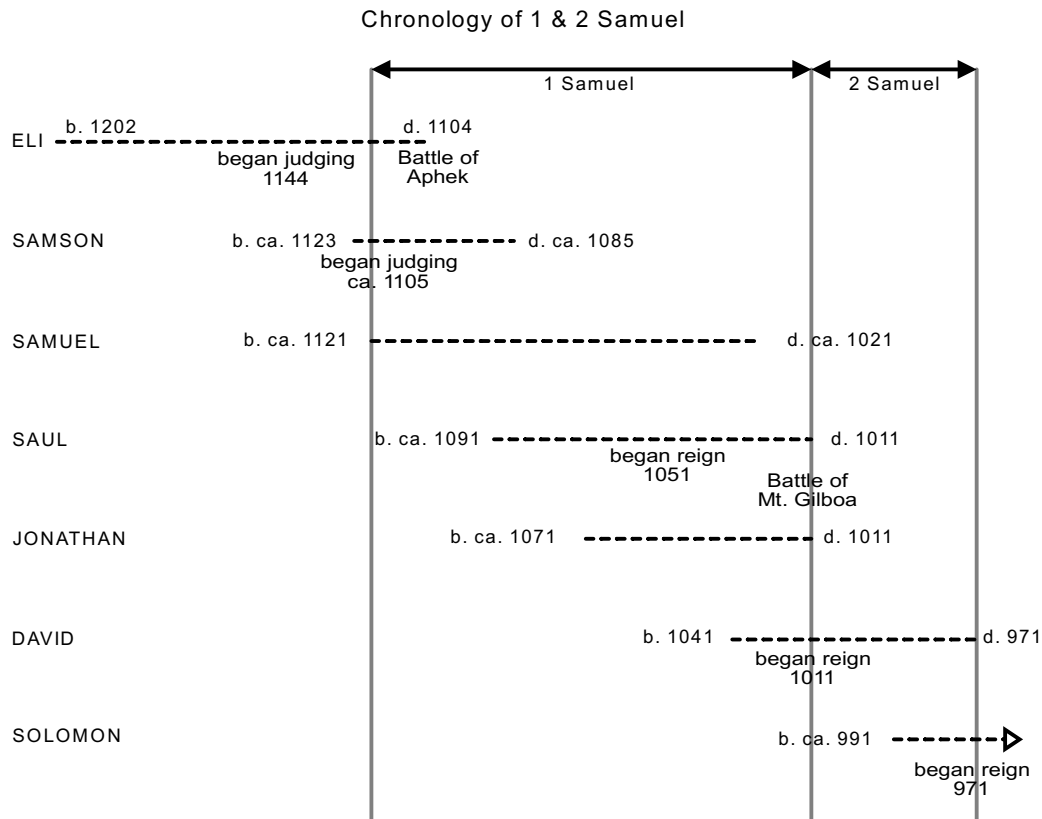
Our attitudes and actions do not determine God's ultimate victory, but they do determine our ultimate destiny in this life and the next—not our eternal salvation, but our rewards. God uses all people, loyal and rebellious, to bring His ultimate purposes to fruition. However, we determine the outcome of our lives by our attitudes and responses to Him. We see these principles working themselves out around us all the time.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:147-58.

Exposition

I. ELI AND SAMUEL 1:1—4:1A

First Samuel begins by contrasting Israel's last two judges (Eli: a failure, and Samuel: a success) and then Israel's first two kings (Saul: a failure, and David: a success).



The first major section of Samuel sharply contrasts obedience and disobedience to the will of God as God expressed that for Israel in the Mosaic Covenant. This contrast is clear in all seven major sections of 1 and 2 Samuel. The events in this section took place during Eli's 40-year judgeship (4:18; 1144-1104 B.C.).¹ First Samuel overlaps Judges chronologically.

¹See Eugene H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1981):247.

"... the first seven chapters, chs. 1—7, constitute a unified whole, dealing with the transitional period from the end of judgeship to the new era of kingship."¹

A. THE CHANGE FROM BARRENNESS TO FERTILITY 1:1—2:10

In the first subsection of the Eli Samuel story (1:1—2:10), we have the joyful account of Samuel's miraculous birth and his mother's gratitude to God for reversing her barrenness and giving her a son. The significance of this story is not only that it gives us the record of how Samuel was born, and that his mother was a godly woman. But it also shows how God, in faithfulness to His promise to bless those who put Him first (Deut. 28), did so even for a despised woman in Israel (cf. Rahab and Ruth). He brought blessing to all Israel because of her faith.

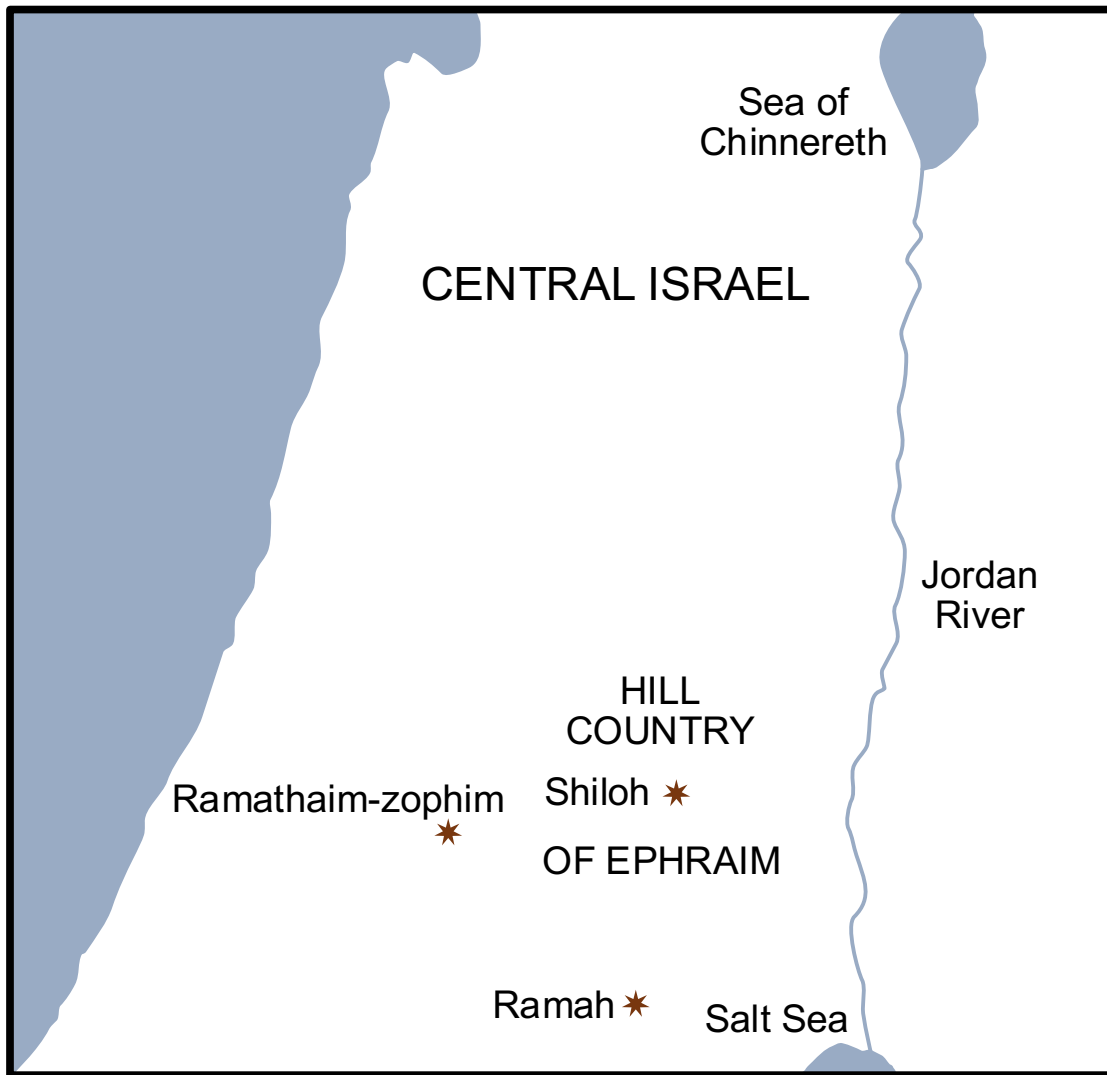
The birth narratives of Moses (Exod. 1—2) and Jesus (Luke 1—2) likewise introduce decisive periods in history. In Samuel's case (1 Sam. 1—2), the new era of monarchy began with the birth of the kingmaker.

1. Hannah's deliverance ch. 1

"I Samuel 1 is presented as a conventional birth narrative which moves from barrenness to birth. Laid over that plot is a second rhetorical strategy which moves from complaint to thanksgiving. With the use of this second strategy, the birth narrative is transposed and becomes an intentional beginning point for the larger Samuel-Saul-David narrative. Hannah's story begins in utter helplessness (silence); it anticipates Israel's royal narrative which also begins in helplessness. As Hannah moves to voice (2,1-10), so Israel's narrative moves to power in the historical process. Both Hannah's future and Israel's future begin in weakness and need, and move toward power and well-being. The narrative of I Samuel 1 functions to introduce the theological theme of 'cry-thanks' which appears in the larger narrative in terms of Israelite precariousness and Yahweh's powerful providence. Our chapter corresponds canonically to II Samuel 24 which portrays David in the end (like Hannah) as a needy, trusting suppliant. The two chapters,

¹David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 103.

witnesses to vulnerable faith, together bracket Israel's larger story of power."¹



The problem 1:1-2

Samuel's parents lived near Ramathaim-zophim (lit. "two heights," or "two hills," elsewhere called "Ramah," e.g., v. 19, lit. "height"). This town was in Ephraim, in central Canaan, about five miles north of Jerusalem. Perhaps

¹Walter Brueggemann, "1 Samuel 1: A Sense of a Beginning," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102:1 (1990):48.

the city stood on one of the two hills, with a high place of worship on the other.¹

"Perhaps the city's name proper was "Ramah" (also 1 Sam. 2:11) and was sometimes called by its descriptive name, Ramathaim "Two Hills" ..."2

There was also a Ramah in the territory of Benjamin, farther to the south (Judg. 19:13; et al.), and one in Naphtali, to the north (Josh. 19:29, 36).

Samuel's father, Elkanah, was an Ephraimite by residence but a Levite by birth (1 Chron. 6:33-38). Ramah was not one of the Levitical towns in Ephraim. Elkanah's residence raises initial questions about his commitment to the Mosaic Law. Was he really where he should have been, and does this indicate that the will of God may not have been very important for him (cf. Judg. 17:7-13)? In the story that follows, it is Hannah (lit. "Grace" or "Favor with God") rather than Elkanah (lit. "God Created") who emerges as the person of outstanding faith.

Hannah's problem was that she was barren (v. 2).

"It was common in real life for a well-to-do man to take a second wife if the first did not bear him an heir [cf. Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, Gen. 16:1-6]."³

In the Hebrew Bible the description of Samuel's father and Samson's father are almost identical (cf. Judg. 13:2). The Holy Spirit may have recorded this to remind us of the unusual Nazirite status of both judges. John the Baptist may have been another lifetime Nazirite (cf. Luke 1:15).

Hannah's barrenness 1:3-8

The writer used a name for God that appears for the first time in the Bible here (v. 3): "the LORD of armies" (Heb. *Yahweh sebaoth*). This name views God as the One who leads armies of followers: humans (e.g., 17:45), angels (e.g., Josh. 5:14), and stars (e.g., Isa. 40:26), but mainly angels. This is a very commonly used divine titulary (a title that became a name) in the rest of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and the prophetic books. It appears about

¹Tsumura, p. 107.

²Ibid., p. 125.

³Ibid., p. 108.

280 times in the Bible, and prominently in Jeremiah (88 times) and Zechariah (80 times). Its occurrence at the beginning of 1 Samuel probably indicates that this was a name of God that had become popular in Israel by this time (cf. v. 11). This name expresses the infinite resources and power at God's disposal as He fights for His people.¹

Eli (v. 3) was the only judge in Israel who also served as the nation's high priest (cf. 4:18). Most scholars believe that the tabernacle was located at Shiloh at this time, even though it is called the "temple" in verses 9 and 3:3. Firth believed that it was not the tabernacle but a temporary building that contained the ark.²

Elkanah was a bigamist, a marital status forbidden by God (Gen. 2:24). However, Elkanah loved Hannah dearly and gave her special consideration because she was infertile (v. 5; cf. Jacob's relationship with Rachel and Leah). Hannah's inability to bear children may have prompted Elkanah to take Peninnah as a second wife (cf. Gen. 16).

God had promised to bless His people with many descendants if they obeyed Him (Deut. 28:11). Consequently many Israelites saw a woman's inability to bear children not just as a natural handicap but also as a curse from God. Peninnah (lit. "Pearl"; her "rival," v. 6) may have accused Hannah of some sin in her life that had apparently brought God's curse on her (v. 6; cf. Hagar's treatment of Sarai, Gen. 16:4). From the context we learn that Hannah was an unusually godly woman. Probably her barrenness was not a divine punishment for sin. It appears to have been a natural condition that God placed on her for His own purposes, some of which become clear as this story unfolds (cf. John 9:1-3).

Elkanah was careful to observe some of the statutes in the Mosaic Law, such as worshipping God yearly at Shiloh. The Law did not require Hannah to accompany her husband to the annual feasts, but this was evidently the common practice (cf. Luke 2:41-42).³

¹Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:2:137; *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "God, Names of," by G. T. Manley, p. 480; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 206. See also Matitiah Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 36 (1965):49-58.

²Firth, p. 55.

³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 215.

"If the devotions of a family prevail not to put an end to its divisions, yet let not the divisions put a stop to the devotions."¹

Elkanah seems to have been somewhat insensitive to the depth of Hannah's suffering as a barren woman (v. 8).

"Three dramatic elements in the scene make the problem of barrenness more poignant for the narrative.

"First, we are told twice that 'The Lord had closed her womb' (v. 5, 6). ... Second, while it is Yahweh who has created Hannah's problem, Hannah's response is not against Yahweh, but against Peninnah (v. 6-7). ...

"Third, the scene ends with Elkanah's four-fold question, three times *lamah*, 'why,' plus a concluding question about his own value to Hannah (v. 8). Elkanah's questions are voiced in pathos. He does not understand Hannah's response; moreover he is helpless to change Hannah's situation. Elkanah is helpless about the problem of barrenness caused by Yahweh, and he is helpless in the destructive interaction between his wives. Hannah is deeply needy and immobilized, and her husband is helpless. The family system seems desperately closed. The only opening is that every year Elkanah goes up to sacrifice to Yahweh, the very one who has closed Hannah's womb."²

Hannah's lament and Eli's response 1:9-18

These verses provide some insight into the godly character of Samuel's mother and her personal relationship with Yahweh. Levites served between the ages of 25 and 50 (Num. 8:24), but Hannah promised her son for a lifetime of service. That she would offer her son to God's service for life was similar to asking that God would lead your child into "the ministry." Asking that he would be a lifetime Nazirite (v. 11) was similar to asking that your child would dedicate himself completely to God, not just by profession but also by conviction. Hannah showed that she desired the honor of Yahweh more than simply gaining relief from her abusers. She wanted to make a positive contribution to God's program for Israel by

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 281.

²Brueggemann, p. 35.

providing a godly leader, not just to bear a child. Compare the blessing God gave Samson's parents, in Judges 13:2-5, that probably came just a few years before Hannah made her vow.

The fact that Eli sat on a seat (v. 9) in the tabernacle (probably the tabernacle courtyard) "was a sign of honor in a society where most people sat on the ground."¹ One wonders if Eli did this also because he was "old and heavy" (4:18; cf. 4:13). Descriptions of the tabernacle in the first part of 1 Samuel have caused some interpreters to speculate that a more stable structure had by this time been built around the tent-shrine.²

"While the people are crying for a king, Hannah is crying out for a child."³

"Thoughts are words to him [God]."⁴

The record of Eli's observations of and dialogue with Hannah (vv. 12-17) confirms the sincerity and appropriateness of her petition. Eli did not rebuke Hannah but commended her. (This is the only Old Testament passage that shows a priest blessing an individual worshipper.⁵) However, Eli's response to Hannah reveals his instability. He misunderstood Hannah because he did not perceive her correctly. This weakness surfaces again later and accounts in part for his demise.

Prayer in the ancient world was usually audible (cf. Ps. 3:4; 4:1; 6:9; et al.; Dan. 6:10-11).⁶ Pouring out one's soul before God (v. 15) graphically describes earnest, burdened praying.⁷ This kind of praying normally results in a release of anxiety, as it did in Hannah's case (v. 18; cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

¹Tsumura, p. 116.

²E.g., *ibid.*, p. 115; Chisholm, p. 23.

³McGee, 2:124. See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Characterization in 1—2 Samuel: The Use of Quotations and Intertextual Links," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:693 (January-March 2017):45-59.

⁴Henry, p. 282.

⁵Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, p. 75.

⁶Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 573.

⁷G. W. Ahlstrom, "1 Samuel 1,15," *Biblica* 60:2 (1979):254.

"In prayer it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart, ' said John Bunyan, and that's the way Hannah prayed."¹

"The issues now turn not on barrenness and birth, but upon submission to Yahweh and trust in Yahweh. Thus while the two scenes share a common problem, they approach the problem very differently. Scene 1 [vv. 3-8] treats the problem of barrenness as a matter of family struggle. In scene 2 [vv. 9-18] the same problem has been redefined in Yahwistic categories of need, submission, and trust."²

When we believers find ourselves in difficult situations, we should commit our desires to God in prayer. In prayer we should seek what is best for God primarily, because the purpose of prayer is to enable us to accomplish God's will, not to get Him to do our will (cf. Matt. 6:9-10). When we feel a need greatly, we should also pray earnestly. When we pray this way, God will enable us to feel peace in our problem (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

A birth announcement 1:19-20

Hannah's godly character surfaces again in the naming of Samuel. His name probably means "Heard of God" or "God Hears." Another possibility is "Name of God."³ Hannah recognized that Samuel's birth was not just a coincidence. It was an answer to prayer and a supernatural gift from God. The mothers of Ichabod (4:21) and Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24) also named them.

"Yahweh is the key actor in the narrative. Hannah could speak complaint and petition only because she submitted to Yahweh. Eli could give assurance to her only because he spoke on behalf of Yahweh. The son is born only because Yahweh remembered. Everything depends on asking Yahweh and being answered by Yahweh. Thus scene 3 [vv. 19-20] resolves scene 1 [vv. 3-8], but only by way of the decisive intrusion of Yahweh through scene 2 [vv. 9-18]."⁴

¹Wiersbe, p. 209.

²Brueggemann, p. 37.

³See Tsumura, p. 127.

⁴Brueggemann, p. 37.

The parents' thanksgiving 1:21-28a

"Scenes 3 [vv. 19-20] and 4 [vv. 21-28a] are a pair, not unlike the pairing of 1 [vv. 3-8] and 2 [vv. 9-19]. They are the two scenes of resolution. ... These two scenes are concerned not with the birth, but with Hannah coming to terms with the reality of Yahweh. She is portrayed as the one who is needy, trustful, submissive, and grateful. She is a model of fidelity."¹

The Mosaic Law required an offering to God when He granted a vow (Lev. 27:1-8). Elkanah went to the central sanctuary to make this offering shortly after Samuel's birth (v. 21). The text refers to Hannah's vow as Elkanah's (v. 21). It was his vow in this sense: since he did not cancel it when he heard about it, he became responsible for it as Hannah's husband (cf. Num. 30:10-14).

Samuel may have been as old as three years before Hannah weaned him and brought him to the sanctuary (v. 23; cf. 2 Chron. 31:16; 2 Macc. 7:27). The three-year-old bull and the flour (v. 24) were evidently for a burnt offering (an offering that represented the worshipper's total dedication to God, Lev. 1) and for food respectively.

Some ancient manuscripts, represented in the NKJV translation "three bulls," suggest that Hannah brought three bulls to Shiloh, not one three-year-old bull.² If this was the case, she probably gave two of the bulls to Eli as a gift, and offered one of them as a sacrifice. I prefer the NASB translation: "three-year-old bull."

The Hebrew word for flour used here, *qemah*, never occurs in a sacrificial context except once, where it is unaccompanied by an animal sacrifice (Num. 5:15). Hannah could have offered a less expensive animal sacrifice (Lev. 12:6), but she was very grateful.

"The Hebrew word translated *lent* [in the NKJV, *dedicated* in the NASB, and *give* in the NIV; v. 28a] has the idea of a complete giving up of the child to God [cf. Gen. 22]."³

¹Ibid., p. 39.

²NKJV stands for *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

³*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 453. NIV stands for *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

The beginning of Samuel's worship 1:28b

"The future of the story now to be told in I and II Samuel concerns not only the newly born son, but the rule of Yahweh to whom laments are addressed and thanksgiving uttered. No wonder the narrative ends with yielding, grateful, trusting worship."¹

The "he" who worshipped before the LORD (v. 28) may refer to Elkanah, the leader of the family and the main man in the context. It might also refer to Eli to whom Hannah was speaking.² I think it probably refers to Samuel, the most immediate antecedent of "he" in verse 28. If this interpretation is correct, this reference marks the beginning of Samuel's ministry, which all of chapter 1 anticipates.

Hannah obeyed the Mosaic Law when she fulfilled her vow (vv. 24-28). This contrasts with the disobedience of Eli's sons (2:11-36). In Deuteronomy 28, Moses predicted the outcome of these two responses to God's Word, and the writer of this book illustrated it in 1 Samuel 1 and 2.

Hannah's obedience resulted in great blessing. God blessed her with fertility, He blessed her and her husband with this child and other offspring (2:20-21), and He blessed Israel with a spiritual leader.

"This beautiful story of a faithful mother in Israel whom God honored by giving her a son is the crown jewel in the argument of the book. Yahweh looks for faithful, godly men and women whom He can set over His People."³

"Like Hannah, believers too are called to approach God through prayer and worship, to ask him to grant his gift to us, and to dedicate that gift to his service."⁴

Godly parents should give their children away—to the Lord for His service.

¹Brueggemann, p. 39.

²Youngblood, p. 575.

³Homer Heater Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 121-22.

⁴Tsumura, pp. 134-35.

2. Hannah's song 2:1-10

Some commentators have seen Hannah's prayer as a non-essential song of praise included in the text for sentimental reasons. But this magnificent prayer provides the key to interpreting the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel. In this prayer, which contains no petition, Hannah articulated her belief that God rewards trust with blessing. He turns barrenness into fertility, not just in her case but universally. Mary, the mother of Jesus, incorporated some of Hannah's song in her own "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55).

"The Song of Hannah appears near the beginning of 1 Samuel, and the Song of David appears near the end of 2 Samuel. These two remarkably similar hymns of praise thus constitute a kind of *inclusio*, framing the main contents of the books and reminding us that the two books were originally one. Both begin by using 'horn' (1 Sam 2:1; 2 Sam 22:3) as a metaphor for 'strength,' referring to God as the 'Rock,' and reflecting on divine 'deliverance/salvation' (1 Sam 2:1-2; 2 Sam 22:2-3). Both end by paralleling 'his king' with 'his anointed' (1 Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 22:51)."¹

Hannah praised God because He had provided salvation for His people (vv. 1-2). She had learned that God will humble people who view themselves as self-sufficient (vv. 3-4), but He will help those who cast themselves on Him, asking Him to provide what they need (vv. 5-8). Therefore the godly and the wicked will experience vastly different fates (vv. 9-10). Hannah noted God's holiness (v. 2), power (v. 2), wisdom (v. 3), justice (v. 3), sovereignty and providence (vv. 6-10) in her prayer.

The Old Testament writers spoke of Sheol (v. 6), the abode of the dead, as though it were a huge underground cave where judgment takes place (cf. Deut. 32:22; Ps. 88:3-6; et al.). "The pillars of the earth" (v. 8) are not literal pillars but a metaphor that pictures the LORD firmly establishing the earth (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). The whole point of this inspired poetic prayer is that people should trust in the LORD. Hannah had done this, and God had blessed her miraculously.

Hannah's song contains the first reference to a king that God would raise up as "His anointed" representative to lead Israel (v. 10; cf. v. 35). This is

¹Youngblood, p. 579.

one of a few such references made by an ordinary Israelite that God recorded in Scripture (cf. Judg. 8:22-23). God had revealed through Moses that in the future He would provide a king for His people (Deut. 17). God revealed His purpose to set up a king over His people as early as Genesis (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10; cf. Gen. 1:26-28). Hannah's reference to this king shows that the people of Israel looked forward to the fulfillment of that promise. Shortly after this the people demanded a king from God (8:4-7).

"This is the first reference in the OT to the king as the anointed of the Lord. Later, in the eschatological thought of Judaism, this expression became the characteristic title of the expected Deliverer, the Messiah or the Christ, who would alleviate world troubles in a Messianic era."¹

"In the beginning of the Books of Kingdoms [the Septuagint titles of 1—2 Samuel and 1—2 Kings] heaven's true King is seen in prophetic vision."²

The motif of God making the barren fertile, in response to their trust and obedience, runs through the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel. So does the corollary truth that God will make the powerful, who are not trusting and obedient, infertile and ultimately dead. Samuel is an example of the first truth, and Saul is an example of the second. Likewise the motif of the LORD's anointed king is a major one in 1 and 2 Samuel. David personifies this revelation. Thus this prayer prepares the reader for the rest of the book.

In 1:1—2:10 we also find, for the first time, the reversal-of-fortune motif that is a major theme in 1 and 2 Samuel.³ People apparently unimportant become important, and those who appear to be important become unimportant (cf. Matt. 19:30). The crucial factor for them as Israelites was their response to the will of God as contained in the Mosaic Covenant.

God will bless people who want to further His program in the world by making it possible for them to do that. He may even do supernatural things to enable them to do so. Natural limitations do not limit God. Knowledge of what God has revealed about Himself and His program is what God uses to inspire trust in Himself and interest in His program. God may even reverse

¹Fred E. Young, "First and Second Samuel," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 276.

²Gaebelein, 1:2:139.

³Longman and Dillard, p. 159.

the fortunes of people in response to their response to His will. Many examples of this truth follow in these books.

As noted above, Hannah's song serves as one of the "bookends" that bracket 1 and 2 Samuel. The other song is in 2 Samuel 22, a song of David. They are similar in that they articulate correct perspectives and profound insights concerning God. The song in this chapter came from a humble woman in Israel. The one in 2 Samuel 22 came from the great male monarch in Israel. Together they suggest that a consciousness of Yahweh permeated Israel during this period of its history, though often events during that period tempt the reader to think otherwise. These songs voice the heart of the godly remnant in Israel that followed Him faithfully during all its turmoils. The Book of Ruth gives us one glimpse of a part of this remnant during the Judges Period.

Hannah's song is one of several poems in 1 and 2 Samuel. Others are Samuel's rebuke of Saul (1 Sam. 15:22-23), Samuel's announcement of Agag's death (1 Sam. 15:33), David's challenge to Goliath (1 Sam. 17:45-47), the victory tribute to David (1 Sam. 18:7), the Song of the Bow (2 Sam. 1:19-27), David's funeral chant on the death of Abner (2 Sam. 3:33-34), the song of Nathan (2 Sam. 7:8-16), David's song of victory (2 Sam. 22:2-51), and David's last words (2 Sam. 23:1-7).¹

B. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN SAMUEL AND ELI'S SONS 2:11-36

Samuel's innocence and the godlessness of Eli's sons contrast strongly in this pericope (section of text). Samuel would succeed and become a channel of God's blessing. Eli's sons would fail, would become a source of frustration to Eli and the Israelites, and would ultimately perish.

"The section [2:11—4:1] poignantly illustrates the theme of 'Hannah's Song' as it is epitomized in 2:7b, 'he brings low, and also exalts'. For it is under the auspices of God who has determined the ruin of Hophni and Phinehas that Samuel makes his mark."²

The literary design of this portion of 1 Samuel also emphasizes the contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons. The writer wrote about Samuel, then Eli's

¹See Sanford C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, pp. 61-62, 67-75.

²Gordon, p. 81.

sons, then Samuel, then Eli's sons, etc. The effect is to help the reader place them side by side for comparison (cf. Job 1—2).

Samuel	Eli's sons
1:1—2:10	2:11-17
2:18-21	2:22-36
3:1—4:1a	4:1b—7:2
7:3—12:25	

1. Eli's sons' wickedness 2:11-17

Eli, who was probably past the age of 70,¹ now became the virtual father of Samuel. It is to Eli's credit that he assumed this challenging role at his advanced age. We might wonder at Hannah and Elkanah's wisdom in leaving their young son with a man who had been a failure at rearing his own sons. Perhaps Eli had learned his lesson with his own sons and was better prepared to rear Samuel now. In any case, it was an act of faith for Hannah and Elkanah to leave their boy with Eli. And Eli turned out to be a good "father" to Samuel.

Eli's sons were not only evil in their personal lives, but they flagrantly disregarded the will of God even as they served as leaders of Israel's worship. They neither knew the LORD (in the sense of paying attention to Him, v. 12) nor treated His offerings as special (v. 17; cf. Mal. 1:6-14). The clause "they did not know the LORD" (v. 12; cf. 3:7), does not mean that they did not know about the LORD but that they did not have a relationship with Him.² The writer supported his evaluation of Eli's sons with two instances of their specific practices (vv. 13-14, and 15-16).

The Law ordered the priests to handle the offerings in particular ways to respect God's holiness (cf. Lev. 3:3, 5; 7:34; Deut. 18:3). However, Eli's sons served God the way they chose (cf. Korah's behavior in Num. 16). The Law allowed the priests to take for themselves the breast and upper part

¹Leon J. Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, p. 344.

²Firth, p. 67.

of the right rear leg of animals brought as peace offerings (Lev. 7:30-34). But Eli's sons took all that the three-pronged fork brought up when plunged into the remaining meat being boiled for the sacrificial meal (vv. 13-14). The priests were to burn the best part of the sacrifices on the altar as offerings to God, but Eli's sons demanded for themselves raw meat that was not cooked at all (vv. 15-16). Meat was luxurious food in Israel's economy, so Eli's sons were living off the fat of the land.

They were "useless men" (v. 12, lit. "sons of Beliel," Beliel evidently being a synonym for Satan; cf. Ps. 18:4; 2 Cor. 6:15).¹ In other words, they were very wicked and worth nothing. Their conduct not only reflects on the low spiritual condition of the nation at this time, but it also discouraged, rather than encouraged, the Israelites from worshipping the LORD at the tabernacle (cf. 2:17).

"They were running one of the first religious rackets."²

"To this day, arrogant assertiveness and self-seeking are temptations to all those in positions of great power in society."³

"Their sin was particularly egregious since they were supposed to be teaching morality and representing the people of God (2:22-25; cf. 2 Chron. 17:7-9)."⁴

"Just as God protected Joseph in Egypt, so He would protect Samuel in Shiloh, and so He can protect our children and grandchildren in this present evil world."⁵

2. Hannah's godly influence on Samuel and its effect 2:18-21

In the previous paragraphs two statements about the main characters described them and framed the paragraph: "they did not regard the LORD," and "they treated the offering of the LORD disrespectfully" (vv. 12, 17). Likewise in this one the writer described Samuel as "before the LORD" at

¹See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Beliel," by D. F. Payne, pp. 138-39.

²McGee, 2:127.

³Payne, p. 18.

⁴Heater, p. 120.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 210.

the beginning and at the end (vv. 18, 21). Even though he was very young, and his service was probably menial at this time (cf. 3:15), Samuel lived sensitively before God. The writer did not stress this sensitive spirit here; he only hinted at it. However it comes out clearly later (e.g., ch. 4).

In the central part of this section (vv. 18-19) the writer documented the support and encouragement to serve the LORD that Samuel received from his parents. The linen ephod was a priestly garment, as was the robe (cf. Exod. 28:31; 2 Sam. 6:14).¹ Hannah dressed Samuel like a little priest showing that she respected this office and wanted her son to grow up valuing it. Similarly, today, sometimes parents buy things for their children that will give them a love for those things and encourage them to pursue interest in them (e.g., a football, a child's cooking set, etc.).

"We need to remember that the boy who goes to a good church or a good school still needs prayer. He may be in a dangerous place."²

Hannah's obedience resulted in God blessing Elkanah and Hannah even more (vv. 20-21). Among other blessings, God gave Hannah five additional children, by overcoming her barrenness and making her fertile (cf. Exod. 1:21; Ps. 127:3). Furthermore, Samuel continued to develop in a promising manner (cf. Luke 2:40, 52).

"They [Hannah and Elkanah] gave one [child] to God and received five more without losing the first, just as Abraham gave Isaac and received many offspring without losing Isaac! ... He [God] gave her [Hannah] back far more than she had given him. God still works in the same way for those who love him and seek to live according to his plan and purpose."³

3. Eli's lack of influence on his sons and its effect 2:22-26

The sons of Eli followed the example of Canaanite worship rather than the instruction of the Mosaic Law. Ritual prostitution was part of Canaanite

¹N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. II 18 and 2 Sam. VI 14," *Vetus Testamentum* 24:4 (October 1974):505-7.

²McGee, 2:127.

³Tsumura, p. 159.

worship, and Eli's sons seem to have adopted this custom.¹ However, the women with whom they "slept" were evidently not temple prostitutes, but women who performed menial duties in the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 38:8).

"... the Canaanites made sacred prostitution an important part in their sensuous worship. Hophni and Phinehas apparently [or perhaps] were seeking to bring this aspect of that worship into the holy ceremonies of the Tabernacle."²

Even when their father confronted them with their sin, Eli's sons refused to repent. Frequently old men demonstrate wisdom, but Eli was not wise enough to restrain the sinful behavior of his sons. Josephus understood Eli's sons' immorality as follows:

"They were also guilty of impurity with the women that came to worship God [at the tabernacle], obliging some to submit to their lust by force, and enticing others by bribes; nay, the whole course of their lives was no better than tyranny."³

The women referred to were evidently volunteer helpers in the service of the sanctuary (cf. Exod. 38:8). Unintentional sin was pardonable under Mosaic Law, but highhanded, deliberately rebellious sin was not, particularly ritual prostitution (cf. Num. 25:1-5; Deut. 23:17; Amos 2:7-8). The punishment for highhanded sin was death (Num. 15:30). God initially judged Eli's sons by giving them hard hearts as a result of their sin, before He brought final destruction on them (cf. Exod. 7:3; Rom. 1:24).

Earlier in Israel's history another Phinehas, the godly son of another priest, Eleazar, had executed an Israelite named Zimri and a Moabite woman named Cozbi for practicing sexual immorality in Israel (Num. 25). Now this Phinehas, a priest and the son of another priest, Eli, was practicing sexual immorality in the tabernacle. How far the priests had departed from the LORD during the approximately 300 years that separated these incidents!

While Eli's sons were growing in disfavor with the LORD and the Israelites (vv. 22-25), Samuel was growing in favor with both (v. 26; cf. Luke 2:52)—because he was obeying God.

¹Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 207.

²Wood, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 350.

³Josephus, 5:10:1.

4. The oracle against Eli's house 2:27-36

The rest of the chapter explains why God put Eli's sons to death (v. 25). The specific criticism that the unnamed man of God (a prophet, cf. 9:9-10) directed against Eli and his sons was two-fold: They had not appreciated God's grace extended to them in the Exodus deliverance, nor the opportunity to serve Him as priests (vv. 27-29). It is a serious matter to undervalue the grace of God. God had initiated blessing, but they had not responded appropriately, namely, with gratitude, trust, and obedience. Eli's guilt (v. 29) lay in his failure to rebuke his sons severely for their sin (3:13), though he did warn them of God's judgment (2:25). He also enjoyed the fruits of their disobedient worship (2:13-16). Had Eli grown fat from eating the best portions that his sons extorted from the people (cf. 4:18)?

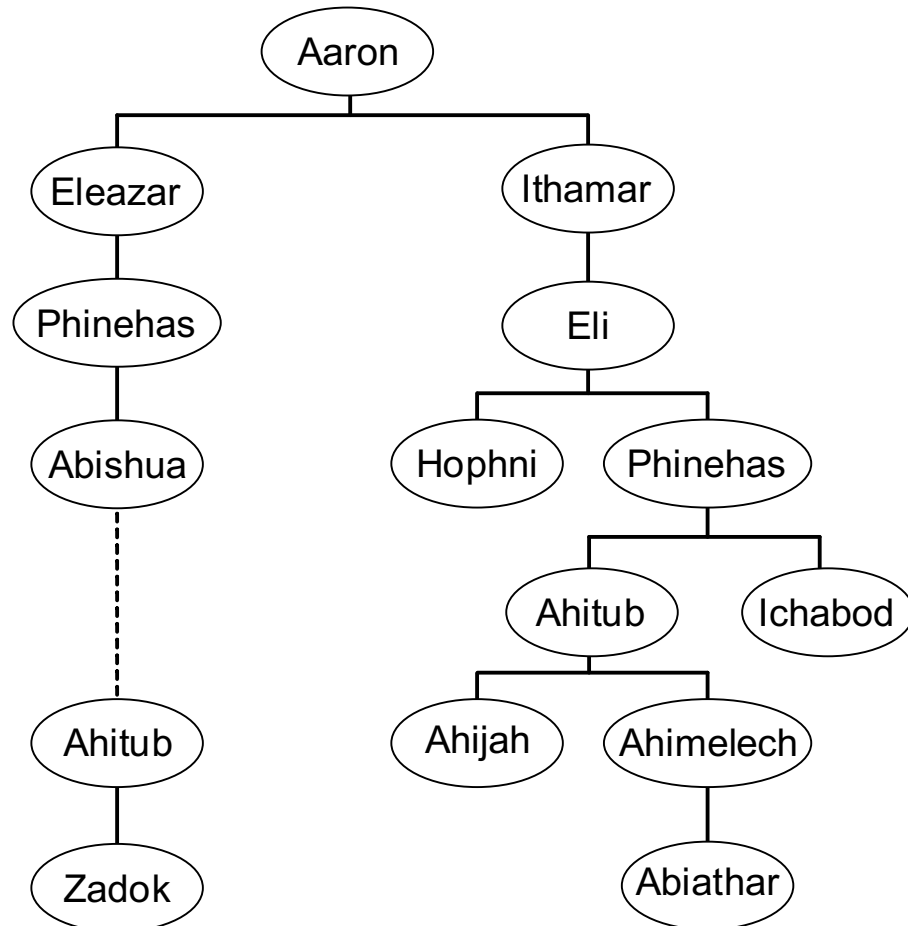
"Honoring one's own sons more than Yahweh, thus reversing the priority of devotion, and despising the divine commandment go side by side in the lives of sinful men."¹

Many students of this book have identified verse 30 as its key verse because it articulates the principle that the books of Samuel illustrate. Every section of 1 and 2 Samuel demonstrates the truth of this statement: "Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be insignificant."

God's judgment on Eli and his sons was that He would dishonor them. God had promised that Levi's descendants would serve Him forever as priests, namely, as long as Israel existed as a sovereign nation (Exod. 29:9; Num. 25:13). Now God revealed that He would cut off Eli's branch of the Levitical family tree. Eli was a descendant of Levi through Levi's son Ithamar. His descendants ceased to function as priests when Solomon dismissed Abiathar as high priest. Abiathar escaped the slaughter of the priests at Nob (22:17-20), but Solomon "defrocked" him because he supported Adonijah (1 Kings 2:27, 35).

¹Tsumura, p. 167.

THE ANCESTORS OF ABIATHAR AND ZADOK



The "faithful priest" God promised to raise up (v. 35) may refer to Samuel (3:1, 20; 7:9; 9:2-13), or possibly Zadok (cf. 1 Kings 1:7, 8; 2:26, 27, 35).¹ Zadok, a descendant of Levi's son Eleazar, replaced Abiathar as high priest in Solomon's day (1 Kings 2:26, 27, 35). The LORD's promise to raise up a coming faithful priest is similar to the His promise to raise up a prophet

¹Davis p. 192.

like Moses (Deut. 18:18). So a succession of priests is probably in view (cf. Acts 3:24).¹

"The complete fulfillment, however, in whom all came true (see especially 1 Sam. 2:35), can be found only in Christ Himself, who indeed was made, and continues to be, God's 'faithful priest' forever. One may see in both Samuel and Zadok partial fulfillments of the prophecy, but only in Christ the complete fulfillment."²

"While the heart is 'the seat of the intellect and will,' the soul is 'the seat of desire and the appetites.'"³

The LORD's "Anointed" referred to in verse 35 was the king of Israel. One of his descendants would be Messiah. Ezekiel 44:15 and 48:11 refer to the continuing ministry of Zadok's descendants when Messiah reigns in His future millennial kingdom.⁴ Verse 36 evidently continues to describe the fate of Eli's descendants after God deposed Abiathar.⁵

Notice the chiasmic (crossing) structure of chapter 2, which focuses on Eli's blessing of Samuel's parents:

- "A The song of Hannah, concluding with reference to the LORD's anointed (2:1-10)
- B Samuel ministers before the Lord (2:11)
- C The sins of Eli's sons (2:12-17)
- D Samuel ministers before the Lord (2:18-19)
- E Eli blesses Samuel's parents (2:20-21a)
- D' Samuel grows in the Lord's presence (2:21b)

¹Firth, p. 71.

²Wood, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 349.

³Tsumura, p. 171.

⁴See Ronald L. Rushing, "Phinehas' Covenant of Peace," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988.

⁵For another study of verses 27-36, see Matitiah Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961):191-216.

- C' The sins of Eli's sons (2:22-25)
- B' Samuel grows in the Lord's presence (2:26)
- A' The oracles of the man of God, concluding with reference to the Lord's anointed (2:27-36)"¹

This section reveals the importance and power of parental influence, though this is not the primary lesson. Eli had placed more importance on his sons' personal preferences than he had on God's preferences; he had honored them more than Him (v. 29). Consequently they became worthless men (v. 12) whom God finally killed prematurely.

"This is not a text about parenting. One could use Eli's example to illustrate poor parenting *if* one were preaching from another passage that deals directly with the subject of parenting, such as a proverb."²

"Honoring one's sons above God in the interest of preserving a dynasty, even a good dynasty for the good of the people, was a way to end that dynasty and to cause great trouble for the nation. The sin of Eli would have been a solemn warning to all religious and civic leaders in Israel not to repeat the folly of those good men, and it is still a warning today."³

Hannah, on the other hand, encouraged her son, Samuel, to value the service of God. Consequently he developed into a godly man whom God and other people honored and respected (v. 26). Eli's sons despised God and abused other people (vv. 17, 22). Samuel feared God and became a great blessing to other people.

This chapter also shows that godly influence can be more powerful than ungodly influence and can overcome many natural obstacles. God enabled Hannah to influence Samuel for good even though she seldom saw him, lived miles from him, and could not prevent the daily wicked influence of Eli's sons over him. Her previous dedication of him to the LORD was

¹Youngblood, p. 588.

²Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 19.

³Brett W. Smith, "The Sin of Eli and Its Consequences," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:677 (January-March 2013):30.

undoubtedly a factor in her success. Other important factors were her continuing encouragement to serve God and her prayers for Samuel.

God has not blessed with godly offspring all parents who have had the same desires for their children that Hannah did. Children are responsible for their own decisions as they grow up (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Some choose to turn away from the LORD. Nevertheless this story shows what *can* happen. Children can grow up in an ungodly environment, away from their parents' personal supervision, and still become godly. The influence of a wise and godly parent can overcome many other ungodly influences in a child's life.

C. GOD'S FIRST REVELATION TO SAMUEL 3:1—4:1A

This chapter records how God's blessing of and through Samuel continued and grew as a result of his faithful commitment to God. This is a revelation of another call to ministry that God extended to His servants the prophets (cf. Exod. 3; Isa. 6; Jer. 1; Ezek. 1; et al.).¹ It is also another instance in which God revealed Himself to someone audibly in a vision.²

1. Samuel's call 3:1-18

The Hebrew word used to describe Samuel in verse 1, *naar*, elsewhere refers to a young teenager (cf. 17:33). Therefore we should probably think of Samuel as a boy in his early teens as we read this section. Josephus wrote that Samuel was 12 years old.³ At this time in Israel's history (i.e., the late Judges Period), special revelations from God were rare. These normally came to prophets in visions or dreams (cf. Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 28:6). Samuel, who saw clearly, both physically and spiritually, contrasts with Eli, who could not see well either way (v. 2, cf. vv. 5, 6; 4:15).

The lamp of God (v. 3) is an expression that refers to lampstand in the tabernacle that continued to give light through the night (cf. Exod. 27:20-21; 30:8; Lev. 24:2-4; 2 Chron. 13:11). The fact that its light had not gone out indicates that God called to Samuel just before dawn.⁴ Samuel may

¹See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

²See Robert K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance*.

³Josephus, 5:10:4.

⁴*The Nelson ...*, p. 456.

have been sleeping in the holy place (Heb. *hekal*).¹ Or he may have been sleeping in the courtyard of the sanctuary.² Eli evidently slept nearby (v. 5). Samuel's self-discipline in getting up three times in response to what he thought was Eli's call was commendable. His selfless, willing obedience qualified him to receive the ministry that God entrusted to him (cf. Gen. 22:1, 11; Exod. 3:4; Isa. 6:8; 1 Tim. 1:12).

"Those are fittest to rule who have learnt to obey."³

Verse 7 does not necessarily mean that Samuel did not then know the LORD at all personally—that he was an unbeliever. Some writers have understood terms such as "knew the LORD" and "did not know the LORD" as evidence of salvation or lack of it (cf. Jer. 31:34; John 17:3).⁴ However, this may be reading too much into the text. Rather, it means that the boy had not yet come to know Yahweh as he was about to know Him, having heard His voice speaking directly to him (cf. 2:12).

"Such mistakes as these [not recognizing God's voice] we make oftener than we think. God calls to us by his word, and we take it to be only the call of the minister, and answer it accordingly; he calls to us by his providences, and we look only at the instruments."⁵

Even though Samuel knew God and His will, God had not previously communicated with him directly. Finally, God not only called to Samuel but also stood by him (v. 10, cf. Gen. 18:22), suggesting the possibility that Samuel could see Him (i.e., a theophany). The LORD's repetition of Samuel's name added a note of urgency to his call (cf. Gen. 22:11; 46:2; Exod. 3:4; Acts 9:4).

In verses 11-14, God restated for Samuel what the unnamed prophet had told Eli concerning the fate of Eli's house in the near and far future (2:27-36). The reference to people's ears ringing (v. 11) occurs only here at the beginning of the monarchy and at its end in the Old Testament (2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3). Under the Mosaic Law the penalty for showing contempt

¹Tsumura, p. 175.

²See Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 157, n. 9.

³Henry, p. 286.

⁴E.g., McGee, 2:130; Zane C. Hodges, "The Salvation of Samuel," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:3 (May-June 1994):1, 3-4.

⁵Henry, p. 286.

for the priesthood, for disobeying parents, and for blasphemy, was death (Deut. 17:12; 21:18-21; Lev. 24:11-16, 23). This was what Hophni (lit. "Tadpole") and Phinehas (lit. "Black One") would experience (cf. 4:11). The cutting off of Eli's line happened about 130 years later (cf. 1 Kings 2:27, 35).

The writer may have intended to mark the beginning of Samuel's ministry with his statement that the lad "opened the doors of the house of the LORD" (v. 15; cf. 1:28b).¹ Evidently they were closed at night.

Eli (lit. "God is High") realized that God's words to Samuel would have been very significant. He therefore insisted that the lad tell him what God had said. "May God do the same to you, and more so" (v. 17) is an oath by which the speaker places a curse on someone, if that person fails to do what is specified (cf. 14:44; 20:13; 25:22). Samuel faithfully reported to Eli all that God had revealed to him (v. 18). He was a faithful prophet from the start; he relayed God's message to Eli completely and correctly. Ironically, Samuel's first message as a prophet was an announcement of his mentor's doom. This was the second time Eli had received a prophecy of his family's future (cf. 2:27-36). Thus he knew that the prediction would surely come to pass (cf. Gen. 41:32). To his credit, he accepted God's will submissively (v. 18).

2. Samuel's ministry 3:19—4:1a

These verses summarize Samuel's continuing ministry as a prophet (Heb. *nabbi'*) in Israel. Though the Hebrew word *nabbi'* describes Samuel only here (3:20) and in 2 Chron. 35:18, the Hebrew word *ro'eh* ("seer") describes the same office and refers to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9:11, 18, 19; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 26:28; and 29:29. When the word prophet appears, it usually emphasizes the proclamation aspect of the prophet's ministry, and when the word seer occurs, the emphasis is usually on his or her ability to perceive messages from the LORD.

¹See J. Gerald Janzen, "'Samuel Opened the Doors of the House of Yahweh' (1 Samuel 3.15)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26 (June 1983):89-96.

"Genuine prophecy was not primarily concerned with prediction or with working charms. It was related to the reformation of the moral order."¹

Samuel qualified for the privilege of being a prophet of the LORD by his faithful obedience to God's will, as he knew it. God sovereignly chose Samuel for this ministry, but his disobedience could have disqualified him, as the disobedience of Eli and his sons disqualified them, and as King Saul's disobedience disqualified him.

The clause "He [Yahweh] let none of his [Samuel's] words fail" [lit. "fall to the ground"] (v. 19) is a metaphor taken from archery (cf. Josh. 21:45; 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56). The arrow that falls to the ground fails to reach its target. In contrast, all of Samuel's words hit their mark. They were effective, because God found him to be a reliable "bow" that delivered His words.²

The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" (v. 20) was proverbial at this time and described all the land of Canaan that Israel possessed (cf. Judg. 20:1; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25). Dan stood on the northern border about 150 miles from Israel's southernmost major town: Beersheba.

The LORD's word (v. 21) is what Samuel communicated to the people as His prophet. He did this so consistently that Samuel's word amounted to the LORD's word (4:1a; cf. Jer. 1:2, 4, 11, 13; Hos. 1:1; Mic. 1:1).

Moses called Abraham (Gen. 20:7), Aaron (Exod. 7:1), and himself (Deut. 34:10) prophets. Samuel became a prophet in a new sense. He was the first of those "servants of the LORD" who became primarily, not secondarily, as the former prophets had become, God's mouthpieces. Samuel also established a company (or school) of prophets that he trained to serve God in this capacity. He did not, of course, train these men to get revelations from God. God gave new revelations sovereignly. He probably did, however, train his students in the general functions of the prophets that included studying God's Word, communicating it effectively, and leading God's people in worship. Schools of the prophets continued through the tenth century B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 2:3). After that time we have no record of their existence. Individual prophets ministered throughout the history of Israel,

¹Abram Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 62.

²For further study of this verse, see W. T. Claassen, "1 Sam. 3:19 - A Case of Context and Semantics," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 8 (1980):1-9.

though some generations saw none, others some, and others more prophets. The great writing prophets who have given us the prophetic books of the Old Testament began their ministry in the ninth century. Moses and the other writers of the historical books of the Old Testament were also prophets. There were no prophets who gave new revelation from God in Israel between Malachi and our Lord's days, which was a period of about 400 years.

"It seems plausible ... to attribute to Samuel the development of the prophetic movement in a formal sense. Certainly it was always God who raised up the true prophet, but the structure itself had its inception with Samuel and was developed further by Elijah."¹

The literary structure of chapter 3 focuses on the LORD's sentence of destruction on Eli's house. This was very significant for the whole nation of Israel.

- "A Absence of divine oracles (3:1)
- B Eli's fading powers (3:2)
- C Three divine calls to Samuel (3:3-9)
- D A divine oracle to Samuel (3:10-15)
- C' Eli's request for Samuel's report (3:16-18)
- B' Samuel's growing stature (3:19a)
- A' Return of divine oracles (3:19b—4:1a)"²

Another writer believed that the chiasmic structure of chapter 3 focuses emphasis on Yahweh.

- "A1 Samuel's career in the shadow of Eli (v. 1)
- B1 Eli and Samuel in darkness (vv. 2-3)
- C1 Yahweh breaks through (vv. 4-10)

¹Heater, pp. 129-30. Cf. Acts 3:24.

²Youngblood, p. 592.

- C2 ... and speaks (vv. 11-14)
- B2 Samuel and Eli in light (vv. 15-18)
- A2 Samuel's career as a prophet (vv. 19-21)"¹

This chapter also shows that God rewards faithful obedience to His word with further ministry opportunities (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12). Samuel became the communicator of God's revelations to Israel. He continued to receive revelations from God and to represent God on earth because he remained faithful. He became the most powerful man in Israel, even anointing the nation's first two kings. Like Moses, Samuel became an excellent leader of the Israelites (cf. Jer. 15:1). He functioned as judge, priest, and prophet. Yet he glorified the kings he appointed, who were the LORD's anointed servants, above himself. In many respects he foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In contrast to Micah, whose idolatry led to the rise of a renegade religious center that competed with the authorized sanctuary at Shiloh [Judg. 17], Samuel's godly influence restores Shiloh to its rightful place (1 Sam. 3:21)."²

Chapters 1 through 3 prepare us for the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel historically and theologically. They teach us that God responds to the faith of people—even insignificant people. A barren and therefore despised woman became the mother of Israel's most powerful man because she trusted and obeyed God. This was a complete reversal of what one would naturally expect. These chapters also show that God blesses with fertility those who commit to His revealed will contained in His Law, but He cuts off those who do not.

"The birth of Samuel was God's means of dealing with His chosen people. The rest of the narrative deals with a similar theme. The righteous ones who are chosen by God will prosper while the ones who are chosen by the people and oppose God's rule will be cut off. This is true even if those who oppose God's

¹Donald Wiebe, "The Structure of 1 Sam. 3: Another View," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 30:12 (1986):256.

²Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 3.

rule (i.e., Eli and his sons) are a part of the covenant community."¹

There are four conflicts and reversals of fortune in these chapters: Peninnah and Hannah (ch. 1), the arrogant and the innocent (2:1-10), Eli's sons and Samuel (2:11-36), and Eli's line of priests and Samuel's line of prophets (3:1—4:1a). God decides who will prosper and who will perish. The basis of His judgment is His faithfulness to what He has said He will do when people respond to His will (Deut. 28).

II. THE HISTORY OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT 4:1B—7:1

Many serious students of 1 Samuel have noted the writer's emphasis on the ark of the covenant that begins here in the text. Critical scholars have long argued that 4:1b—7:1 and 2 Samuel 6 are the only remaining fragments of an older and longer ark narrative, which was a source document for the writer here. Of the 61 references to the ark in 1 and 2 Samuel, 36 appear in 1 Sam. 4:1b—7:2. More recently, some scholars have come to believe that the old ark narratives were somewhat shorter. Conservative scholars generally believe that the ark narratives were not necessarily independent documents but may simply reflect the writer's particular emphasis on the ark here.² One writer believed that their purpose was to explain Israel's demand for a king, as well as the reasons for the end of Eli's branch of the Aaronic family.³

This is a very important part of 1 Samuel. It reestablishes the fact that Yahweh is the only real God, He is alive, and He is sovereign. This revelation to Israel should have precluded idolatry and polytheism in the nation, but it did not. This revelation also forms a foundation for responses to God in Israel by Israel's first two kings. Saul's response was pagan, but David's was proper. Saul and David's responses were typical of all Israel's kings that followed.

¹John A. Martin, "Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):32.

²For a discussion of this subject, including a bibliography of books and articles dealing with it, see Youngblood, pp. 593-94.

³Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 208.

A. THE CAPTURE OF THE ARK 4:1B-22

A new subject comes to the forefront in this section and continues to be a significant motif throughout the rest of Samuel. It is the ark of the covenant. The writer drew attention to the ark in this chapter by mentioning it seven times, including a notation at the end of each text section (vv. 4, 11, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22). Following the reference to Samuel the prophet in 4:1, the writer did not mention him again until 7:3.

The ark was important in Israel's national life. It symbolized God's presence. It was not a good luck charm, as both the Israelites and the Philistines learned. The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) inside it revealed God's will for Israel, the Decalogue being the essence of the Mosaic Covenant. The "atoning cover" (or "mercy seat," AV) on top of the ark made ongoing fellowship with God possible.¹ Thus the ark was indispensable to the Israelites. It corresponds to the Cross in Christian theology as a symbol. The Cross is a symbol of the essential revelation of God in the New Covenant, namely, the finished work of Christ, and it is the key to fellowship with God now. Yet some people fail to appreciate its significance and treat it merely as a talisman, like the Israelites sometimes regarded the ark.

"The purpose of the story in 1 Sam. 4-6 of the ark's imprisonment in Philistia and its travels to different Philistine cities, as well as to Beth-Shemesh, is to give an historical background for the Philistines' rule over the whole country prior to the emergence of the Israelite state which could still accentuate Yahweh's supremacy as an unconquerable deity. The story explains how Yahweh finally became superior to his captors."²

The major historical element of continuity in this section is the fate of Eli's sons (4:9-11). The theological theme of fertility continues to be the primary unifying factor in the narrative.

¹AV stands for *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*.

²G. W. Ahlstrom, "The Travels of the Ark: A Religio-Political Composition," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43 (1984):143. See also Antony F. Campbell, "Yahweh and the Ark: A Case Study in Narrative," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98:1 (1979):31-43.

"Outwardly, 1 Samuel 4 is about the ark; read carefully, it is about YHWH."¹

1. The battle of Aphek 4:1b-11

The Philistines, as we have already seen in Judges, were Israel's primary enemy at this time. Most of them lived in southwest Canaan along the Mediterranean seacoast. Samson, too, fought the Philistines (Judg. 13—16).² There are about 150 references to the Philistines in 1 and 2 Samuel. They originally migrated from Greece primarily by way of Crete (Caphtor, cf. Gen. 10:14; Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7). Their major influx into Canaan occurred about 1200 B.C., about 100 years before the events recorded in this chapter. However there were some Philistines in Canaan as early as Abraham's day (Gen. 21:32; et al.).³

"At the beginning of the twelfth century B.C. the coasts of Palestine were inundated by a flood of seafaring peoples from the islands and shores of the northern Mediterranean. The entire coastal plain of Palestine seems to have been occupied by the Sea Peoples, best known among whom are the Philistines and the Tjikal, who occupied the district between Gaza and Ekron and the coast south of Carmel, respectively. The Philistines brought their own culture with them, but they soon amalgamated with the Canaanites whom they had conquered, and since they possessed the richest tract of land in Palestine it was not long before they were able to dominate the other Sea Peoples."⁴

"... the Philistines did not lose their independence until the Assyrians destroyed Samaria in 722 [B.C.] and brought Judah under submission."⁵

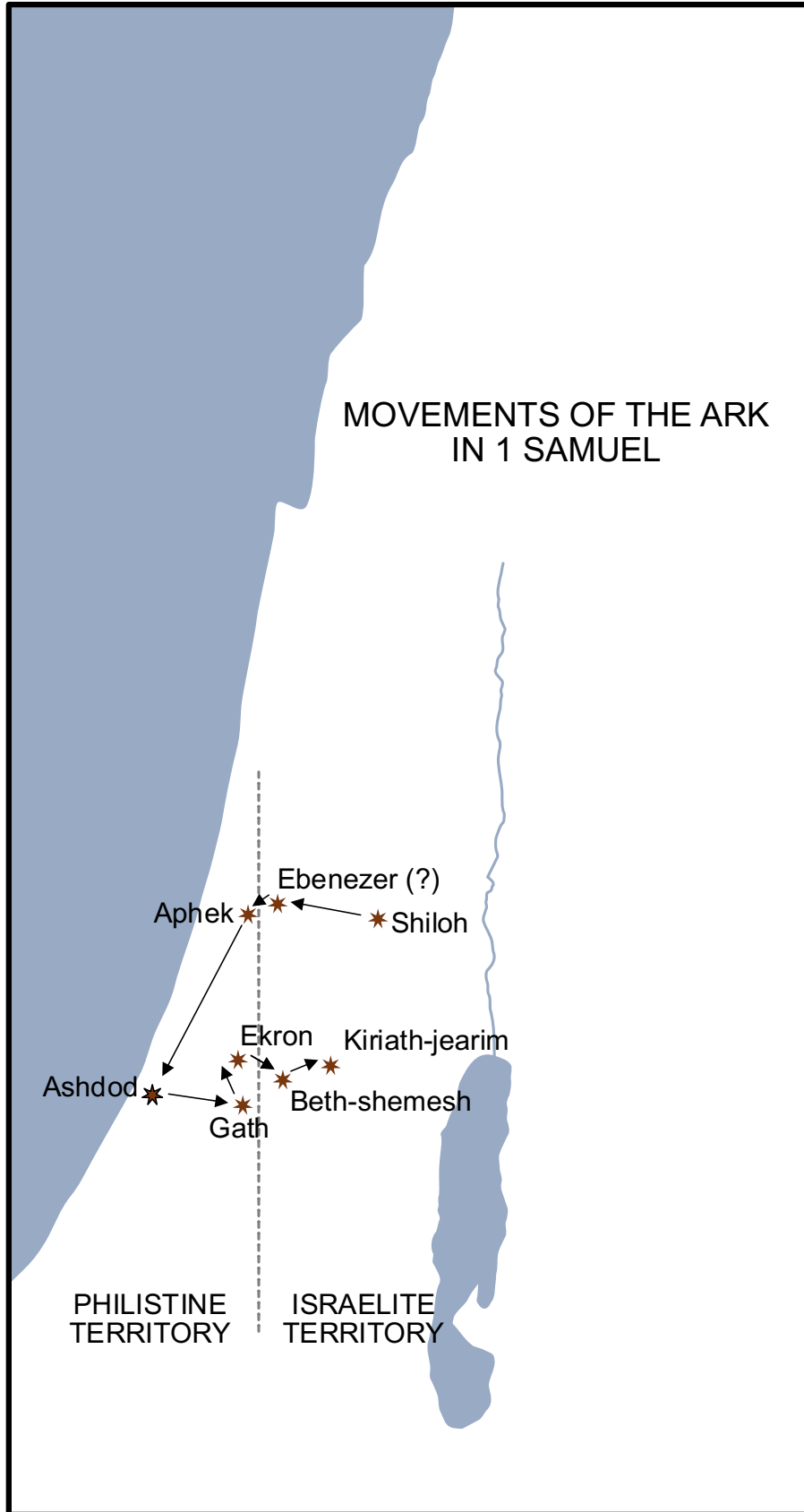
¹Seong-Kwang (Kevin) Kim, "The triumph of Irony in 1 Samuel 4: A Story of Divine Providence," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:705 (January-March 2020):55.

²For a good, brief history of the Philistines, see Edward Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*.

³For further study, see Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture*, especially pp. 13-16, 21-24, and 289-96.

⁴W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 113.

⁵Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 207.



The town of Aphek (cf. 29:1; New Testament Antipatris, Acts 23:31) stood on the border between Philistine and Israelite territory. It was about 11 miles east and a little north of Joppa (and modern Tel Aviv). Archaeologists have not yet located Ebenezer, but it was obviously close to Aphek and on Israel's side of the border. It may have been the modern Izbet Sarteh about two miles east of Aphek on the road to Shiloh.¹

In Israel's first encounter with the Philistines in 1 Samuel, the enemy slew about 4,000 Israelite soldiers (v. 2), and in the second, 30,000 Israelites fell (v. 10). Between these two encounters the Israelites sent to Shiloh for the ark. The ark had always been the place where God dwelt in a special way among the Israelites. It was for this reason a symbol of Yahweh and His presence.

During the long period of the judges, the Israelites as a whole had adopted an increasingly pagan attitude toward Yahweh. They felt that they could satisfy Him with simply formal worship and that they could secure His help with offerings. They were treating the ark the same way they treated God; they believed the ark's presence among them in battle would ensure victory.

"Hophni and Phinehas, in keeping with their character, had shown little concern [for the ark], even permitting the people to enter the Holy of Holies and take the ark out to battle. This was sacrilege of the first order. The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was not to be entered by anyone except the high priest (in this case, Eli), and this only once a year; and surely the ark was not to be carried about the land and into battle like an idol of the heathen."²

"In church work today many people are equally as superstitious. They think that God, as it were, is in a box. They say, 'Look at this method. It is a nice little package deal. It is success in a box. This method will solve our problem.' So many people are moving in that direction today. My friend, that is not being spiritual. That is being superstitious."³

¹Moshe Kochavi and Aaron Demsky, "An Israelite Village from the Days of the Judges," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4:3 (1978):19-21.

²Wood, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 353.

³McGee, 2:132.

"It is common for those that have estranged themselves from the vitals of religion to discover a great fondness for the rituals and external observances of it."¹

"We eventually all learn what Israel discovered in battle against the Philistines. Having the paraphernalia of God and having God are not the same."²

The paraphernalia that modern believers sometimes rely on in place of God include a crucifix, a picture of Jesus, or a family Bible positioned conspicuously in the home but seldom read. Others base their hope of spiritual success on a spiritually strong spouse, regular church attendance, or even the daily Bible reading. These things, as good as they may be, are no substitute for a vital personal relationship with God.

Perhaps the elders of Israel remembered that in Joshua's conquest of Jericho, the ark played a very important and visible part in the victory (Josh. 6:2-20). Nevertheless, back then the people trusted in Yahweh, not in the ark as a talisman (good luck charm). And God had ordered them to take the ark into battle. The custom of taking idols into battle so their gods would deliver them was common among ancient warriors (cf. 2 Sam. 5:21; 1 Chron. 14:12). Obviously the Israelites were wrong in thinking that the presence of the ark would guarantee success.

"The offenses against the ark as pledge of Yahweh's presence appear to be mainly of two kinds: (1) a misplaced reliance on the ark, and (2) an irreverent disregard for the ark."³

The Hebrew word *elep*, translated thousand (v. 2), can also mean military unit. Military units were of varying sizes but considerably smaller than 1,000 soldiers.⁴ Most English translations have rendered *elep* as "thousand."

¹Henry, p. 287.

²Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 54.

³Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant from the Conquest to Kingship*, p. 55.

⁴For more information concerning the problem of large numbers in the Old Testament, see R. E. D. Clark, "The Large Numbers of the Old Testament," *Journal of Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 87 (1955):82-92; and J. W. Wenham, "Large Numbers in the Old Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967):19-53.

Ancient Near Eastern artists sometimes pictured a king sitting on a throne supported on either side by a cherub, which the artist represented as a winged lion (sphinx) with a human head.¹ This may have been the image of the LORD of armies "who is enthroned above the cherubim" that the writer had in mind here (v. 4; cf. Ezek. 1).

According to Jewish tradition, the ark resided at Shiloh for 369 years.² The fact that the people shouted loudly when the ark arrived at Ebenezer from Shiloh (v. 5) may be another indication that they were hoping to duplicate the victory at Jericho (cf. Josh. 6:20). Likewise the response of the Philistines when they heard the cry recalls Rahab's revelation of how the Canaanites feared Yahweh (Josh 2:9-11). These allusions to the victory at Jericho contrast the Israelites' present attitude toward God with what it had been at that earlier battle.

The Philistines referred to the Israelites as "Hebrews" (v. 6). Hebrew is an ethnic term—probably derived from Eber, who was a descendant of Shem, Noah's son (cf. Gen. 10:21; 14:13)—whereas Israelite is a religio-political designation—derived, of course, from the patriarch Israel, formerly Jacob.³

The fact that the Israelites suffered a devastating slaughter (Heb. *makkah*, v. 10) in this second battle, many times worse than their earlier recent defeat (v. 2), proved that victory did not come from the ark but from the LORD. Defeat was due to sin in the camp, including Hophni and Phinehas' sin (cf. 2:25). Israel had suffered defeat at Ai, about 300 years earlier, for the same reason: sin among the people (Josh. 7:11). Trying to duplicate previous spiritual victories by going through the same procedures is no substitute for getting right with God (cf. Judg. 16:20; Matt. 23:25).

God did not record the destruction of the tabernacle at Shiloh, but many scholars assume that the Philistines completely destroyed it after they captured the ark.⁴ This is probably incorrect, though the town probably did suffer some destruction then (cf. 1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:3; Jer.

¹W. F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 1:1 (1938):1-3.

²Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, pp. 59-60.

³P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, p. 240.

⁴E.g., W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 104; Wood, *Distressing Days ...*, pp. 305, 358; idem, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 231, n. 97; S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, p. 50; Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 71; Tsumura, p. 195; Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 143.

7:12, 14; 26:6).¹ The writer of Chronicles mentioned that the tabernacle still stood in David's day (1 Chron. 21:29) and when Solomon began to reign (2 Chron. 1:3). The writer of Samuel showed less interest in the tabernacle than in the ark. The Philistines may have destroyed the town of Shiloh, but it "revived sufficiently to produce a few worthy citizens in later generations (cf. 1 Ki. 11:29; Je. 41:5)."²

"It is likely that Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines either after the battle of Ebenezer (I Sam. 7:11-12), or a little later ... Jeremiah definitely indicates that Shiloh was desolate in his day (Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9), about 600 B.C., and it is quite likely that this desolation dated from the probable destruction by the Philistines about 1050 B.C. ...

"Confirmation of the Biblical indication of the desolation of Shiloh was found in the excavation by the Danes under Aage Schmidt, 1923-1931 ..., which showed that Shiloh was occupied from the thirteenth to the eleventh centuries B.C. This is exactly what one would expect, for the Israelites established the ark at Shiloh in the fourteenth or thirteenth century (Josh. 18:1), and later the site became desolate, probably about 1050 B.C., and was still desolate in the days of Jeremiah, as this prophet tells us."³

THE TWO TABERNACLES AND THE ARK		
Moses' Tabernacle at:	The Ark at:	David's Tabernacle at:
Gilgal (Josh 5:10; 10:15, 43)	Gilgal (Josh. 6:12)	
Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 9-10)	Shiloh (Josh. 18:10)	

¹See John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 165.

²Gordon, p. 96.

³Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 149.

Bethel (Judg. 20:18-28; 21:1-4)	Bethel (Judg. 20:27)	
Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3)	Shiloh (1 Sam. 4:3)	
	Ebenezer (1 Sam. 4:4-5)	
	Ashdod (1 Sam. 5:1)	
	Gath (1 Sam. 5:8)	
	Ekron (1 Sam. 5:10)	
	Bethshemesh (1 Sam. 6:12-14)	
	Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam. 7:1)	
Mizpah ? (1 Sam. 7:9-10)		
Gilgal ? (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-10; 15:10-15)		
Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-9; 22:9-19)		
Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4; 1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:3)		
	Perez-uzzah (2 Sam. 6:2-11; 1 Chron. 13:5-14)	
		Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:1)
	Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12-17; 1 Chron. 15:2—16:6, 37-38)	

2. The response of Eli 4:12-18

The deaths of Hophni and Phinehas, who accompanied the soldiers into battle, were the sign God promised Eli that He would remove the priestly privilege from Eli's descendants eventually (2:34). The writer carefully recorded that it was the news that the Philistines had captured the ark, not that his two sons had died, that shocked Eli and caused him to die (v. 18). Eli's primary concern, to his credit, was the welfare of Israel.

"His heart was broken first, and then his neck."¹

There is a word play in the Hebrew text that helps us understand the significance of the departure of God's glory from Israel at this time. The Hebrew word for "heavy," which describes Eli's weight (v. 18), is *kabed*, and the word for "glory," which Eli's daughter-in-law used to describe the ark (v. 21), is *kabod*. Rather than Israel enjoying glory from God's presence through Eli's priesthood, Eli himself had received the glory, as his heavy weight implies. Eli's apparent self-indulgence was partially responsible for the departure of God's glory from Israel and from his line of priests.²

The battle of Aphek, recorded in this chapter, took place in 1104 B.C. Since Eli was 98 years old when he died on hearing the news that the Philistines had taken the ark in this battle, he must have been born in 1202 B.C.³

3. The response of Phinehas' wife 4:19-22

Likewise, the news of the loss of the ark is what distressed Phinehas' wife more than the news of the deaths of her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law (vv. 21-22). Ichabod (Heb. "No Glory") is usually translated, "The glory has departed," but it may mean, "Where is the glory?"

"With the surrender of the earthly throne of His glory, the Lord appeared to have abolished His covenant of grace with Israel; for the ark, with the tables of the law and the capporeth [atoning cover], was the visible pledge of the covenant of grace which Jehovah had made with Israel."⁴

¹Henry, p. 288.

²See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 400-401.

³See the "Chronology of 1 and 2 Samuel" earlier in these notes.

⁴C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, pp. 56-57.

Phinehas' wife's words may also reflect a pagan viewpoint to some extent: that because the Philistines had stolen what represented Yahweh, the LORD Himself had abandoned the nation. In view of God's promises and revealed plans for Israel, she should have known that He had not totally abandoned His people (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; cf. Matt. 28:20). Furthermore the Israelites knew that the true God is omnipresent. Israel's pagan neighbors typically believed that their gods were limited geographically. On the other hand, she may have had Deuteronomy 28:47-48 in mind: "Since you did not serve the LORD your God ... you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you ... and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you." Josephus wrote that she gave birth to Ichabod prematurely: at seven months.¹

Most of the Israelites evidently thought that since Israel had lost the ark she had lost God. However, because the people had not lived in proper covenant relationship with Him, Israel had only lost God's blessing, not His presence. They were disregarding God's Law, so God's glory had departed from Israel (v. 22; cf. Exod. 19:5-6; Ezek. 10). His people could not enjoy fertility.² In the following chapters (5—6), God demonstrated His glory in the land of Philistia.

Someone has said that if you feel far from God, you need to remember that He is not the One who moved. God has promised that, if His people will draw near to Him, He will draw near to them (2 Chron. 7:14; James 4:8; Heb. 10:22).

B. PAGAN FERTILITY FOILED BY GOD CH. 5

The primary purpose of this chapter, I believe, is to demonstrate the superiority of Yahweh over Dagon, the fertility god of the Philistines. There are several similarities between this chapter and the record of God sending plagues on the Egyptians (Exod. 7—12), an earlier demonstration of His sovereignty.

¹Josephus, 5:11:4.

²For a further discussion of the role of the ark at this time in Israel's history, and how Samuel's ministry related to it, see Clive Thomson, "Samuel, the Ark, and the Priesthood," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118:417 (July-September 1961):259-63. For a more critical study of the ark, see P. R. Davies, "The History of the Ark in the Books of Samuel," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 5 (1977):9-18.

5:1-5 Having captured the ark, the Philistines brought it from Ebenezer to their main city, Ashdod, which stood about 30 miles to the southwest and three miles from the Mediterranean coast. Archaeologists have excavated Ashdod more extensively than any of the five major Philistine cities.

"It was understood [in the ancient Near East] that a people whose gods were in enemy hands was completely conquered."¹

Dagon was the principal deity of the Philistines. In the Ugaritic myths, Dagon (or Dagan) was the father of the storm god Baal.² The popular teaching that the Philistines pictured him as being part man and part fish finds support in verse 4. *Dag* in Hebrew means "fishy part."

"Though an older interpretation understood him to be a fish god, it is more likely that he was a weather-fertility deity responsible for crops."³

Dagon (cf. Heb. *dagan*, meaning "grain") was a grain god whom the Philistines worshipped as the source of bountiful harvests. Worship of him began about 2500 B.C. in Mesopotamia, especially in the Middle-Euphrates region.⁴

"Thus Dagon was a grain deity superimposed upon an original god of fish or fishing."⁵

"Archaeological light and confirmation concerning the god Dagon has been forthcoming from the excavations. A temple of Dagon, identified by the inscriptions, has been found at Ugarit (ancient name of Ras Shamra), as well as two steles

¹Tsumura, pp. 203-4. See also McCarter, p. 24.

²See D. E. Fleming, "Baal and Dagan in Ancient Syria," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 83 (1993):88-98; Albright, *Archaeology and ...*, p. 74.

³Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 33.

⁴*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Dagon," by Kenneth A. Kitchen, pp. 287-88.

⁵Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 206. See also Firth, p. 94.

[carved standing stones] erected to the same god."¹

The Philistines probably regarded the fact that the image representing Dagon had fallen on its face before the ark as indicating Yahweh's superiority. Falling on one's face was a posture associated with worship. The fact that the Philistines had to reposition the idol is another evidence of Dagon's inferiority. He could not act on his own (cf. Isa. 46:7). Surely, this is an indication that God has a sense of humor! Later Goliath, the Philistine champion, would also fall on his face before David, Yahweh's champion (17:49).

The following night the symbol of Dagon toppled again before the ark, the symbol of Yahweh. This time Dagon's head, suggestive of his sovereign control, and his palms, suggesting his power, broke off (v. 4). In the ancient Near East, warring armies cut off and collected the heads and hands of their defeated enemies to count accurately the number of their slain (cf. 29:4; Judg. 8:6).² Thus, it appeared that someone had defeated Dagon. Earlier Samson's defeat had involved the cutting of the hair of his head and the weakening of his hands (Judg. 16:18-21). Later David would cut off Goliath's head (17:51), and the Philistines would cut off King Saul's head (1 Chron. 10:10).

The breaking of Dagon's head and hands on the threshold of his temple rendered the threshold especially sacred to the Philistines. From then on their pagan priests superstitiously regarded the threshold as holy (cf. Zeph. 1:9). The ancients commonly treated sanctuary thresholds with respect, because they marked the boundary that divided the sacred from the profane.³ They were regarded as entry points into the underworld.⁴ This incident involving Dagon made the threshold to his sanctuary even more sacred. This is another ironical

¹Free, p. 148.

²Antony F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative*, p. 86, n. 1. See also Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 34.

³Gordon, p. 99; Tsumura, p. 206.

⁴Firth, p. 95.

testimony to the utter folly of idolatry and to Yahweh's sovereignty (cf. Exod. 20:3).

5:6-12 The writer now began to stress the major theme in the ark narrative: the powerful "hand" of the LORD.¹ There are nine occurrences of this anthropomorphic phrase in this section of 1 Samuel (4:8; 5:6, 7, 9, 11; 6:3, 5, 9; 7:13). The hand of the LORD represents Yahweh in action (cf. Exod. 9:3; Jer. 21:5-6). In the biblical world, people spoke of sickness and death as the bad effects of the "hand" of some god.² This was the conclusion of Ashdod's leaders, who attributed their recent calamities to Yahweh (v. 7). God afflicted the Philistines with tumors: swellings caused by new tissue growth.

Evidently the men of Ashdod believed that it was particularly with their city that Yahweh felt displeasure. So they moved the ark to Gath (lit. "Winepress"), which lay about 12 miles southeast of Ashdod. Dagon could not prevent the tumors and death with which Yahweh afflicted the Philistines (vv. 6, 9-12). The people of Ashdod should have turned from worshipping Dagon and put their trust in Yahweh. Death followed because they chose to continue in unbelief in spite of their confession of Yahweh's superiority (v. 7).

"Carnal hearts, when they smart under the judgments of God, would rather, if it were possible, put him far from them than enter into covenant and communion with him, and make him their friend."³

Josephus referred to the temple of Dagon as existing at Ashdod in the Inter-testamental Period.⁴ He did not say whether the temple referred to in 1 Samuel survived until then, or was rebuilt.

¹Patrick D. Miller Jr. and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel*, p. 48.

²See J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," *Vetus Testamentum* 21:2 (1971):244-51.

³Henry, p. 289.

⁴Josephus, 13:4:4.

The Hebrew word translated "broke out" (v. 9) occurs only here in the Old Testament. The Septuagint translators interpreted it accurately as "groin." These tumors or "sores" (NET2, CEV) were apparently most prominent in the groin area, hence the English translations "hemorrhoids" (NAB) or "emerods" (AV).¹ But hemorrhoids are not normally fatal. Tumors in the groin are a symptom of bubonic plague. Since the Philistines associated mice with this plague (6:4-5), and mice carry bubonic plague, it may be that the hand of Yahweh sent this particular affliction on them. Josephus wrote that vomiting and dysentery plagued the people, which may have included anal sores.²

Ekron stood about 6 miles north of Gath.³ The reputation of the ark preceded it to that town, and its residents did not welcome it as a trophy of war. They saw it instead as a divine instrument of death, a "hot potato" (cf. Exod. 2:23; 11:6; 12:30). The Philistines repeatedly acknowledged Yahweh's superior power over themselves and Dagon (vv. 7-12; cf. 2:6, 25; Exod. 10:7; 12:31-33). This is another testimony to Yahweh's sovereignty in the narrative.

The cry that went up to heaven from Philistia (v. 12) recalls the death cry that went up to heaven earlier from Egypt when God afflicted that enemy (Exod. 12:30; cf. 1 Sam. 4:8). Through the seven months that the ark was in Philistia (6:1) the Philistines learned what the Israelites had not: Yahweh is the sovereign God. Yet they refused to bow before Him and so experienced death, though the LORD mixed mercy with judgment and did not kill all the Philistines (v. 12).

Chapters 4 and 5 both testify to God's sovereignty. Neither Israel, in chapter 4, nor the Philistines, in chapter 5, could control or resist His will. People cannot manipulate God. We must follow Him rather than expecting Him to follow us. Had the Israelites learned this lesson they probably would

¹NET2 is *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed., CEV is *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*, and NAB is *The New American Bible*.

²Josephus, 6:1:1.

³See Trude Dothan, "Ekron of the Philistines. Part I: Where They Came From, How They Settled Down, and the Place They Worshipped In," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16:1 (1990):26-36.

not have demanded a king like the other nations (8:5) but waited for Him to provide His choice for them.

C. THE ARK RETURNED TO ISRAEL BY GOD 6:1—7:1

The writer added further evidence of the Philistines' reverence for Yahweh and the Israelites' spiritual blindness in this section.

1. The plan to end God's judgment 6:1-9

The ark was with the Philistines seven months (v. 1), though Josephus said it was four months.¹ They held onto it as long as they could, but finally could tolerate it among themselves no longer.

"Note, Sinners lengthen out their own miseries by obstinately refusing to part with their sins."²

"Never can the children of Satan endure the presence of the true God."³

The Philistines acknowledged Yahweh's superiority over Dagon, but they believed they could manipulate Him (v. 3). Guilt (trespass) offerings were common in ancient Near Eastern religions when sacred space or property was violated. On this occasion, the offering was to compensate for trespassing against God by capturing the ark.

"Ancient religious protocol mandated that the worshiper not approach his god(s) empty-handed (cf. Exod 23:15; Deut 16:16)."⁴

The Philistines may have fashioned images of mice (v. 4) because there was some connection between rodents and the swellings that the Philistines suffered.⁵ This connection has led many interpreters to conclude that perhaps the Philistines had experienced something such as bubonic

¹Josephus, 6:1:4.

²Henry, p. 289.

³J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:448.

⁴Youngblood, p. 604.

⁵John B. Geyer, "Mice and Rites in 1 Samuel V-VI," *Vetus Testamentum* 31:3 (July 1981):293-304.

plague,¹ which fleas living on rodents transmit. Bubonic plague causes buboes (inflamed swellings of the lymph glands, especially in the armpits and groin): tumors.² Josephus diagnosed the problem as dysentery, which may have been an accompanying symptom.³ However, the text does not link mice directly with this plague. Mice may have been a second problem for which the Philistines offered an additional guilt offering.⁴ Probably the Philistines intended that the models would trigger sympathetic magic, that is, that the models would accomplish what the Philistines wanted. By sending the models out of their country they hoped the tumors and mice would depart too.

Yahweh had reduced the fertility of the crops of the Philistines as well as afflicting the people and their gods (v. 5). The Philistines remembered that this is what Yahweh had done to the Egyptians earlier (v. 6). The priests counseled the people not to harden their hearts as Pharaoh had done. Hardening the heart only brings divine retribution (cf. Josh. 7:19).

Milk cows (vv. 7, 10) are cows that are still nursing their calves. It would be very unusual for nursing cows to leave their young and head for a town some 10 miles away. Indeed, the Philistines regarded this behavior as miraculous and indicative that Yahweh had been punishing them. Beth-shemesh (lit. "House of the Sun") was a Levitical city (Josh. 21:16). In view of its name, it may have been known for hosting a temple to the sun when the Canaanites controlled it.

2. The return of the ark to Beth-shemesh 6:10-18

Beth-shemesh was the closest Israelite town to Ekron. It stood east-southeast of Ekron. To get there the cows walked east up the Sorek Valley, which was Samson's home area. Evidently the Israelites, who were reaping their wheat harvest (in May-June) when the ark appeared, remembered that only Levites were to handle the ark (Num. 4:15-20; v. 15). Beth-shemesh was a Levitical town (Josh 21:13-16; 1 Chron. 6:57-59), so Levites were perhaps nearby. Even though the ark had been absent from Israel for seven

¹E.g., Davis, p. 197; et al.

²See Nicole Duplaix, "Fleas: The Lethal Leapers," *National Geographic* 173:5 (May 1988):672-94, for more information on bubonic plague.

³Josephus, 6:1:1.

⁴Firth, p. 98.

months, God had not removed His blessing of fertile crops from His chosen people during that time. This indicates His grace.

3. The removal of the ark to Kiriath-jearim 6:19—7:1

"That the label 'Ark Narrative' is not entirely appropriate becomes apparent in these verses. Rather, the narrative as a whole emphasizes Yahweh's glory and holiness, emphasized through the ark."¹

Not all the people who later assembled to view the returned ark were as careful about handling it as those from Beth-shemesh were. The Mosaic Law specified that no one was to look into the ark—or that person would die (Num. 4:5, 20; cf. 2 Sam. 6:6-7). The number of the slain (50,070, v. 19) may represent an error a scribe made as he copied the text,² though there is strong textual support for the large number. Several Hebrew manuscripts omit 50,000, and Josephus mentioned only 70 fatalities.³ Perhaps 70 men died, as the NIV and several other modern translations state.⁴

"The basic point at issue in this verse is that God will brook no irregularity in his people's treatment of the sacred ark (cf. 2 Sa. 6:6f.).⁵

"The power of God was not something that Israel somehow tamed and confined in a box, any more than modern man can banish God to the churches, chapels and cathedrals they take care never to frequent."⁶

"Beth-shemesh stands in the shadow of the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol, where earlier the judge Samson had been born and had lived out his days as a Nazirite set apart to God (Judg. 13:2, 7, 25). ... The curiosities of both Samson and the people of Beth-shemesh offer an interesting contrast. Samson had a

¹Ibid., p. 100.

²See John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology*, pp. 87-89; Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, p. 169.

³Josephus, 6:1:4.

⁴David M. Fouts, "Added Support for Reading '70 men' in 1 Samuel VI:19," *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992):394. See also Tsumura, pp. 226-27.

⁵Gordon, p. 103.

⁶Payne, p. 35.

curiosity about sin, and the people of Beth-shemesh had a curiosity about forbidden holy things. Both interests lay outside of God's law. As the people of God, we need to follow God's standards of holiness. Because God is set apart from sin, we should share that commitment."¹

Why did God strike dead some Israelites who touched the ark inappropriately (v. 19; 1 Chron. 13:10; cf. Lev. 10:2) and not deal with the Philistines in the same way (4:17)? God was merciful to the Philistines. He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will show compassion on whom He will show compassion (Exod. 33:19). The reason for His patience with the Philistines was partially to teach the Israelites and the Philistines His omnipotence. Also, the Israelites' greater knowledge of God's will placed them under greater responsibility to do His will.

The Israelites came to a fresh appreciation of Yahweh's holiness because the men of Beth-shemesh died (v. 20). The last part of this verse indicates that they wished God would depart from them, because they were sinful and He was holy (cf. Isa. 6:5; Luke 5:8). Thus the capture of the ark resulted in the Philistines recognizing that Yahweh was the true source of fertility and blessing. The Israelites also rededicated themselves to investigating and following the revealed will of God in the Mosaic Covenant.

Archaeologists believe they have located the remains of Kiriath-jearim about 10 miles east and a little north of Beth-shemesh. Why did the Israelites not return the ark to the tabernacle at Shiloh? One possibility is that the Philistines had destroyed Shiloh (cf. Ps. 78:60; Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). There is some archaeological evidence that the city was destroyed about 1050 B.C.² The ark did not reside in an appropriate place of honor until David brought it into his new capital, Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). Kiriath-jearim was not a Levitical city, nor is there any reason to believe that Abinadab (lit. "My Father is Noble") and Eleazar were priests or Levites. Perhaps the Israelites kept the ark there for convenience. It evidently remained there for 20 years (cf. 7:2). Wood calculated that it was there

¹Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 339. Paragraph division omitted.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 458.

about seventy years.¹ "Baale-judah" (2 Sam. 6:2) was evidently another, later name for Kiriath-jearim (cf. Josh. 15:9).²

"The certainty of God's presence is always a sign of hope, however dark the circumstances may be."³

This whole major section of 1 Samuel (4:1b—7:1) advances the fertility motif. Dagon, the chief god of Israel's chief rival, proved incapable of preventing Yahweh's curse from falling on the Philistines. Yahweh Himself appears as sovereign and all-powerful. Whereas the ark was the symbol of God's presence, it was not a good luck charm that would secure victory for its possessor. The Israelites' attitude reveals that they did not appreciate the importance of obeying the Mosaic Law. Some individuals probably perceived that God's presence was essential to Israel's blessing. Perhaps Eli and Phinehas' wife did. When God's presence was near His people again, there was rejoicing. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, God gave the nation some blessing and returned the ark to His people. He evidently did this so they would be able to rediscover the true nature of worship at a future time: under David's leadership.

In this second major section of Samuel, as in the others, there are conflicts and reversals of fortune. These include Israel and the Philistines (4:1b-22), Dagon and the ark (5:1—6:9), and the people who did not rejoice and those who did (6:10-16).⁴

III. SAMUEL AND SAUL 7:2—15:35

This third major part of 1 Samuel contains three subsections: Samuel's ministry as Israel's judge (7:2-17), the kingship given to Saul (chs. 8—12), and the kingship removed from Saul (chs. 13—15). The main point seems to be Israel's unjustified dissatisfaction with her sovereign God and its awful consequences. In spite of His people's rejection, the LORD continued to show them mercy and faithfulness.

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 23, n. 8, and p. 190; idem, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 371.

²Youngblood, p. 868. For a study of the complex history of Kiriath-jearim, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Kiriath-jearim and the Ark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969):143-56.

³Payne, p. 37.

⁴Martin, p. 138.

A. SAMUEL'S MINISTRY AS ISRAEL'S JUDGE 7:2-17

"The other judges before him had been important, especially Gideon and Samson, but they can hardly be put in a class with this man. In fact, when one recognizes the depth to which conditions in Israel had fallen at the time Samuel stepped upon the scene, and then the remarkable change that was effected through him in a comparatively few years, one has to accord him a place among the greatest of the Old Testament. He was God's man for one of Israel's most crucial hours, and he performed a task of major significance. He stepped into a position which presented discouraging obstacles, and he moved ahead in spite of them to accomplish what few would have believed possible."¹

As a totally dedicated Nazarite, who followed the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant as best he could with God's help, Samuel became a source of deliverance for Israel. The writer recorded two deliverances in this chapter.

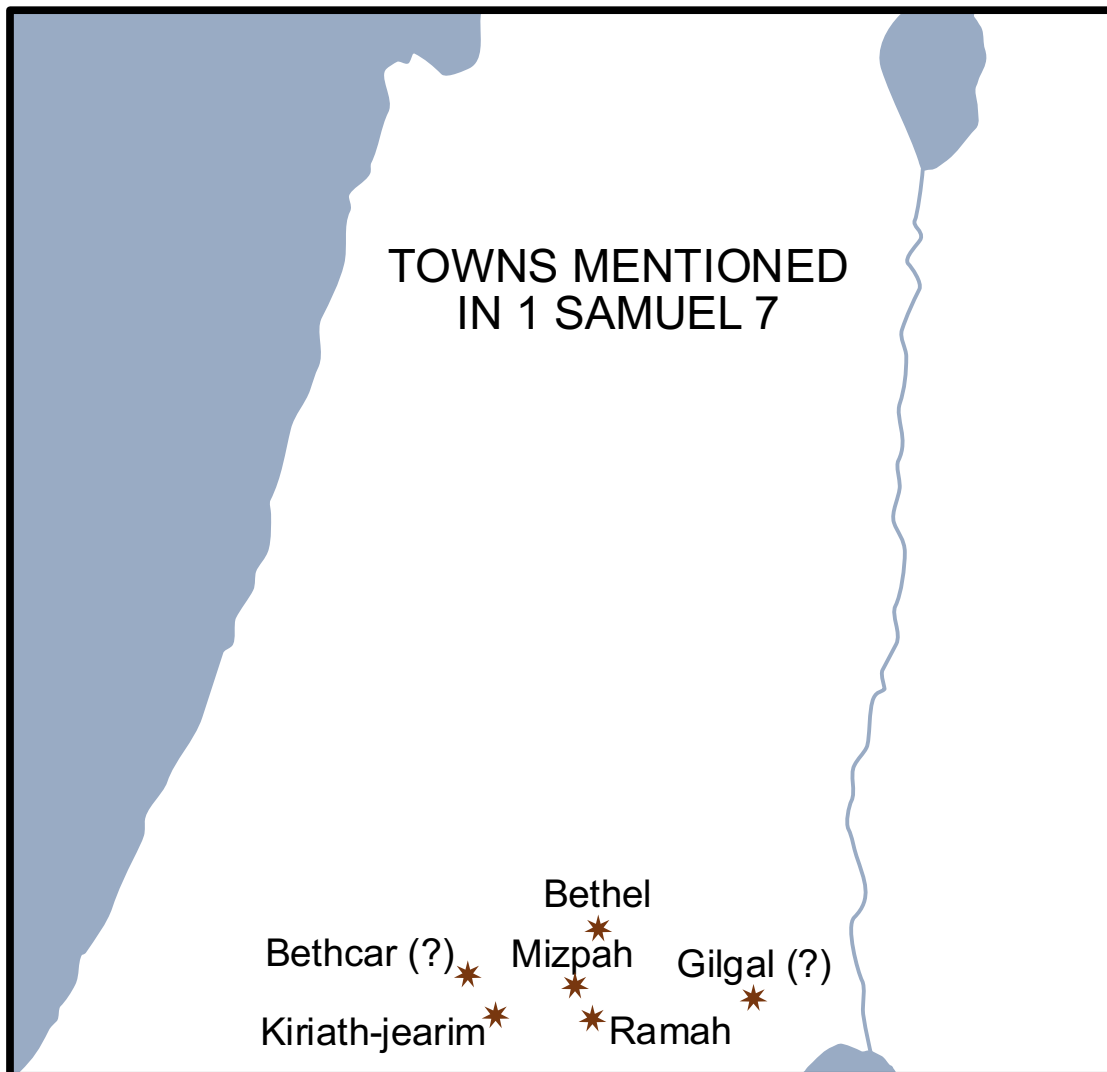
This section sounds more like the Book of Judges than does any other in 1 or 2 Samuel. The cycle of religious experience repeated six times in Judges occurs here as well. That cycle consists of blessing, apostasy, discipline, repentance, deliverance, rededication, and blessing. Samuel exercised the same function as the judges whose experiences appear on the pages of Judges.

"In the books of Samuel there are three chapters which stand out as markers, characterized by their interpretation of historical changes taking place in Israel's leadership structure. They are 1 Samuel 7, 1 Samuel 12 and 2 Samuel 7. Not that the remainder of these books is 'non-theological,' for theological presuppositions undergird the whole, but in these chapters a prophet expounds the divine word for each stage of the crisis through which the people of God are passing."²

Note the continuation of the key word "hand" in this chapter (vv. 3, 8, 13, 14). It reflects the writer's continuing interest in the source of true power.

¹Wood, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 363.

²Baldwin, p. 33.



1. Samuel's spiritual leadership 7:2-4

Twenty years after the Philistines had returned the ark, Samuel led the people in national repentance.¹ Samson's ministry may have taken place during these 20 years.² The Philistine oppression resulted in the Israelites turning to Yahweh for help (v. 2). Samuel told the people what they needed to do to secure God's blessing and victory over their enemy: They needed

¹Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, pp. 65-66; Wood, *The Prophets ...*, p. 159, n. 12.

²Idem, *Distressing Days ...*, pp. 303-4.

to repent (cf. Deut. 6:13; 13:4; Matt. 4:10). The people did so, and the hope of deliverance revived.

Baal and Ashtoreth were the chief male and female deities of the Canaanite pantheon. The plural forms of these names are Baals and Ashtaroth (v. 4).

"The Baals and the Ashtaroth that the Israelites removed (v. 4) is probably idiomatic (merismatic) for all "the foreign gods and goddesses."¹

"Our archaeological and historical sources show that Ashtaroth was one of the best known fertility goddesses. She was known in certain areas in the Near East under the names Ashtart and Astarte, and to the Babylonians as Ishtar. She is pictured on a seal found at Bethel ..."²

2. National repentance and deliverance 7:5-14

Mizpah (lit. "Watchtower," indicating an elevated site) was about two miles northwest of Samuel's hometown, Ramah, on the central Benjamin Plateau, about seven miles north of Jerusalem.³ Pouring out water symbolized the people's feeling of total inability to make an effective resistance against their enemy (cf. Ps. 62:8; et al.). The people showed that they felt a greater need to spend their time praying to strengthen themselves spiritually than eating to strengthen themselves physically. They did this by fasting (skipping a meal or meals).⁴ They admitted that what they had been doing was a sin against God (cf. 1 John 1:9). The writer described Samuel as one of Israel's judges similar in function to Gideon, Samson, and others, at this time (cf. Judg. 6:25-27).

"When sinners begin to repent and reform, they must expect that Satan will muster all his force against them, and set his

¹Tsumura, p. 232. "Idiomatic" refer to a mode of expression, and "merismatic" refers to the figure of speech in which a few represent the whole.

²Free, p. 152.

³On the significance of the six-fold repetition of Mizpah in this story, see John A. Beck, "The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of 1 Samuel 7:5-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):299-309. See also Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 175-77.

⁴On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103.

instruments on work to the utmost to oppose and discourage them [v. 7]."¹

The Israelites sensed their continuing need for God's help and appealed to Samuel to continue to intercede for them (v. 8).

"In contrast to the debacle at Aphek (ch. 4), the Israelites were no longer depending on the ark as a magical talisman. They now wanted to depend solely on the power of God through prayer."²

Samuel gave intercession priority in his ministry, because he realized how essential it was to Israel's welfare (cf. 12:23). All spiritual leaders should realize this need and should give prayer priority in their ministries. The suckling young lamb he sacrificed for the people represented the nation as it had recently begun to experience new life because of its repentance (v. 9). The burnt offering was an offering of dedication, but it also served to make atonement for God's people's sins (cf. 24:25; Lev. 1:4; Job 1:5; 42:8).

After the tabernacle left Shiloh, the Israelites may have pitched it at Mizpah. Since Samuel offered a burnt offering there (v. 9), perhaps that is where the tabernacle stood. Nevertheless at this time the Israelites made offerings to God at other places too (cf. v. 17).

God's deliverance was apparently entirely supernatural (v. 10), probably to impress the people with His ability to save them in their hopeless condition and to strengthen their faith in Him. Baal was supposedly the god of storms, but Yahweh humiliated him here.³ Josephus, reflecting Jewish tradition, wrote that God sent an earthquake, the earth opened up, and it swallowed many of the Philistines, as well as thunder and lightning.⁴

"Some scholars immediately take expressions like this [in verse 10] to mean that the event is unhistorical. However, Assyrian

¹Henry, p. 292.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 462.

³See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):277; and idem, "Yahweh versus the Canaanite Gods: Polemic in Judges and 1 Samuel 1—7," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):165-80.

⁴Josephus, 6:2:2.

records also mention divine intervention in battles, and no one claims that those are unhistorical."¹

The location of Beth-car is still uncertain, but most scholars believe it was near Lower Beth-horon, about 8 miles west of Mizpah, toward the Philistine plain.

Scholars also dispute the site of Shen (v. 12). The Israelites memorialized God's help with a stone monument that they named Ebenezer (lit. "Stone of Help or Power"; cf. Josh. 4:1-9; Acts 26:22). This Ebenezer is quite certainly not the same as the one that the writer mentioned in 4:1 and 5:1. It was another memorial stone that marked God's activity for His people (cf. Gen. 35:14; Josh. 4:9; 24:26). Both the Canaanites and the Israelites used standing stones to memorialize significant religious experiences, though the Law forbade setting them up as idols (Lev. 26:1). Some of these remain to this day.² This stone announced the reversal of previous indignities and was a symbol of reintegration.³ This victory ended the 40-year oppression of the Philistines (1124-1084 B.C.; cf. Judg. 3:30; 8:28). However, the Philistines again became a problem for Israel later (cf. 9:16).

"Do you recognize God in your life? That is what Samuel meant by that Eben-ezer stone."⁴

The memorial stone bore witness to the effectiveness of trusting the LORD and His designated judge. If the LORD had helped the people thus far, what need was there for a king? This incident shows that the people should have continued following the leadership of the judges that God had been raising up for them. This was not the right time for a king.

The concluding reference to peace with the Amorites may imply that this victory began a period of peace with the Amorites as well as with the Philistines. The Amorites had controlled the hill country of Canaan, and the Philistines had dominated the coastal plain. The native Canaanites, here referred to as Amorites, would have profited from Israel's superiority over the Philistines since the Philistines were more of a threat to the Canaanites

¹Tsumura, p. 136.

²See Carl F. Graesser, "Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 35:2 (1972):34-63.

³Gordon, pp. 107-8.

⁴McGee, 2:137.

than were the Israelites.¹ Often in the Old Testament, the name Amorites (lit. "Westerners") designates the original inhabitants of Canaan in general.

3. Samuel's regular ministry 7:15-17

In addition to providing the special leadership just described, Samuel's ministry as a judge in Israel included regular civil, as well as spiritual, leadership. He was active especially in the tribal territory of Benjamin and in the town of Bethel, just north of Benjamin in Ephraim's tribal allotment. Samuel covered a four-town circuit as preacher (prophet) and judge. He was obviously similar to the other judges in the Book of Judges, all of whom also served local regions primarily. It is not clear whether the Gilgal referred to here (v. 16) was the Gilgal in the Jordan Valley near Jericho, or whether it was another Gilgal, located a few miles north of Bethel.² Samuel's hometown, Ramah, was about five miles north of Jerusalem. The fact that Samuel built an altar (v. 17) illustrates his response to God's grace and his commitment to Yahweh (cf. Gen. 12:7; et al.).

"Brief as the portrait of Samuel here is, it gives us a glimpse of the ideal ruler. He had been provided by God and trained by him; he now showed himself able to read his people's minds and capable of rebuking them effectively. He was decisive in word and action, and he was fully in touch with God. Nor is his concern to provide justice purely coincidental. Yet the irony was that such a ruler was precisely the man whom Israel rejected, as chapter 8 will show. Political unrest may mirror inadequate or oppressive leadership; on the other hand, it may well demonstrate the fatal flaws in human nature. Exactly the same may be true of unrest within any human community, including a local congregation."³

Samuel's personal faithfulness to God qualified him for spiritual leadership and resulted in God blessing Israel. He was God's man for his time, calling the people back to faithful obedience to His will so they could experience

¹Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh, a Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.*, p. 418.

²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 76, wrote that it was the latter, as did Driver, p. 65, and Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 95.

³Payne, p. 39.

His blessing. His ministry shows that the Israelites had no reason to demand a king. Samuel was an exemplary judge.

B. KINGSHIP GIVEN TO SAUL CHS. 8—12

"Clearly these five chapters constitute a literary unit, for they are immediately preceded by the formula that marks the end of the story of a judge (7:13-17) and immediately followed by the formula that marks the beginning of the account of a reign (13:1; ...). The divisions of the unit ... alternate between negative and positive attitudes toward monarchy (not as contradictory but as complementary): 8:1-22, negative; 9:1—10:16, positive; 10:17-27, negative; 11:1-11, positive; 11:12—12:25, negative ..."¹

In this section and the next (chs. 13—15), the writer skillfully contrasted the blessing that comes as a result of obeying God's will with the cursing that comes from disobedience. Chapters 8—12 are generally positive and record Saul's successes. The section opens and closes with Samuel giving a warning to the Israelites.

1. The demand for a king ch. 8

The Israelites had pressed their leaders for a king at least twice in their past history. The first time was during Gideon's judgeship (Judg. 8:22), and the second was during Abimelech's conspiracy (Judg. 9:2). Now, during Samuel's judgeship, they demanded one again.

"This chapter is among the most significant in the historical books of the Old Testament, marking the transition from judgeship to kingship in ancient Israel."²

The occasion for requesting a king 8:1-3

The people would probably not have pressed for a king at this time had Samuel's sons proved as faithful to the Mosaic Covenant as their father had been. However, Joel ("Yahweh is God") and Abijah ("My [divine] Father is Yahweh") disqualified themselves from leadership in Israel by disobeying

¹Youngblood, p. 611.

²Tsumura, p. 242.

the Law (Exod. 23:6, 8; Deut. 16:19). The text says that they served as judges in Beersheba (v. 2), but Josephus wrote that they served at Bethel and Beersheba.¹ Eli's sons had also proved unworthy. Parental influence is important, but personal choices are even more determinative in the outcome of one's life. Whereas the writer censured Eli for his poor parenting (3:13), he did not do so with Samuel. Evidently he did not consider Samuel responsible for his son's conduct, or perhaps he did not want to sully the reputation of this great judge. Some commentators have faulted Samuel for his sons' behavior.²

The reason for requesting a king 8:4-9

God had made provision for kings to rule His people in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 17:14-20; cf. Gen. 1:26-28; 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10). The request in itself was not what displeased Samuel and God. Note that it came from "all the elders of Israel" (v. 4). This may be a bit hyperbolic, but it reflects a unity of opinion that we do not find characterizing the people during the period of the judges. It was the reason the people wanted a king that was bad. On the one hand, it expressed dissatisfaction with God's present method of providing leadership through judges (v. 7).

"Elsewhere the king was god, in Israel it was God who was king."³

On the other hand, the people's request verbalized a desire to be "like all the nations" (v. 5).⁴ God's purpose for Israel was that it be different from the nations, superior to them, and a lesson for them (Exod. 19:5-6). God saw this demand as one more instance of apostasy (abandonment of loyalty to Yahweh) that had marked the Israelites since the Exodus (cf. Num. 14:11).

"Such a request had never been born in prayer. They had held a committee meeting instead of a prayer meeting!—and now

¹Josephus, 6:3:2.

²E.g., Wood, *The Prophets ...*, p. 160.

³Henri Berr, quoted in Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 238-39.

⁴Wood, *Israel's United ...*, pp. 21-76, provided helpful background material on Israel's fear of enemies, her developing desire for monarchy and rejection of pure theocracy, the political and ideological world of Samuel's day, and the Israelite elders' request for a king. He reviewed the types of kingship that existed in the ancient Near East at this time, what the Israelites wanted and did not want, and what they got.

they were determined on taking a retrograde step instead of going on with God. How often is unbelief thus dressed up as the corporate wisdom of committees!"¹

"They want a king to lead them in battle as a replacement for the ark, which from their perspective, has been ineffective."²

"To neglect God is to reject; to treat with indifference is to refuse; to fail to recognize is to revolt against Him when you are dealing with the fact of the Kingship of God."³

God acceded to the people's request, as He had done many times before—by providing manna, quail, and water in the wilderness, for example. However, He mixed judgment with His grace.⁴

"It is not always good to clamor in the presence of God for something we think we would like to have; He may give it to us, that by the discipline resulting from our own choice, we may learn the folly and the wickedness of the thing chosen."⁵

"The greatest judgment God can give us is to let us have our own way. ... (Ps. 106:15 NKJV)."⁶

"Some suffering comes about because of unwise decisions."⁷

"Alas, how many once bright Christians have been spoiled through wanting to be like the people of the world around, even as did Israel in demanding a human king! And how insidious is the temptation to lean on that which is seen and human instead of resting in the invisible God! It is a temptation

¹J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 2:54.

²Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 53.

³G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 124.

⁴See J. Barton Payne, "Saul and the Changing Will of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:516 (October-December 1972):321-25; J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 36-37; and Gordon, p. 109.

⁵Morgan, *The Unfolding ...*, p. 125.

⁶Wiersbe, p. 227.

⁷ Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Historical Books," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 105.

to which we are all prone; but to yield to it invites a harvest of regrets."¹

"Hosea 13:11 can be written over the remainder of 1 and 2 Samuel: 'I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.'"²

God purposed to bless all other nations through His theocratic reign over Israel. This was a rule that God chose to administer mediatorially: through divinely chosen individuals who spoke and acted for God in governing functions and who were personally responsible to Him for what they did. These vice-regents were people like Moses, Joshua, the judges (including Samuel), and the kings, but God remained the real Sovereign down to the end of this kingdom in history (1 Chron. 29:25).

The Shekinah cloud visibly represented God's presence as the divine ruler. This glorious cloud entered and filled the tabernacle at the inception of the kingdom (Exod. 40:34-38). It led the nation into the Promised Land and stood over Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 7:1-2). Finally it departed from Jerusalem—spectacularly—as the kingdom ended, temporarily, at the Babylonian Captivity, when governmental sovereignty passed from Israel to the Gentiles (Ezek. 11:23; Dan. 2:31-38).

God will restore this mediatorial kingdom to Israel when Jesus Christ returns to earth in power and great glory. Christ will then (at His second coming) serve as God's vice-regent and reign over all the nations as the perfect mediatorial king (Mic. 4:1-8). This earthly kingdom is different from God's heavenly kingdom, over which He reigns directly from heaven. This heavenly kingdom includes all objects, persons, events, activities, natural phenomena, and history (Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:17). The earthly kingdom is a part of this larger universal kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:24).

"The rejection of Samuel was the rejection of godly leadership; the choice of Saul was the choice of ungodly leadership. In many ways Saul was the foil for the godly David, just as the sons of Eli were a foil for Samuel."³

¹Baxter, 2:54.

²McGee, 2:138.

³Heater, p. 139.

Samuel experienced rejection by the people he led just as Moses, Jesus Christ, and so many of God's faithful servants have throughout history (cf. Luke 19:14).

One writer suggested that the end of verse 8 should read, "... so they are also making a king."¹ Even though this translation minimizes what seems to some to be a contradiction between verses 7 and 8, it is inferior, I believe. Most English translations are clear enough.

The consequences of requesting a king 8:10-22

Samuel explained what having a king similar to all the nations would mean. The elders were interested in the *functions* of a monarchy, but Samuel pointed out the *nature* of a monarchy. It meant the loss of freedoms and possessions that the people presently enjoyed. In verses 11-17, Samuel did not define the rights of a king but described the ways of most kings.² There is evidence that Israel's neighbor nations really did suffer under their kings exactly as Samuel warned.³ Note the recurrence of the words "take," "your," and "best" in these verses. The king would have men "run before his [state] chariots" announcing his coming (v. 11).

"It was the custom for the royal chariot to be escorted by a team of runners [cf. 2 Sam. 15:1]."⁴

"By nature royalty is parasitic rather than giving, and kings are never satisfied with the worst."⁵

The people would also regret their request because their king would disappoint them (v. 18).⁶ But God would not remove the consequences of their choice when they cried out to Him for relief.

Their king could have been a great joy to them, instead of a great disappointment—if the people had waited for God to inaugurate the

¹Scott L. Harris, "1 Samuel VIII 7-8," *Vetus Testamentum* 31:1 (January 1981):79-80.

²G. Coleman Luck, "Israel's Demand for a King," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:477 (January-March 1963):61.

³See I. Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of the Akkadian Documents from Ugarit," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 143 (October 1956):17-22.

⁴Tsumura, p. 257.

⁵Youngblood, p. 614.

⁶See Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 108-14.

monarchy. As becomes clear later in Samuel, as well as in Kings and Chronicles, David was God's choice to lead the Israelites from the beginning. If the people had not been impatient, I believe David would have been their first king. Saul's kingship proved to be a "false start" to the monarchy.¹

"Israel's king was not to be an autocratic king, but a theocratic king."²

"In the ancient Near East, the two functions of 'judge' and 'warrior' [v. 20] are interrelated elements of his fundamental task—to establish and maintain order throughout the kingdom."³

In the argument of Samuel, this chapter serves to introduce the reason Saul became such a disappointment to the Israelites, and such a disaster as a king. Nevertheless, his reign was not totally unsuccessful, because at its beginning he sought to please Yahweh. God graciously brought some blessing to Israel during Saul's reign in spite of Saul's folly.

2. The anointing of Saul 9:1—10:16

In chapters 9—11, the writer painted Saul as the ideal man to serve as king from the human viewpoint. The next pericope (9:1—10:16) sets forth Saul's personal conduct.⁴

Saul's background 9:1-2

Saul ("Asked for [of God]," cf. 8:10) came from good Benjamite stock. His father Kish ("My Father is El") was a landowner who led in times of war—something like a feudal lord. The same Hebrew expression, *gibbor hayil*, translated "valiant mighty man" (v. 1) describes Boaz in Ruth 2:1 and King Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 11:28 (cf. 1 Sam. 16:18). It presents Kish as a man of wealth and influence. Thus Saul was a member of the ruling class, though from a small clan in a small tribe.⁵ Saul himself was physically impressive:

¹David Payne, p. 1.

²Baxter, 2:55.

³Tsumura, p. 261.

⁴See the series of three articles on Saul by W. Lee Humphries listed in the bibliography of these notes. Especially helpful is, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9—31."

⁵Tsumura, p. 263.

unusually tall and handsome. At this time he would have been in his late 20s (cf. 13:1). God gave the people just what they wanted: Saul looked like a king. Whereas Hannah had asked for a son directly from God (1:28), the Israelites had asked for a king from Samuel (8:5).

Saul's personal traits 9:3-14

"Saul is out looking for the asses of his father, and the asses of Israel are looking for a king."¹

The servant who accompanied Saul may have been Ziba (cf. 2 Sam. 9:9), though Kish had several servants (v. 3). Saul's concern for his father's peace of mind was commendable. It shows a sensitivity that would have been an asset in a king (v. 5).

"Kings were supposed to 'shepherd' their people, but Saul cannot do so even for some large animals that will eventually find their own way home ..."²

Saul's desire to give Samuel a present for his help was also praiseworthy (v. 7; cf. 1 Kings 14:3; 2 Kings 8:8-9). Saul had some appreciation for social propriety. His servant, however, comes across as more resourceful than Saul (vv. 6-8), which led Robert Gordon to compare the servant to perceptive Jeeves and Saul to bumbling Bertie Wooster.³ Saul was also humble enough to ask directions from a woman (vv. 11-14). Years later, at the end of the story of Saul's reign, the king asked directions from another woman, but she was a forbidden witch (ch. 28). Samuel later acknowledged Saul's humility early in Saul's kingship (15:17).

The "high place" (v. 12) was a hilltop on which the people offered sacrifices and may have been Mizpah (lit. "Watchtower"; cf. 7:9), or a town near Bethlehem.⁴

"Canaanite-type 'high places' are mentioned frequently in the Old Testament and regularly in a context of divine disapproval (see 1 Kings 12:31; 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; etc.). The fact is

¹McGee, 2:139.

²Firth, p. 122.

³Gordon, p. 113. Jeeves and Wooster are characters in several of P. G. Wodehouse's classic comedy novels, some of which have been made into films.

⁴Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 78, n. 12.

noteworthy, therefore, that during this time when the ark was away from the Tabernacle, such 'high places' were used by the Israelites and clearly with the approval of God. ...

"The reason for such divine approval during this particular period was doubtless because there was no 'official' place of worship, now that the ark was not at the Tabernacle (cf. 1 Kings 3:2, 3). Significantly, the first time that a 'high place' is mentioned after the temple had been erected as an 'official' place of worship again, it is given [in] a context of disapproval (1 Kings 11:7)."¹

"Sadly, the misuse of such high places to worship false gods eventually undermined the worship of God and contributed to the rise of idolatry in Israel (see 1 Kin. 11:7; 12:26-33)."²

Saul's introduction to Samuel 9:15-25

Even though God had broken the Philistines' domination at the Battle of Mizpah (7:10-11), they still threatened Israel occasionally and did so until David finally subdued them (v. 16).

"... after the victory of Mizpeh [*sic*], the Philistines no longer totally controlled Israel and ... did not again make a full-scale invasion."³

God referred to Saul as a "ruler" (Heb. *negid*, v. 16), meaning a king-designate. Notwithstanding, Yahweh was Israel's true King. Also, in verse 17, the Hebrew word translated "rule" (*asar*) usually means "restrain." Saul would not rule as most kings did, but would restrain the people—from departing from God's will—as God's vice-regent.

"This section [vv. 15-17] proves that the whole business of choosing Saul was by God's will and guided by his providence."⁴

Samuel gave preference to Saul by inviting him to go up before him to the high place (v. 19). Samuel promised Saul that not only his lost donkeys,

¹Idem, *Distressing Days ...*, p. 375.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 465.

³G. Coleman Luck, "The First Meeting of Saul and Samuel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):259.

⁴Tsumura, p. 273.

but all that was desirable in Israel, would soon come into his possession (v. 20). Saul's humble response to Samuel—in view of his father's being "a valiant mighty man" (v. 1)—was admirable (v. 21; cf. Exod. 3:11; 4:10; Jer. 1:6).

"On the one side Saul was a man hunting for donkeys who instead found a kingdom; and on the other side there was Samuel, who was looking for a suitable king and found a young man of remarkable political unawareness."¹

Saul's unawareness is evident in that he did not know who Samuel was, even though Samuel was Israel's leading judge and prophet. Evidently a dining hall stood near the high place (v. 22). It may have been a room in a larger religious building.² Giving the special leg of meat to Saul was a sign of special honor (vv. 23-24). S. R. Driver believed that this was the fat tail of a certain kind of sheep that was a delicacy.³ Before retiring for the night, Samuel and Saul continued their conversation on the typically flat roof of the house, probably for privacy as well as comfort (v. 25; cf. Acts 10:9).

Saul's private anointing by Samuel 9:26—10:8

Anointing with oil was a symbolic act in Israel that pictured consecration to service. The only things anointed with oil before this anointing were the priests and the tabernacle. The oil symbolized God's Spirit, and anointing with oil represented endowment with that Spirit for enablement (cf. 1 John 2:27). In the ancient Near East, a representative of a nation's god customarily anointed the king, whom the people viewed from then on as the representative of that god on earth.⁴ Thus Saul would have understood that Samuel was setting him apart as God's vice-regent and endowing him with God's power to serve effectively. Beginning with Saul, kings were similar to priests in Israel as far as representing God and experiencing divine enablement.

Samuel's kiss (v. 1) was a sign of affection and respect, since now Saul was God's special representative on the earth. Samuel reminded Saul that the

¹David Payne, p. 45.

²Youngblood, pp. 622-23.

³Driver, p. 76.

⁴Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 152-66.

Israelites were the LORD's inheritance, another comment that Saul unfortunately did not take to heart (cf. 9:13).

Samuel then gave Saul three signs that would verify to the king elect that Samuel had anointed him in harmony with God's will. The first of these would have strengthened Saul's confidence in God's ability to control the people under his authority (v. 2). The second would have helped Saul realize that the people would accept him and make sacrifices for him (vv. 3-4). The third would have assured him that he did indeed possess supernatural enablement from God (vv. 5-6).

Warren Wiersbe believed that Saul should have learned the following lessons from these three signs: (1) God could solve his problems. (2) God could also supply his needs. (3) God could endow him with the power he needed for service.¹

The "hill of God" (lit. "Gibeath-haelohim," v. 5) was probably Gibeah ("Hill"; cf. v. 26; 11:4).²

"It appears from this verse that a large area of Central Palestine was now in the hands of the Philistines."³

The reference to Rachel's tomb being in Benjamin's territory (v. 2) may seem to conflict with the statement that Rachel was buried "on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)" (Gen. 35:19), which was in the territory of Judah. Evidently she was buried somewhere near Ramah, in the territory of Benjamin (cf. Jer. 31:15).

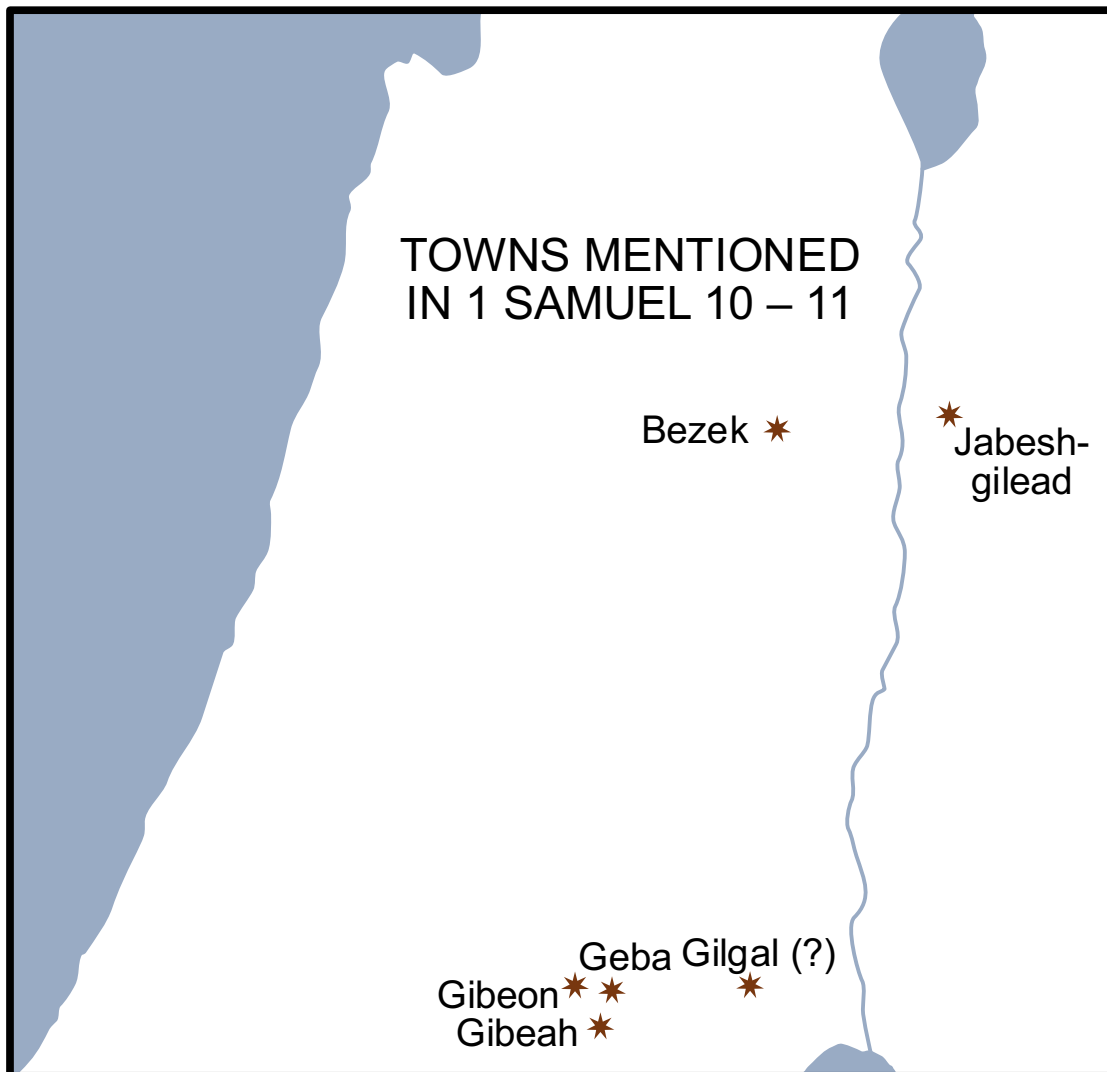
"... the original location [of Rachel's tomb] was near Ramah on the 'Bethlehem' road. ... The present-day 'Rachel's Tomb' is based on a later tradition."⁴

¹Wiersbe, p. 229.

²See Aaron Demsky, "Geba, Gibeah, and Gibeon—An Historico-Geographic Riddle," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 212 (December 1973):27.

³Driver, p. 80.

⁴Tsumura, p. 284. On the subject of the location of Rachel's tomb (cf. Gen. 35:19; Jer. 31:15), see Matitiah Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 33 (1962):107-18.



Some Bible students have concluded that Saul was not a believer in Yahweh.¹ Would any godly Israelite have been unaware of Samuel, who had ministered in the tabernacle and in the towns of Benjamin for years? If Kish, Saul's father, had taken his family to worship at the tabernacle yearly, as Elkanah did with his family, would he not have at least known of Samuel's reputation, if not known him personally?

But since God chose and equipped Saul to rule His people, others believe that he was a genuine believer in Yahweh, though Saul gave evidence of

¹E.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:2:12; Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:229-31; McGee, 2:141, 150-51; Wiersbe, pp. 260, 293-94.

not having a strong commitment to Him. Yet God chose Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, both unbelievers, at least at first, to rule His people.

It seems to me that the writer described Saul as a spiritually insensitive person. Whether he genuinely knew the LORD or not is very difficult to say, in view of what the writer of the book wrote.

"... Saul was a secular person, not a spiritual person ..."¹

"Here, the spirit of the Lord functions as the means by which he takes ordinary people and makes them fit for his service."²

Samuel gave Saul his first orders as God's vice-regent (v. 8). Unfortunately he disobeyed them (13:8-14). Perhaps the tabernacle now stood at Gilgal since Samuel planned to offer burnt and peace offerings there. However, Samuel may have sacrificed at places other than the tabernacle (7:17; cf. 14:35). Again we can see that the tabernacle was not one of the writer's main concerns.

God's enablement of Saul 10:9-16

We should probably not interpret the reference to God changing Saul's heart (v. 9) to mean that at this time Saul experienced personal salvation. This always takes place when a person believes a promise from God, and there is no indication in the context that Saul did that at this time. Probably it means that God gave him a different viewpoint on things, since he had received the Holy Spirit. Some interpreters have taken this as Saul's conversion.³ In Hebrew psychology, the heart was the seat of the intellect, emotions, and will. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explained Saul's change of heart as follows:

"Influenced by the words of Samuel, as well as by the accomplishment of these signs, Saul's reluctance to undertake the onerous office was overcome."⁴

¹Wiersbe, p. 230.

²Tsumura, p. 288.

³E.g., Zane C. Hodges, "The Salvation of Saul," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:4 (July-August 1994):1, 3.

⁴Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 212.

God's Spirit also gave Saul the ability to prophesy (v. 10). This was the outward evidence that God was with Saul. It apparently involved the Holy Spirit controlling these men, and their manifesting His control by praising God (cf. 19:20-24; 1 Chron. 25:1-3). The evidence of this new gift surprised people who knew Saul, and they took note of it (v. 11). Some students of this passage have concluded that Saul demonstrated this gift with ecstatic behavior.¹ Others have not.² I see no evidence of it in the text.

This is the first of several references to groups of prophets in the historical books (cf. 19:20; 2 Kings 2:1-7, 15-18; 4:38-41; 6:1-2). Though the term "school of the prophets" does not appear in the Old Testament, the texts noted identify groups of prophets who gathered together, sometimes under the leadership of a prominent prophet (e.g., Samuel, Elijah, or Elisha), apparently to learn how to present messages from the Lord and lead the people in worship. Some of them even had buildings in which they met, including ones at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho (2 Kings 2:1-5; 4:38-41; 6:1-2). Samuel evidently had such a "school" or group of disciples, and this group apparently also met in their own buildings (cf. 1 Sam. 19:18-20).³

The question, "Who is their father?" (v. 12) inquired about the source of the behavior of all the prophets, including Saul. Their conduct was indeed an evidence of God's presence and working in their lives.⁴ The proverb that evolved from this incident (cf. 19:24) was derogatory. Some of the people felt that the behavior of prophets was inappropriate, especially for their king (cf. 2 Sam. 6:13-16). Ironically, their question did not express doubt that Saul was a prophet but confidence that God had empowered him. Another view is that the question expressed a negative opinion such as, "Saul is no prophet."⁵

The high place referred to in verse 13 is probably the same one mentioned earlier (vv. 5, 10), namely, Geba. Geba was only four miles from Saul's

¹E.g., Bright, p. 166.

²E.g. Leon J. Wood, "Ecstasy and Israel's Early Prophets," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9 (Summer 1966):125-37. See also idem, *The Prophets ...*, pp. 40-56, 91-92.

³For further discussion, see *Ibid.*, pp. 164-66.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 104-5.

⁵See John Sturdy, "The Original Meaning of 'Is Saul Also Among the Prophets?' (1 Samuel X 11, 12; XIX 24)," *Vetus Testamentum* 20:2 (April 1970):210.

hometown, Gibeah (lit. hill). Saul's uncle may have been Ner, the father of Abner (14:50-51), or some other uncle.¹

"These passages in 1 Samuel indicate that the writer of Samuel had no problem with high places so long as they were dedicated to Yahweh. ... In Kings, however, the attitude of the historian is clearly hostile to high places. He conceded the necessity of the people worshiping there (and by inference Solomon also) because of the lack of a temple. However, the historian was writing from a later perspective when religion had become syncretistic, and the high places were a snare to the people."²

This section closes with another reference to Saul's humility (v. 16; cf. Phil 2:8; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6).

3. The choice of Saul by lot 10:17-27

"Saul's rise to kingship over Israel took place in three distinct stages: He was (1) anointed by Samuel (9:1—10:16), (2) chosen by lot (10:17-27), and (3) confirmed by public acclamation (11:1-15).³

Saul's anointing had been private, but his choice by lot was public.

Mizpah was the scene of Israel's previous spiritual revival and victory over the Philistines (7:5-13). Perhaps Samuel chose this site for Saul's public presentation because of those events. As I have noted previously, the tabernacle may have been there as well. Samuel took the opportunity to remind Israel that Yahweh was Israel's real deliverer, so the people would not put too much confidence in their new king (v. 18; cf. Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6; Judg. 6:8-9). He also reminded them of their rebellion against God's will when they insisted on having a king (v. 19).⁴

¹See D. R. Ap-Thomas, "Saul's 'Uncle'," *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961):241-45; Tsumura, p. 385.

²Heater, p. 126. Paragraph division omitted.

³Youngblood, p. 623.

⁴See Bruce C. Birch, "The Choosing of Saul at Mizpah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37:4 (1975):447-54.

"Even though Israel's attitude toward God is blameworthy, when he accepts their request, he will give them the best."¹

The lot (v. 20) showed all Israel that Saul was God's choice, not Samuel's (cf. Josh. 7:14-18). That is, he was the king whom God permitted (Prov. 16:33).

"Was he hiding out of modesty or fear? Probably the latter, because true humility accepts God's will while at the same time depending on God's strength and wisdom."²

Some interpreters have concluded that Saul was hypocritically demonstrating false modesty.³ My judgment is that he was humble, since there are other indications of this quality in chapters 9 and 10 (cf. Prov. 25:6-7).

"... there seems to have been a modesty that was combined with a shy temperament."⁴

"If Saul had been an ambitious person, he would have been at the center of activity; and, even if he had been only an average person, he would at least have been available on the fringes of the crowd. Saul, however, had hidden himself, so that he would not be found."⁵

However, Saul may also have been wisely reluctant to assume the role and responsibilities of Israel's king. The LORD had chosen Saul (v. 24) because He wanted him to be His vice-regent. Saul had the potential of becoming a great king of Israel. Consequently, Samuel commended him, and most of the people supported him (vv. 24, 27). They cried, "Long live the king!"

"It [this cry] represents now, as it did then, the enthusiastic hopes of the citizenry that their monarch may remain hale and hearty in order to bring their fondest dreams to fruition."⁶

¹Tsumura, p. 297.

²Wiersbe, p. 231. See also Gaebelien, 1:2:153.

³E.g., Morgan, *The Unfolding ...*, p. 126.

⁴Baldwin, p. 90.

⁵Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 81.

⁶Youngblood, p. 631.

The "ordinances" (v. 25) that Samuel related to the people, and wrote in a document that he placed before the LORD (i.e., in the tabernacle), were probably the directions involving monarchical rule, in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 at least. The ancient tell (archaeological mound) of Gibeah (v. 26) now stands three miles north of the old city of Jerusalem, the buildings of which are clearly visible from Gibeah. It is now a northern suburb of Jerusalem.

God further blessed Saul by inclining the hearts of valiant men in Israel to support him. There were some, however, who did not support him. They were evidently looking on Saul's natural abilities as essential to Israel's success and were forgetting that Yahweh was the real source of her hope (v. 27; cf. Judg. 6:15-16).

"Thus differently are men affected to our exalted Redeemer. God hath set him king upon the holy hill of Sion. There is a remnant *whose hearts God has touched*, whom he has *made willing in the day of his power*. But there are others who despise him, who ask, *How shall this man save us?*"¹

Saul was a wise enough man not to demand acceptance by every individual in Israel (cf. Prov. 14:29; Rom. 12:19; James 1:19-20). The reason he failed later was not because he lacked wisdom.

Throughout these verses, Saul behaved in an exemplary fashion. However, notice that the writer made no reference to his regard for God or God's Word. By every outward appearance Saul was very capable of serving as Israel's king. This is what the people wanted—a man similar to themselves to lead them—and that is exactly what God gave them.

"... it remains very clear that God did not choose this king for Himself, but rather for the people. In other words, though God actually appointed Saul, Saul did not in the final analysis represent God's choice, but the people's choice."²

Yet God gave the Israelites a man with great personal strengths: wisdom, humility, sensitivity, physical attractiveness, and wealth. His gift of Saul was a good gift, as are all God's gifts to His people (Luke 11:9-13). God did not give Israel a time bomb just waiting to explode. Saul failed because

¹Henry, p. 296.

²G. Coleman Luck, "The First Glimpse of the First King of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (January-March 1966):51.

of the choices he made, not because he lacked the qualities necessary to succeed.

4. Saul's effective leadership in battle 11:1-11

Israel's king not only needed to be an admirable individual in his personal conduct, but he also needed to be an effective military commander. The writer pointed out Saul's abilities in this area in this chapter. The nation united behind him, because of his military success. This was the third divine indication that God had chosen Saul to lead Israel, following his private anointing and his public choice by lot.

The Ammonite siege of Jabesh-gilead 11:1-5

The Ammonites were Israel's enemies to the east. They were descendants of Lot whom Jephthah had defeated earlier (Judg. 11:12-33). Nahash (lit. "Serpent") evidently sought revenge for Jephthah's victory over his nation. Jabesh-gilead lay a few miles east of the Jordan Valley and about 25 miles south of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). Chinnereth is the Hebrew word for lyre, a musical instrument. The lake has the shape of a lyre, which accounts for this name. The men of Jabesh-gilead offered to surrender and serve the Ammonites provided Nahash would make a covenant with them rather than slaughtering them.

Nahash's purpose to put out the right eye of his enemies was not uncommon in that day. This wound made a conquered nation easier to control, and it testified to the conqueror's superior power. Specifically, it made aiming arrows with the right eye impossible—and it made looking from behind one's shield, which covered the left eye, impossible.¹ This injury therefore precluded a military revolt. Perhaps Nahash's decision to attack Jabesh-gilead was the result of the Israelites breaking a treaty with his nation.

"In the ancient Near East, the physical mutilation, dismemberment, or death of an animal or human victim could be expected as the inevitable penalty for treaty violation."²

¹Josephus, 6:5:1.

²Youngblood, p. 637.

"It's interesting that nobody from Jabesh Gilead responded to the call to arms when the nation had to punish the wickedness of Gilead in Benjamin (Judg. 21:8-9), but now they were asking their fellow Jews to come and rescue them!"¹

Nahash's willingness to let his enemies appeal for help shows that he had no fear that adequate reinforcements would come. He was sure of his superiority and may even have viewed the delay as an opportunity to ensure victory. At this time Israel lacked a central government, national solidarity, and a standing army. However, Saul was now Israel's king.

The announcement of the messengers from Jabesh-gilead led the people in Saul's hometown, as well as elsewhere undoubtedly, to weep. They had again forgotten God's promises to protect them since they were His people. Their reaction was a result of viewing the situation from the human perspective only. Contrast the perspective of Caleb and Joshua earlier, which took God into consideration.

Why was Saul at home farming, since now he was Israel's king? He had not yet received direction from God or Samuel to do anything else, as far as we know. The fact that he, the anointed king, was plowing also shows his humility. Estate owners never worked the land themselves.² Furthermore, he was willing to work hard. Thus he was not self-centered at this time (cf. 2 Cor. 4:5).

Saul's deliverance of Jabesh-gilead 11:6-11

God's Spirit "rushed" on Saul in the sense that He stirred up his human spirit (cf. 10:6, 10). Saul's response to the messengers' news was appropriate indignation, since non-Israelites were attacking God's covenant people (Gen. 12:3). Saul may have had a personal interest in Jabesh-gilead since some of his ancestors evidently came from there (cf. 31:11-13). Following the civil war in Israel, during which many Benjamites had died, many of those who remained alive took wives from the women of Jabesh-gilead and the women of Shiloh (Judg. 21).

Saul did something drastic to impress the gravity of the Ammonite siege on his fellow Israelites. He followed the example of the Levite whose concubine had died in Saul's hometown (Judg. 19:29-30). Later another

¹Wiersbe, p. 232.

²Marvin Chaney, "Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy," *Semeia* 37 (1986):61.

plowman, Elisha, would slaughter a pair of oxen and host a meal for his friends as he began his ministry as a prophet (1 Kings 19:21).

"Saul's slaughter and dissection of his oxen is reminiscent of the Levite's treatment of his murdered concubine and clearly is designed to connect the commencement of his reign with the historical event which accounts for his Jabesh-Gilead maternal roots."¹

Saul linked himself with Samuel because Samuel was the recognized spiritual leader of the nation. The Israelites probably dreaded both Saul's threatened reprisals, for not responding to his summons, and the Ammonite threat.

"In Saul's energetic appeal the people discerned the power of Jehovah, which inspired them with fear, and impelled them to immediate obedience."²

The response of the Israelites constituted the greatest show of military strength since Joshua's day (assuming the Hebrew word *eleph* means "thousand" here). Bezek stood about 16 miles west of Jabesh-gilead on the River Jordan's western side (cf. Judg. 1:4-5). The division of the soldiers into Israelites and Judahites probably reflects the division of the nation that existed when the writer wrote this book. There is no other evidence that such a division existed when the event recorded here happened.

The messengers returned to Jabesh-gilead with the promise that their town would be free by noon the next day. The leaders of Jabesh-gilead played with words as they cleverly led the Ammonites into self-confidence, thinking that they would win: The Ammonites had threatened to put out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-gilead (v. 2). The Jabesh-gileadites now told the Ammonites to do whatever seemed good literally "in their eyes" (v. 10; cf. 14:36).

Saul wisely divided his troops into three companies and attacked the besieging Ammonites early in the morning, just like Gideon had done (cf. Judg. 7:16, 19). The morning watch was the last of three night watches,

¹Eugene H. Merrill, "The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):140, n. 13.

²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 112.

and it lasted from about 2:00 to 6:00 a.m. These three watches had their origin in Mesopotamia, but all the western Asian nations observed them before the Christian era (cf. Lam. 2:19). The only other place in the Old Testament where this phrase "at the morning watch" (v. 11) occurs, in Hebrew, is Exodus 14:24. At that earlier time, God slew the Egyptian soldiers as they pursued the fleeing Israelites through the Red Sea. Perhaps the writer wanted his readers to view this victory as another miraculous deliverance, at the beginning of a new phase of Israel's existence, similar to what their ancestors had experienced at the Red Sea.

The Ammonites did not expect the other Israelites to show as much support for the Jabesh-gileadites as they did. Saul thoroughly surprised and defeated them.¹

5. The confirmation of Saul as king 11:12—12:25

This victory helped the Israelites to appreciate Saul as their king, with the result that they committed themselves to him. Samuel therefore gave the people a solemn charge in view of the change in government.

Israel's commitment to Saul 11:12-15

Admirably, Saul sought no personal revenge on those who initially had failed to support him (10:27; cf. Judg. 20:13; Luke 19:27). Furthermore, he gave God the glory for his victory (cf. Jon. 2:9; Ps. 20:7; Prov. 21:31). He was not self-serving at this time.

What Samuel called for was a ceremony to renew the Mosaic Covenant.² It was to be similar to those that had taken place in Joshua's day (Josh. 8 and 24), in which the nation would dedicate itself afresh to Yahweh and His Law as a nation (cf. Deut. 29). As mentioned earlier, it is not clear whether Gilgal refers to the Gilgal near Jericho or another Gilgal a few miles north of Bethel.³ A Gilgal north of Bethel would have been closer to Bethel, since most of the activities recorded in these first chapters of 1 Samuel (at Ramah, Gibeah, Mizpah, etc.) were all on the Benjamin Plateau, near Bethel.

¹For another interpretation of 11:1-11, that views it as an artificially constructed story, see Diana Edelman, "Saul's Rescue of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11:1-11): Sorting Story from History," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96:2 (1984):195-209.

²Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, pp. 66-68; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 135; Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, pp. 37, 383-428.

³See my comments on 7:16.

(The Benjamin Plateau was a very heavily populated area of the Promised Land. It included five major towns: Bethel in the north, Mizpah, Ramah, and Gibeah in the center, and Jerusalem in the south.) Yet the Gilgal near Jericho was the Israelites' first camp after they entered the Promised Land, and the place where they first renewed the covenant in the land (Josh. 4—5). For this reason, that site would have stimulated the people's remembrance of God's faithfulness to them and His plans for them as a united nation. Hopefully further discoveries will enable us solve the puzzle of which Gilgal this was.

The people now gave united support to Saul as their king at Gilgal. This is the first of three significant meetings of Samuel and Saul at Gilgal. The second was the time Saul failed to wait for Samuel, offered a sacrifice prematurely, and received the prophet's rebuke (13:7-14). The third meeting was when God rejected Saul as Israel's king for his disobedient pride, following his victory over the Amalekites (15:10-26).

Peace offerings expressed thanks to God for His goodness. This offering also emphasized the unity of the participants in the sacrifice (Lev. 3).

"Saul's ascent to the throne was now complete, and the 'great celebration' that accompanied the sacrificial ritual more than matched Israel's earlier elation upon their receiving the messengers' report of the imminent doom of the Ammonites (v. 9)."¹

In this incident Israel faced a very threatening situation physically and spiritually. The people's reaction was to weep (v. 4). God went into action because He had made promises to protect His people (cf. Heb. 13:5-6). He provided deliverance when His people thought there was no hope. The result was that God's people rededicated themselves to following the LORD faithfully. Their weeping gave way to rejoicing.

In this incident we also see Saul humble and hardworking (v. 5). God's Spirit empowered him (v. 6), and gave him wisdom (vv. 7-8) and victory (v. 11). Saul gave God the glory for his success, and he was merciful and forgiving toward his critics (v. 13). God also gave him favor in the eyes of His people (v. 15; cf. 2:30; Prov. 16:7).

¹Youngblood, p. 642.

Samuel's second warning to the people ch. 12

The writer wrote chapters 12—15 very skillfully to parallel chapters 8—11. Each section begins with Samuel warning the people about the dangers of their requesting a king (chs. 8 and 12). Each one also follows with a description of Saul's exploits (chs. 9—10 and 13—14) and ends with Saul leading Israel in battle (chs. 11 and 15). This parallel structure vividly sets off the contrast between Saul's early success as Israel's king and his subsequent failure. The reason he failed is the primary theological lesson of these chapters, and it advances the fertility motif that is so strong in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Chapter 12 is one of the most important theological passages in Samuel, along with 1 Samuel 7 and 2 Samuel 7. Here Samuel explained Israel's future relationship with Yahweh and the Mosaic Law, since the people insisted on having a king and had rejected Yahweh and Samuel (cf. 8:7). This chapter reminds me of Moses' and Joshua's farewell addresses (in all of Deuteronomy and Joshua 24), except that Samuel continued to have some ministry in Israel following the events recorded here.

"Samuel mentions the Lord at least thirty times in this message, because his heart's desire was to see the people return to the Lord and honor His covenant."¹

"With this address Samuel laid down his office as judge, but without therefore ceasing as prophet to represent the people before God, and to maintain the rights of God in relation to the king."²

"This chapter ... formally marks the end of the period of the judges ..."³

Samuel's self-vindication 12:1-5

Why did Samuel feel the need to justify his behavior publicly? Perhaps he knew that because the people had rebelled against God by demanding a king, they would experience discipline from the LORD. When it came, he did not want anyone to think that he was responsible for it. Also, it is likely

¹Wiersbe, p. 233.

²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 115.

³Gordon, p. 125.

that Samuel took the people's request for a king as a personal rejection of himself.¹ He probably wanted to show the people that they had no reason to reject him because of his behavior. Samuel's words may seem to expose some personal pride. I think, more probably, they express his concern that no one should conclude that living a life of commitment to God, as he had lived, would bring God's discipline. The discipline to come would be a result of the sin of the people, not Samuel's sins. Furthermore, by his life and ministry among them, Samuel had given the people no reason for demanding a king. He was also seeking to vindicate the type of rule he represented that was God's will for Israel at that time.

"Here, as in 8:11-18, a keyword is the verb *take*: if kingship was to be characterized by the tendency to take rather than to give, it was otherwise with the prophet. As he stepped down from high office, Samuel's hands were empty (verse 5)."²

Samuel stepped down as Israel's judge at this point, and turned his judicial function over to Saul. We might say that he retired as Israel's judge. But Samuel did not retire from being a prophet. He continued to exercise his prophetic ministry, evidently for the rest of his life.

Samuel's review of God's faithfulness 12:6-12

Samuel had given the people no reason to demand a king, but neither had God given them a reason to do so. He had delivered them in the past from all their enemies when they confessed their sins, repented, and sought His help. They had been unfaithful to God and had disobeyed His Law, but He remained faithful to His commitment and promises to them.

The name "Badan" (v. 11) is probably a copyist's erroneous reference to Barak, which the Septuagint and Syriac versions of 1 Samuel have here.³

Samuel's challenge to obey God 12:13-18

The Hebrew grammatical construction translated "the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for" (v. 13), shows that the people had not just requested a king, but demanded him out of strong self-will. The key to Israel's future blessing would be fearing Yahweh, serving Him, listening to

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 70.

²David Payne, pp. 57-58.

³See Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 210.

His voice through the Mosaic Law and the prophets, and not rebelling against His commands (v. 14). The major message of 1 and 2 Samuel thus comes through again clearly in Samuel's final words to the nation, as we would expect. For the Israelites, obedience to the Mosaic Covenant would result in fertility of all kinds (cf. Deut. 28:1-14).

God confirmed the truth of Samuel's words supernaturally when He sent rain during the wheat harvest. This was normally the driest period of the year. The rain symbolized the blessing of God for obedience (cf. Deut. 28:12). This storm was a sign that Yahweh was supporting Samuel. However, coming at this time of the year, it proved to be judgmental—since farmers do not appreciate rain during harvests—and a warning of future potential judgment. Josephus called this "a winter storm in the midst of harvest."¹

"... Samuel demonstrated the awesome power of the Lord by 'praying up a storm' ..."²

"The thunder and rain were God's great 'amen' on Samuel's career as God's spokesman."³

Samuel's reassurance of the people 12:19-25

The people's rebellion against God was not something they could undo. Consequences would follow. Nevertheless Samuel counseled them to follow and serve the LORD faithfully from then on. They should not fear that God would abandon them because of their sin of demanding a king. He would not cast them off, because He had promised to stay with them and had committed Himself to them (Exod. 19:5-6). His name (reputation) would suffer if He abandoned them.

Not only did the Israelites need to walk in obedience to God, they also needed the supportive intercession of Samuel that would bring down God's enablement so that they could follow Him faithfully. This Samuel promised them too. Intercession is a vitally important ministry of leaders of God's people, and Samuel realized this (Jer. 15:1; Ps. 99:6).

¹Josephus, 6:5:6.

²Wiersbe, p. 235.

³McGee, 2:145.

"Prophetic intercession is regarded as essential to Israel's continued prosperity; only when her doom is sealed is a prophet told to desist (Je. 11:14; 14:11). Samuel's ministry of intercession and teaching, exercised independently of the offices of state, becomes the norm for those who followed him in the prophetic succession. These are 'the irreducible aspects of the prophetic office' (McCarter, p. 219)."¹

"For God's people not to pray is to sin against the Lord, yet if there's one thing lacking in our churches today, it is prayer, particularly prayer for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4)."²

In order to fear and serve God faithfully, the Israelites would need to remember God's faithfulness to them in the past, and to bear in mind the certain consequences of disobedience (cf. Deut. 28:41, 45-64; 30:15-20). The dark alternative was being swept away in exile.

This chapter sets forth clearly the basic principles by which God deals with His people. As such it is very important. It explains why things happened as they did in Israel and in the personal lives of the major characters that the writer emphasized. God articulated these principles earlier in the Torah (Pentateuch), but He repeated them here.

"... this chapter is not finally condemnation; it is gospel, good news, because it affirms God's commitment to renew those who turn to him, recognizing their sin, and who seek to serve him faithfully."³

In chapters 8—12, the writer emphasized that even though the people insisted on having a human king instead of God, God gave them one who was personally admirable and victorious in battle. Everything about Saul in these chapters is positive. Saul was well qualified and could have been a great king. His personal choices led to his later downfall, especially his choice not to submit to God. God gave blessing to His people as long as their representative submitted to His authority.

As noted above, chapters 7 and 12, plus 2 Samuel 7, are key theological chapters in the Bible. In each one, the writer gave us important explanations

¹Gordon, p. 130. Cf. Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 210.

²Wiersbe, p. 235.

³Firth, p. 149.

that help us understand why events happened as they did in the history of Israel at this time.

C. KINGSHIP REMOVED FROM SAUL CHS. 13—15

This section of chapters documents Saul's disobedience to the revealed will of God that resulted in his disqualification as Israel's king. Saul's failure proved to be God's instrument of discipline on the people as a whole because they demanded a king. Failure followed disregard of God's Word. Joyce Baldwin expressed well the situation Saul faced as he began to reign:

"In relation to Samuel, it is obvious that Saul had a problem. On the one hand he owed his appointment to Samuel, but on the other hand he was taking over Samuel's position as Israel's leader. Samuel spoke frequently of the wickedness of the people in requesting a king, apparently implying that he, Saul, should not really be in office. Yet Saul had not sought to be king, and would have preferred, at least at first, to have been left in obscurity, but he had not been offered any option. Too many signs had been given that he was the person of God's appointment, and prayers for deliverance from the Ammonites had been marvelously answered. He was king by divine anointing, by God's overruling of the sacred lot, and by united popular demand. He had caught the imagination of the people, who wanted a hero, and against all odds he was expected to pass muster.

"Had he realized it, Saul could have gained much by the presence of a seasoned prophet like Samuel alongside him, ready to give guidance, instruction and, if necessary, rebuke. Above all, Samuel was an intercessor who knew the Lord's mind, and saw prayer answered. Samuel would indicate the right way, and all Saul had to do was follow. He could have leaned hard on Samuel and he would have found reassurance. In the event, this was exactly what Saul could not bring himself to do."¹

¹Baldwin, p. 102.

Saul's improper response to his predecessor, Samuel, should be a warning to all ministers whose predecessors remain on the scene after they replace them.

Chapters 13—15 explains the reasons for the disintegration of Saul's personality and kingdom.

1. Saul's disobedience at Gilgal 13:1-15

The writer introduced the history of Saul's reign by apparently referring to the king's age and then the total length of his reign.¹ Verse 1 contains a textual corruption in the Hebrew text.² This verse in Hebrew reads: "Saul was one year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." This is obviously incorrect.

The first problem is Saul's age when he began to reign. This is the first questionable number in verse 1. No other text of Scripture gives us his age when he began to reign. However, 9:2 says that he was a young man.

The second problem is, how long did Saul reign? The last part of verse 1 probably gives us the length of Saul's total reign, as is customary in similar summaries of kings' reigns (cf. 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42; 2 Kings 8:17, 26; et al.), rather than how long he had reigned by this time in his kingship. In some ancient versions, this number is missing. In other versions, the number is 2.

If the last part of verse 1 gives the year of Saul's reign in which the events of chapter 13 happened, the number probably should be 2.³ Another view is that 2 represents the length of Saul's reign from God's point of view.⁴ Still another view is that they may be the years of Saul's reign that God sanctioned.⁵

According to Acts 13:21, Saul reigned "for 40 years." This could be a round number. If Saul was about 40 years old when he began to reign, he would

¹See Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, pp. 171-72.

²On the many problems with the Hebrew text of Samuel, see Driver's commentary, or Martin, pp. 209-222.

³Wood, *Israel's United ...*, pp. 122-23; Firth, p. 151; E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 133..

⁴Tsumura, pp. 330-33.

⁵Firth, p. 153.

have been about 80 when he died in battle on Mt. Gilboa (ch. 31). This seems very old in view of the account in chapter 31. Even if Saul was 70 he would have been quite old. The account of his anointing by Samuel pictures a young adult with a measure of maturity. I would suggest that 40 may be the first number that the copyists lost in 13:1, and that 42 may be the correct second number. My reasons follow below. But first, a table of how various texts and translations have rendered these figures follows:¹

Source	First number	Second number
Masoretic text	1 year old	Reigned 2 years
Some Septuagint texts	30 years old	
Syriac Peshitta	21 years old	
Acts 13:21		Reigned 40 years
AV and NKJV	Reigned 1 year	Reigned 2 years
NASB (2020 ed.)	30 years old	Reigned 42 years
NASB (older eds.)	40 years old	Reigned 32 years
NIV, TNIV, and HCSB	30 years old	Reigned 42 years
NET2	30 years old	Reigned 40 years
NEB	50 years old	Reigned 22 years
CEV	A young man	Reigned 2 years
ESV and NRSV and 2 years

When did the events of this chapter happen, if the second number in verse 1 indicates the length of Saul's total reign as being 40 years? In 10:8, Samuel commanded Saul to go to Gilgal and to wait seven days for him

¹In addition to the modern English translations already identified in previous footnote, the others are: TNIV (*The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*), HCSB (*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*), NEB (*The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*), ESV (*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*), and NRSV (*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*). See also the notes on verse 1 in *The NET2 Bible*.

there. In 13:8, we read that Saul went to Gilgal and waited seven days for Samuel. Therefore the events of chapter 13 appear to have followed those in chapter 10 soon, perhaps in the second year of his reign.¹

However, in 13:3, Saul's son Jonathan is old enough to lead an invasion against a Philistine garrison. Jonathan must have been at least about 20 to do that. If he was about 20, and this was the beginning of Saul's reign, we have two problems. First, Saul must have been somewhat older than 30 when he began ruling. Yet this would make him quite old when he died in battle, as explained above. I think he was probably about 40, even though this would make him about 80 when he died. (Joseph and Joshua were 110 when they died, and Moses was 120.) Saul's son Ish-bosheth was 40 when he succeeded Saul as king over the northern tribes of Israel (2 Sam. 2:10). Saul also had a five-year-old grandson, Jonathan's son, at the time of Saul and Jonathan's deaths (2 Sam. 4:4).

Second, if Jonathan was about 20 at the beginning of Saul's reign, he would have been about 60 when he died with Saul, since Saul reigned about 40 years (Acts 13:21). If David was a contemporary of Jonathan, as 1 Samuel implies, David began reigning when Jonathan was about 60. Yet 2 Samuel 5:4 says David was 30 when he began to reign. In spite of the disparity in the ages of David and Jonathan, it seems that Jonathan was indeed about 20 or 30 years older than David.² Firth believed that Jonathan was about 10 years older than David.³

Some of the evidence (10:8 and 13:8) seems to support the view that the events of chapter 13 happened early in Saul's reign. Other evidence (the ages of David and Jonathan) suggests that they may have happened much later. I favor the view that the events in chapter 13 follow those in chapter 10 closely, perhaps two years later.⁴

Gibeah (v. 2) was Saul's hometown and his capital. Michmash was five miles northeast of Gibeah, and Geba was four. Evidently Saul wanted to clear the area around Gibeah, and the central Benjamin Plateau on which it stood, of Philistines, in order to make this population center more secure. Jonathan's

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 193; Wood, *Israel's United ...*, pp. 123.

²See Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):475-533; Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 213; Gaebelien, 1:2:166.

³Firth, p. 333.

⁴See again the "Chronology of 1 and 2 Samuel" at the beginning of these notes.

initial victory at Geba provoked the Philistines, who massed their forces across the gorge that separated Geba and Michmash. This is the first mention of Jonathan, whose name means, "The LORD Has Given." Some scholars believe that Saul mustered the Israelite forces in the Jordan Valley at Gilgal, about 12 miles east of Michmash.¹ However, the location of the Gilgal in view is problematic. In going to Gilgal, Saul was following orders that Samuel had given him earlier (10:8). Saul was to meet Samuel, and Samuel was to offer sacrifices of worship, before Saul engaged the Philistines in battle. Because of the superior Philistine army, the Israelite soldiers were afraid, and some even fled (cf. Judg. 6:2). The enemy must have been strong to threaten Israel's eastern territory, since Philistia was Israel's neighbor to the west.

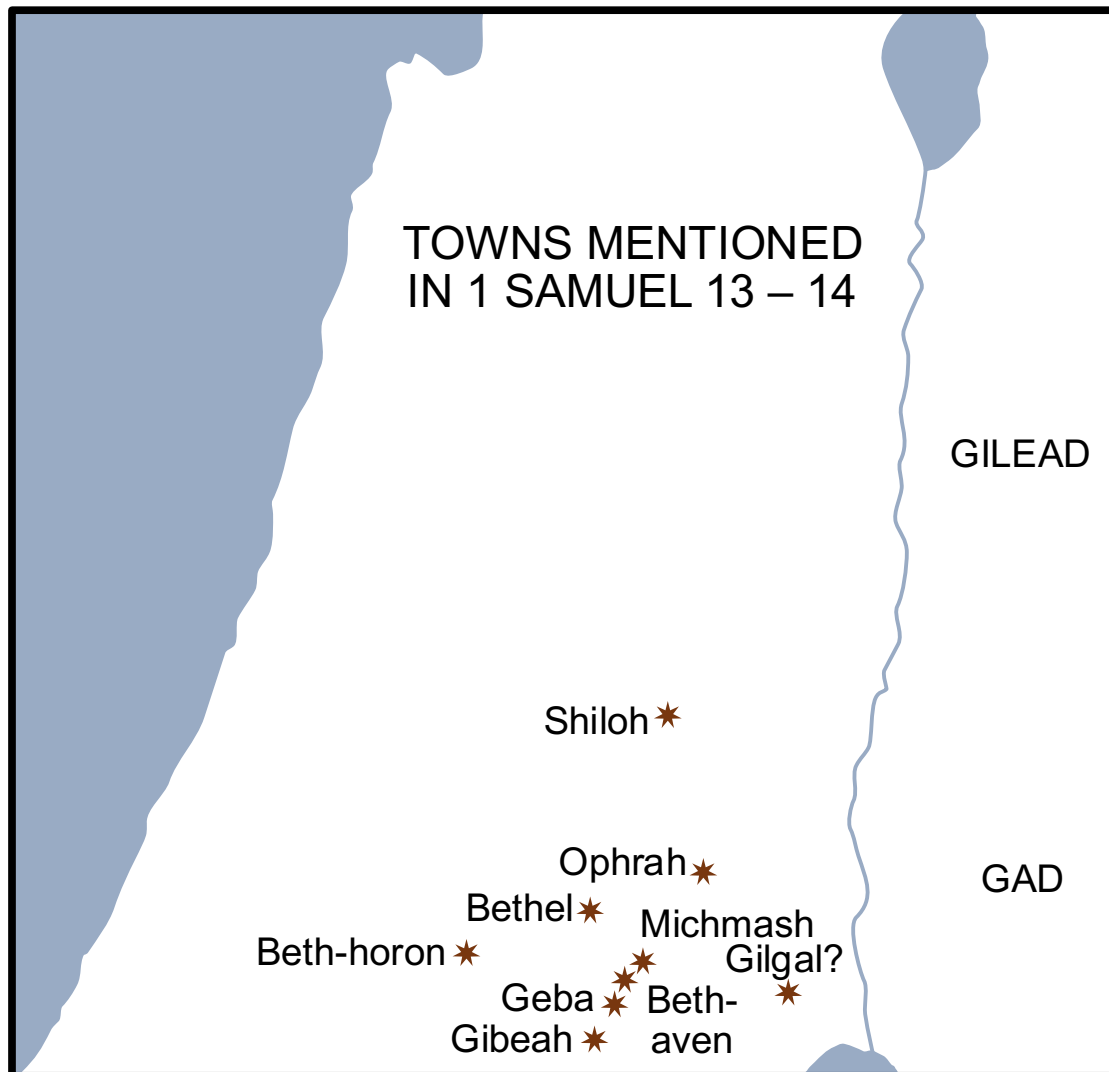
"How could the Philistines have used 30,000 chariots in a place like Michmash (1 Sam. 13:5)? ... such a large number of chariots in a single army has never been recorded in the annals of any ancient power, not even of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, or the Persians. It is most unlikely, therefore, that a third-rate little pentarchy like Philistia could have fielded the largest chariot force in all human history."²

This is probably another case of a corrupted number. Three thousand, rather than 30,00, is probably the correct number.³

¹E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 127-28.

²Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, p. 172.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 173.



"Since 'Hebrew' was commonly used by non-Israelites as a synonym for 'Israelite' (cf. 4:5-10), it is understandable that the two terms should alternate throughout the narratives of the Philistine wars in chapters 13—14."¹

Another explanation for the unusual fact that an Israelite referred to other Israelites as "Hebrews" is that Saul meant those Israelites who had been

¹Youngblood, p. 654. Cf. Tsumura, p. 338.

fighting for the Philistines (cf. 14:21; 29:3).¹ A third possibility is that Saul used this term because he did not respect his own people.²

Fearful lest the mass desertion of his soldiers continue, Saul decided to slay the sacrificial animals before engaging the enemy, and to attack rather than to wait for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifices. This was a violation of the prophet's orders (10:8).

"His sin is not that he offers the sacrifice prematurely (because he does wait until the time set by Samuel is up.). His sin is that he disrespects Samuel's authority by offering the sacrifice himself."³

Contrast David's submission to Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 12:1-15) with Saul's rebellion against Samuel the prophet. Saul could have asked for the LORD's help in prayer, of course, as Hannah did. Evidently ritual was very important to him, so he offered the sacrifice and disobeyed Samuel. His choice suggests that he had a rather superficial relationship with Yahweh. Contrast weak-in-faith Gideon who also faced overwhelming odds fearfully, yet trusted and obeyed Yahweh nonetheless (Judg. 6).

"Saul's failure, then, lay in his appropriating to himself priestly prerogatives which may have been associated with pagan kingship but which, without specific divine sanction, were inappropriate to him or any king of Israel. ...

"David, on the contrary, did function in cultic matters because, as messianic king, he transcended and was exempted from the restrictions of the law in this respect. ... As the son of God he was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, if not after the order of Aaron. ...

"Saul, though chosen to be king of Israel, was never designated as 'son of God' nor granted priestly privileges by virtue of that relationship. Here, then, is where his disobedience and rejection lay—he arrogantly and consciously stepped beyond the bounds and entered an arena of kingship that was

¹Gottwald, p. 424.

²See Wiersbe, p. 237.

³Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 82.

theologically as well as historically reserved for David and his dynasty alone."¹

Saul's punishment may appear excessively severe at first. However, the king of Israel was the LORD's lieutenant. Any disobedience to his Commander-in-Chief was an act of insubordination that threatened the whole administrative organization of God's kingdom on earth. Saul failed to perceive his place and responsibility under God. (Contrast King Hezekiah's appropriate behavior in a similar situation in 2 Chronicles 29:25.) Saul assumed more authority than was his. For this reason God would not establish a dynasty for him (cf. 24:21). Had he obeyed on this occasion, God would have placed Saul's descendants on his throne for at least one generation, if not more (v. 13; cf. 1 Kings 11:38). Perhaps Saul's descendants would have reigned in a parallel kingdom with the king from Judah.² Perhaps they would have served with David,³ though this seems unlikely to me. Now Saul's son would not succeed him. Eventually God would have raised up a king from the tribe of Judah—even if Saul had followed the LORD faithfully (Gen. 49:10). That king probably would have been David.

"Saul lost his kingdom for want of two or three hours' patience."⁴

Samuel's departure from the battlefield (v. 15) was symbolic of the breach that now opened up between Samuel and Saul, the prophet and the king. Saul's presumptuous plan also failed to bring his departing soldiers back to him.

"Saul had mustered over 300,000 men to rescue the people of Jabesh Gilead and then had cut it down to 3,000, but now his forces numbered only 600. The Philistine army was 'as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude' (v. 5), a simile also used for the army Gideon faced (Judg. 7:12)—and Saul's army was twice as large as Gideon's! The difference wasn't so much the size of the army as the strength of the leader's faith.

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 210-11.

²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 139; Youngblood, p. 657.

³Wiersbe, p. 238.

⁴Henry, p. 300.

Gideon trusted God for victory and God honored him; Saul disobeyed God and God punished him."¹

2. Saul's struggle against the Philistines 13:16—14:23

As a result of Saul's disobedience he began to flounder, but his son Jonathan, who sought to follow the LORD faithfully, became increasingly successful.

The results of Saul's disobedience 13:16-23

The writer explained the military disaster that resulted from Saul's disobedience in verses 16-18. Saul's army dwindled and the enemy continued to move around his capital city, Gibeah, freely.

Saul evidently led his troops from Gilgal to Geba where some of the Israelite soldiers camped. Saul himself proceeded back to Gibeah (14:2). The Philistines had posted a larger camp of their soldiers just north of the Wadi Suweinit ravine that ran between Geba and Michmash. The Philistines used their camp (garrison, v. 23) at Michmash as a base for raiding parties. From Michmash these raiders went north toward Ophrah, west toward Beth-horon, and probably southeast toward the wilderness, specifically the valley of Zeboim (exact site unknown).

The main physical advantage the Philistines enjoyed was their ability to smelt iron. This advanced technology gave them a strong military edge over the Israelites.² As in the days of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5:8), the Philistines still had the advantage of superior weapons and the power to restrict the Israelites' use of iron implements.

"This monopoly continued with some success until the time of David when Israel began to produce iron objects rather freely (cf. 1 Chron. 22:3)."³

Jonathan's success at Michmash 14:1-23

Armed with trust in God and courage, Jonathan ventured out to destroy Israel's enemy in obedience to God's command to drive out the inhabitants

¹Wiersbe, pp. 238-39.

²Dothan, p. 20.

³Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 216.

of Canaan (cf. 9:16). He would have made a good king of Israel. Saul remained in Gibeah, evidently on the defensive. His comfortable position under a fruit tree (cf. 22:6; Judg. 4:5) in secure Gibeah, surrounded by his soldiers, contrasts with Jonathan's vulnerable and difficult position with only the support of his armor bearer. Jonathan was launching out in faith to obey God, but Saul was resting comfortably and failing to do God's will.

"Saul was hesitating in unbelief (14:2) while his son was acting by faith."¹

The reference to priestly activity at Shiloh (v. 3) shows that the nation still regarded Shiloh as a cultic site (i.e., a site where the people practiced formal worship).

"Saul is accompanied by Ahijah [lit. "My Brother Is the LORD"], a member of the rejected priestly house of Eli (14:3), and this first mention of an Elide after the disasters which befell Eli's family in chap. 4 triggers the response 'rejected by Yhwh.' Lest the point be missed, it is reinforced by the odd and needless genealogical reference to Ichabod, Ahijah's uncle, picking up on 4:21-22, and reminding the reader that 'the glory has departed.' His own royal glory gone, where else would we expect Saul to be than with a relative of 'Glory gone'? The axes which here intersect, the rejection of Saul and the rejection of the Elide priesthood, will do so again in 22:11-19, when Saul will bloodily fulfill the prophecy of 2:31-33, wreaking Yhwh's will on the Elides."²

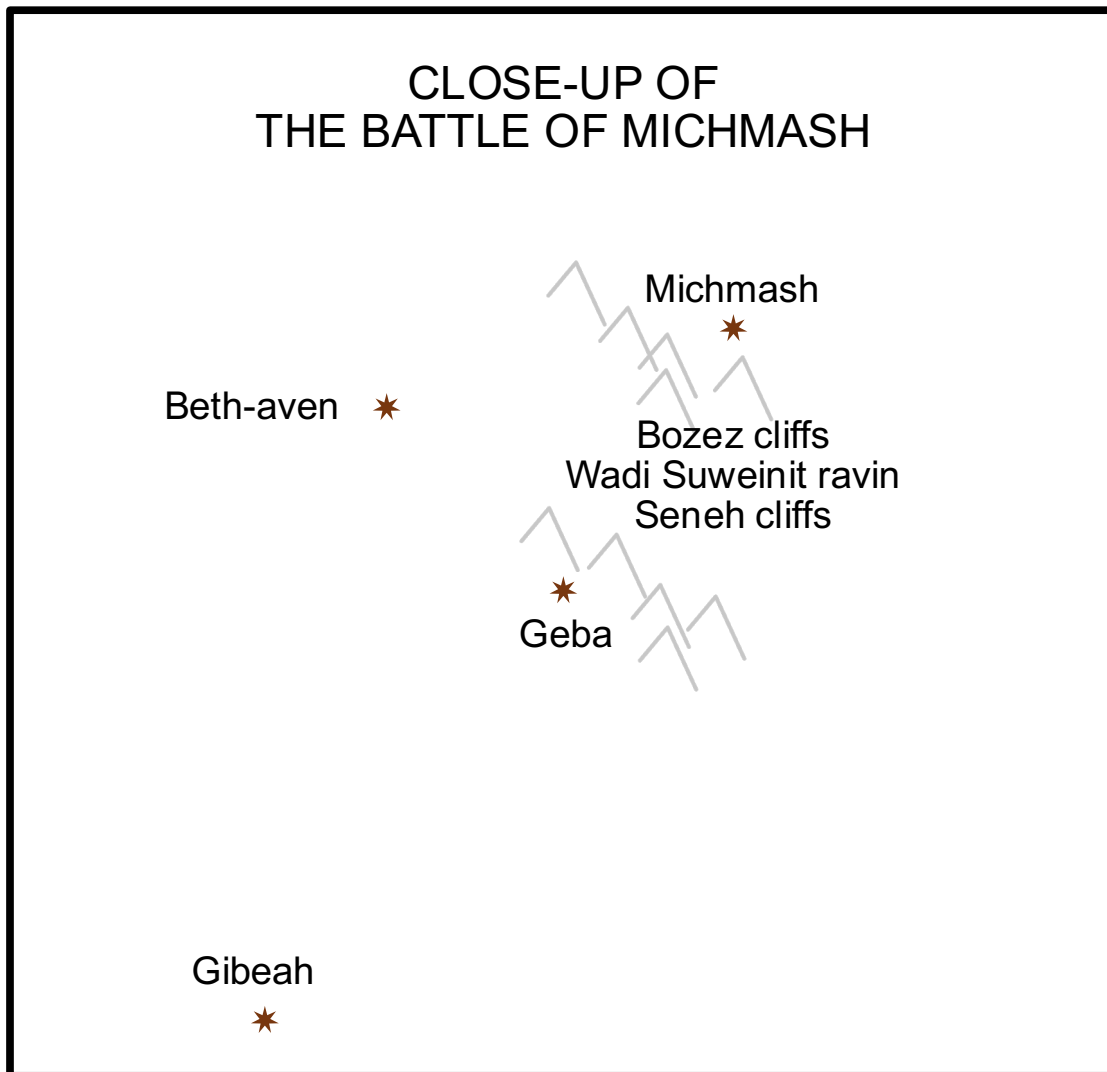
¹Wiersbe, p. 240.

²David Jobling, "Saul's Fall and Jonathan's Rise: Tradition and Redaction in 1 Sam 14:1-46," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95:3 (1976):368-69.

ELI'S DESCENDANTS FROM SAMUEL'S TO DAVID'S TIMES ¹					
	Samuel's time		Saul's time	David's time	
Eli	Hophni				
	Phinehas	Ahitub	Ahijah		
			Ahimelech ben Ahitub	Abiathar	Ahimelech ben Abiathar
					Jonathan
		Ichabod			

Bozez (v. 4, lit. "the Gleaming One" or "the Miry One") was the south-facing rocky crag near the Philistine camp at Michmash, perhaps so named because it reflected the sun that shone on it from the south. Seneh (lit. "the Thorny One" or "Thorn bush") faced north and was closer to Geba. Jonathan's route was an extremely difficult one. This fact accounts for his being able to surprise the Philistines.

¹Tsumura, p. 358.



In contrast to Saul, Jonathan had a true perception of God's role as the leader and deliverer of His people (v. 6). He viewed the Philistines as unbelievers under divine judgment, whom God wanted exterminated (cf. Gen. 17). He believed that God would work for His people in response to faith, as He had done repeatedly in Israel's history. He also had learned that superior numbers were not necessary for God to give victory in battle (cf. 17:47; Judg. 7:4, 7). Jonathan's name means "The LORD Has Given," which is what Jonathan claimed in verse 10: "The LORD has handed them [the Philistines] over to us" (cf. Lev. 26:7-8; Deut. 28:7).

"Other parallels with the story of Gideon commend themselves as well: the hero accompanied by only one servant (v. 7; cf.

Judg 7:10-11); the sign (vv. 9-10; cf. Judg 7:13-15); the panic (v. 15; cf. Judg 7:21); the confusion, causing the enemy soldiers to turn on 'each other with their swords' (v. 20; cf. Judg 7:22); reinforcements from the 'hill country of Ephraim' (v. 22; cf. Judg 7:24); and the pursuit (v. 22; cf. Judg 7:23 ...)."¹

Perhaps Jonathan chose his sign arbitrarily, simply to determine how the Lord wanted him to proceed. Some commentators have felt he did not:

"If the Philistines said, 'Wait till we come,' they would show some courage; but if they said, 'Come up to us,' it would be a sign that they were cowardly ..."²

Or their invitation to "Come up to us" (v. 12) may mean that they regarded Jonathan and his armor-bearer as deserters from Saul's army.³

Half a furrow in an acre of land (v. 14) was half a parcel of land that a yolk of oxen could plow in one day. Driver wrote that it was 10 to 15 yards.⁴ Evidently God assisted Jonathan by sending a mild earthquake to unnerve the Philistines further (v. 15; cf. Deut. 7:23).

When Saul should have been acting, he was waiting, and when he should have been waiting, he was acting (vv. 18-19).

"Saul is a person who prays when he should act and acts when he should pray. Such inconsistency is one of Saul's characteristics."⁵

"... he was what some people call a 'control freak.'"⁶

"Many will consult God about their safety that would never consult him about their duty."⁷

¹Youngblood, p. 661.

²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 138.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 214.

⁴Driver, p. 109.

⁵Tsumura, p. 366.

⁶Wiersbe, p. 241.

⁷Henry, p. 301.

Saul may have viewed the ark as a talisman (good luck charm) that he planned to use to secure God's help. He may have used the Urim and the Thummim (the objects in the high priest's breastpiece) to determine God's will (cf. Exod. 28:30).¹ As Saul watched, the multitude of Philistine soldiers that covered the area began to dissipate. He evidently concluded that he did not need to seek the LORD's guidance or blessing (cf. 13:12).

God caused the Philistines to fight one another (v. 20; cf. Judg. 7:22; 2 Chron. 20:23). Some Israelite deserters, or more probably *'apiru* mercenaries, who were fighting for the Philistines, even changed their allegiance and took sides with Jonathan.² The tide of battle had turned. Beth-aven stood near Michmash, but the exact site is uncertain.

3. Saul's cursing of Jonathan 14:24-46

Jonathan, a man of faith, initiated a great victory, but in this section we see that Saul, a man of pride, limited the extent of that victory while trying to extend it. Saul's failure to submit to Yahweh's authority resulted in his behaving foolishly more than wickedly (at this time).

Saul's selfishness 14:24-35

Saul's improper view of his role as Israel's king comes through clearly in verse 24. The Philistines were not Saul's enemies as much as God's enemies. This was holy war (cf. Judg. 16:28), but Saul viewed the battle too personally: as his war. He had lost perspective.³ His selfish desire to win for his own glory led him to issue a foolish command. Perhaps Saul had "sworn the army to a vow that they would fast until God intervened on their behalf (14:24-30)."⁴

An oath was an extremely serious matter in the ancient Near East (v. 26; cf. Judg. 14:8-9). One did not violate a king's oath without suffering severe consequences. Jonathan saw the folly of Saul's oath clearly, because he wanted God's glory, which involved victory over the Philistines (vv. 29-30). The Hebrew word translated troubled (v. 29, *'akar*) is the same one from which the names Achan and Achor come (Josh. 7:25-26). Saul, not

¹Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 214.

²See idem, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 203; Gottwald, pp. 422-25.

³Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 218.

⁴Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 214.

Jonathan, had troubled Israel, as Achan had, by his foolish command (v. 24). Saul is the last person in the Old Testament to utter such a curse.¹

"Jonathan probably experienced low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). It can be caused by vigorous exercise and lack of food; today it is most commonly experienced as an insulin reaction by diabetics. A symptom occasionally experienced is a 'darkening' of the eyes, in which vision is darkened, appearing similar to the darkening of vision when one stands up too quickly. Eating honey would quickly raise the blood sugar level and make vision normally 'bright' again."²

"While Saul was stubbornly religious, Jonathan was, by contrast, practically God-fearing."³

Aijalon (v. 31) stood about 17 miles west of Michmash. Verses 32-34 illustrate the confusion that resulted from Saul's misguided oath. The Mosaic Law forbade eating meat with the blood not drained from it (Lev. 17:10-14). The great stone (v. 33) served as a slaughtering table where the priests carefully prepared the meat for eating.

Saul was not entirely insensitive to Yahweh and His will. We can see this in his concern to observe the ritual dietary law (v. 33) and his desire to honor God for the victory (v. 35; cf. 11:13; Exod. 17:14-16). However, Saul may have built this altar simply to make amends for his legal infringement, not to express gratitude for the day's victory.⁴ There are many examples of spiritually sensitive Israelites building altars to God in the Old Testament (e.g., 7: 17; Gen. 12:8; Judg. 6:24; 2 Sam. 24:25; 1 Chron. 21:18). The writer's note that this was the first altar that Saul built reflects the king's general lack of commitment to Yahweh.

"Saul was turning aside from God, and yet now he began to build altars, being most zealous (as many are) for the form of godliness when he was denying the power of it."⁵

¹Tsumura, p. 370.

²Ibid., p. 372.

³Ibid., p. 373.

⁴Gordon, p. 140.

⁵Henry, p. 302.

Saul's blindness to his guilt 14:36-46

Evidently Saul would not have inquired of God if Ahijah (cf. v. 18) had not suggested that he do so (v. 36). Probably God did not answer his prayer immediately because Saul wanted this information to vindicate himself rather than God (v. 37). Saul thought God did not answer him because someone had violated his rule (v. 24), which he confused with God's Law, calling violation of it sin (v. 38; cf. Josh. 7:14). Really, God did not answer him because Saul was disloyal to Yahweh. The king boldly vowed that anyone who had sinned, which was only breaking his rule, even Jonathan, would die (v. 39). God identified Jonathan rather than Saul as the guilty party. Jonathan had violated the king's command, though he had not violated God's command. Actually, Jonathan was executing God's will.

Jonathan would have had to die if he had broken Yahweh's command, as Achan did. However, Saul's oath was not on that high a level of authority, though Saul thought it was, as is clear from his insistence that Jonathan die. The soldiers who had gone along with Saul's requests thus far (vv. 36, 40) refused to follow his orders when he called for Jonathan's execution (v. 45). They recognized that Saul's rule about abstaining from eating (v. 24) was not divine law. They correctly saw that even though Jonathan had violated Saul's rule, he had obeyed God's order to drive Israel's enemies out of the land.

"The people here obviously think that God spoke much more clearly in the victory than in the lots."¹

Saul's failure to see his role under God, and the difference between the Word of God and his own commands, resulted in confusion and disunity. Saul's preoccupation with Jonathan's eating against his wishes cost him a great victory over the Philistines.

The writer pointed out the reason for Saul's ultimate failure as Israel's king, and the reason for his own personal destruction, in this section (13:1—14:46). Essentially, Saul refused to put the will of God above his own personal desires. Saul showed great concern about the observance of religious rituals, but he failed to appreciate the indispensable importance of submitting his will to Yahweh. He sought to use God rather than allowing

¹Tsumura, p. 381.

God to use him. He thought he was above the Mosaic Law rather than under it. He put himself in the position that God alone rightfully occupied.

To illustrate the seriousness of Saul's sin, suppose a set of parents have two children. The first child has a real heart for what pleases his parents. On rare occasions when this child disobeys his parents, his conscience bothers him, he confesses his offense to his parents, and he tries to be obedient from then on. This was how David responded to God. Even though David sinned greatly by committing adultery and murder, these sins broke his heart, he confessed them to God, and he returned to following God faithfully. His heart was one with God's. He wanted to please God and honor God even though he failed miserably occasionally.

The second child in the family, in this illustration, really wants to run his own life. He submits to parental authority when it seems to him to be to his advantage to do so, but his heart is really not with his parents. He wants to control his own life and believes that he can do a better job of it on his own than by following his parents' instructions. He thinks, "What's right for me is right." This was Saul's attitude. Saul never submitted to divine authority unless he felt it was to his advantage to do so. He always wanted to maintain control over his own life.

Which of these two children has the more serious problem of disobedience? The second child does. Saul's sin was worse than David's. Even though David committed a few great sins, God did not cut off his dynasty or his rule prematurely, since he really wanted to glorify God with his life. However, David suffered severe consequences for his sins, even though God forgave him. God did cut off Saul's dynasty and his rule prematurely because Saul would not yield to Yahweh's control, which was crucial for Israel's king. Failure to yield control to God is extremely important, even more important than individual acts of disobedience (cf. Rom. 6:12-13; 12:1-2).¹

Saul's pride led him to make foolish decisions that limited his effectiveness. Many believers experience unnecessary confusion and complications in their lives because they will not relinquish control of their lives to God.

¹See also Baxter, 2:78-79.

"Here we see the beginnings of Saul's irrationality and madness."¹

4. Saul's limited effectiveness in battle 14:47-52

"So far ch. 14 has presented Saul in a mixed light, but this summary is completely favorable."²

Saul was an active warrior, and was effective to an extent, due to his native abilities and God's limited blessing. He punished the enemies of Israel (vv. 47-48), which was God's will. Yet he did not subdue and defeat them all, as David did. He subdued the Philistines in the central, hilly part of Israel, but by the end of his reign, they were as much of a threat as before.³

The information concerning Saul's family members, which the writer recorded here, corresponds to other similar ancient Near Eastern texts. It was common to give this information as part of a summary of a king's accomplishments (cf. 2 Sam. 8). Ishvi is probably an alternative name for Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 2:8; et al.).

God would later bring valiant warriors to David, as He had previously brought them to Saul (10:26), but Saul now had to select recruits by personally evaluating them. This is another indication of God's limited blessing on Saul. In contrast, hundreds of soldiers volunteered to serve with David. Saul established a standing army in Israel for the first time (cf. 8:11). He never provided "rest" for the Israelites, as David did (2 Sam. 7:1).

5. Yahweh's final rejection of Saul ch. 15

"In the short pericope 13:7b-15a obedience was the stone on which Saul stumbled; here it is the rock that crushes him."⁴

Chapter 15 records one of the battles that Saul fought with the Amalekites, Israel's enemy to the south (cf. 14:48). The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12; 1 Chron. 1:36) and, therefore, linked with the Edomites. They were nomads who lived principally in southern Canaan and

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 204.

²Tsumura, p. 383.

³Ibid.

⁴Gordon, p. 142.

the Sinai Peninsula. This battle evidently happened about 25 years after Saul began reigning, which was 23 years after God rejected Saul's dynasty, following Saul's disobedience at Gilgal (13:1-15).¹ Thus Saul apparently served as king about 23 years between God's rejection of his dynasty (ch. 13) and God's rejection of him personally (ch. 15).

There are two reasons God blesses people, according to Scripture: His sovereign choice to bless some more than others, and their obedience to Him. This applies to believers and unbelievers alike. Believers do not lose their salvation by being disobedient, but they can lose their opportunity to serve—both now and in the future.

Most scholars are sure Saul attacked the Amalekites who lived in the southern Judaeen Negev, though some feel he attacked an enclave of them in western Samaria (northwest of Gibeah).² Saul did not destroy all the Amalekites at this time (27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam. 8:12). King Hezekiah completely annihilated them years later (1 Chron. 4:43).

God directed Saul through His prophet Samuel (vv. 1-3). Consequently for Saul to disobey what Samuel said was tantamount to disobeying God. Samuel reminded Saul that Yahweh was the LORD of armies (v. 2), his Commander-in-Chief. Saul's mission was to annihilate the Amalekites, plus their animals, completely (v. 3; cf. Deut. 7:2-6; 12:2-3; 20:16-18). God had commanded Joshua to do the same thing to Jericho; every breathing thing was to die (Josh. 6:17-21; cf. Deut. 20:16-18). Saul was now to put the Amalekites under the ban (Heb. *herem*). This practice was not unique to Israel; the Moabites and presumably other ancient Near Eastern nations also put cities and groups of people under the ban.³ God had plainly commanded this destruction of the Amalekites through Moses (Exod. 17:16; Deut. 25:17-19; cf. Num. 24:20; Gen. 12:3). Thus there was no question what the will of God involved. The phrase "completely destroy" (Heb. *heherim*) occurs seven times in this account (vv. 3, 8, 9 [twice], 15, 18, 20), showing that God's will was clear and that Saul's disobedience was not an oversight.

"The agent of divine judgment can be impersonal (e.g., the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) or personal

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 138.

²E.g., Diane Edelman, "Saul's Battle Against Amaleq (1 Sam. 15)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986):74-81.

³See Gordon, pp. 143, 147-48.

(as here), and in his sovereign purpose God often permits entire families or nations to be destroyed if their corporate representatives are willfully and incorrigibly wicked (cf. Josh 7:1, 10-13, 24-26)."¹

The Amalekites (v. 6) were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12), but the Kenites traced their ancestry from Midian, one of Abraham's sons by Keturah (Gen. 25:2). The Kenites had been friendly to Israel (Exod. 18:9, 10, 19; Num. 10:29-32), whereas the Amalekites had not. There may have been a treaty, or at least friendly relations, between the Israelites and the Kenites.²

Saul's criterion for what he put to death was not part of God's command but his own judgment (v. 9). Again, Saul's defective view of his role under Yahweh's sovereign rule is obvious. God had earlier revealed through Balaam that Israel's king "shall be higher than Agag" (Num. 24:7). As Achan had done, Saul misused some of what God had devoted to another purpose. Clearly Saul set his will against the orders of his Commander; he was "unwilling" to destroy everything that breathed (v. 9). His obedience was selective and partial.

Sometime later, an armed force of Amalekites attacked and destroyed Ziklag, a town in southern Judea (ch. 30). This would never have happened if Saul had obeyed God here.

The phrase "the word of the LORD came to" occurs only three times in 1 and 2 Samuel (v. 10; cf. 2 Sam. 7:4; 24:11). In all three cases it refers to an important message of judgment that God sent Israel's king through a prophet. It is the key phrase in this chapter.³

God regretted that He had made Saul king (v. 11) because of Saul's actions, not because God felt that He had made a mistake in appointing Saul as Israel's king. Saul's failure to follow God faithfully also broke Samuel's heart. The disobedience of leaders to God's will always grieves the hearts of God's

¹Youngblood, p. 673. On the problem of God's goodness and His severe treatment of sinners, and even their animals, in the Old Testament, see Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, and John W. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?*

²See F. Charles Fensham, "Did a Treaty Between the Israelites and the Kenites Exist?" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 175 (October 1964):51-54.

³Tsumura, p. 398.

faithful servants. Samuel foresaw the consequences of Saul's actions. The village of Carmel (lit. "Vineyard") stood about 8 miles south and a little east of Hebron (cf. 25:2; Josh. 15:55). The monument Saul set up honored himself, not God who gave him the victory. When Moses defeated the Amalekites, he built an altar (Exod. 17:15-16); but when Saul defeated them, he erected a stele, a monument commemorating a victory (cf. 2 Sam. 18:18).

Consistent with his view of his own behavior, Saul claimed to have obeyed God (v. 13). Nevertheless he had only been partially obedient. God regards incomplete obedience as disobedience (v. 19). Rather than confessing his sin, Saul sought to justify his disobedience (v. 15; cf. Gen. 3:12; Exod. 32:22-23). He believed it was for a worthy purpose, and he failed to take responsibility for his actions but blamed the people instead (v. 15).

"Samuel now realized that Saul was not a leader, but the tool and slave of the people."¹

Samuel had earlier delivered a message of doom to Eli in the morning (3:15-18). Now he delivered one to Saul in another morning (v. 16).

"There is in all of us an inclination to resent being told what to do; but those in positions of authority and power are all the more reluctant to acknowledge anyone else's superior authority."²

Since Saul returned to Gilgal to offer sacrifices, it is possible that this was the site of the tabernacle (vv. 12, 15; cf. 10:8; 13:8-10). If this was the Gilgal in the Jordan Valley, it was where the Israelites had pitched the tabernacle first in Canaan, after they crossed the Jordan River in Joshua's day (Josh. 4:19). On the other hand, the Israelites offered sacrifices at places other than the tabernacle after they entered the Promised Land. We cannot say for sure that Saul went to Gilgal because the tabernacle was there.

Saul had formerly been genuinely humble. He had realistically evaluated himself before his anointing (v. 17; cf. 9:21). Yet when he became king, he increasingly viewed himself as the ultimate authority in Israel, a view

¹Young, p. 285. See Jessica N. T. Lee, "The Role of the People in Saul's Rise and Fall," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:694 (April-June 2017):159-78.

²David Payne, pp. 77-78.

common among ancient Near Eastern monarchs. This attitude led him to disobey the Law of God. God had sent Saul on a mission (v. 18; cf. Matt. 28:19-20), which involved the total extermination of the Amalekites. The Hebrew word translated "sinners" (v. 18) means habitually wicked people (cf. Ps. 1:1, 5), people like the Canaanites.

"That Haman the 'Agagite' (Esth 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24) was an Amalekite is taken for granted by Josephus, who states that Haman's determination to destroy all the Jews in Persia was in retaliation for Israel's previous destruction of all his ancestors (Antiq. XI, 211 [vi.5])."¹

However, there is good reason to believe that Agag was the name of an area in Media that had become part of the Persian Empire.² If Josephus was correct, Saul's total obedience to God would have precluded Haman's attempt to annihilate the Jews in Esther's day.

Saul persisted in calling partial obedience total obedience (v. 20). He again placed responsibility for sparing some of the spoils taken in the battle on the people (v. 21), but, as king, he was responsible for the people's actions. How prone we are to deflect responsibility for our wrong actions (cf. Gen. 3:12-13). We try to justify our mistakes in order to escape blame and punishment. Saul sometimes took too much responsibility on himself and at other times too little. He tried to justify his actions by claiming that he did what he had done to honor God. He betrayed his lack of allegiance by referring to Yahweh as "your" God, not "our" God or "my" God (cf. v. 30).

Some people who are stern by nature insist on strong discipline for wrongdoing, but they do not forgive. Those who are compassionate by nature may be quick to forgive but may not confront sin. Some Christians take a stand against moral blights like abortion and pornography but are lax on materialism, which results in the starvation of thousands around the world every day. And with some it is the other way around. God demands full obedience: discipline and forgiveness, moral purity and social sensitivity.

Samuel spoke what the writer recorded in verses 22 and 23 in poetic form, indicating to all that God had inspired what he was saying. God frequently communicated oracles through the prophets in such exalted poetic speech

¹Youngblood, p. 674.

²See Archer, *A Survey ...*, p. 421.

(cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33; et al.). These classic verses prioritize total obedience and worship ritual for all time. God desires reality above ritual. Sacrificing things to God is good, but obedience is "better" (v. 22) because it involves sacrificing ourselves to Him.

"The issue here is not a question of either/or but of both/and. Practically speaking, this means that sacrifice must be offered to the Lord on his terms, not ours."¹

"Worship of God that does not proceed from obedience to Him is not worship at all."²

"Samuel was merely pointing out a basic truth that sacrifices *in themselves* were not the final answer to man's need in restoring fellowship with his God. A true sacrifice was to be a genuine sign of faith and obedience."³

What is the difference between obedience and sacrifice? Sacrifice is one aspect of obedience, but obedience involves more than just sacrifice. We should never think that we can compensate for our lack of obedience to some of God's commands by making other sacrifices for Him.

Suppose one Saturday morning a father asks his teenage son to mow the lawn for him, since he has to work that Saturday and cannot do it himself. Company is coming, and he wants it to look good. The son decides that his dad's car needs washing more than the grass needs cutting. Besides, the boy plans to use the car on a date that night. When the father comes home, he finds that his son has not cut the grass. "I decided to wash your car instead," the boy explains. "Aren't you pleased with me?" His father replies, "I appreciate your washing the car, but that's not what I asked you to do. I would have preferred that you mow the lawn, as I told you."

The failure of Israel's king to follow his Commander-In-Chief's orders was much more serious than the son's disobedience in the illustration above. Departure from God's will ("rebellion") presumes to control the future course of events, as divination does (v. 23). Failure to carry out God's will ("insubordination") is as reprehensible as false religion and idolatry, because it puts the insubordinate person in God's place. God would now

¹Youngblood, p. 677.

²Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship*, p. 88. Italics omitted.

³Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 221.

begin to terminate Saul's rule as Israel's king (v. 23; cf. Exod. 34:7). Previously, God had told Saul that his kingdom (dynasty) would not endure (13:14).

"Saul's loss of kingship and kingdom are irrevocable; the rest of 1 Samuel details how in fact he does lose it all."¹

Saul's confession (v. 24) seems to have been superficial. The Hebrew word translated "violated" (*abarti*) means overlooked. Saul only admitted that he had overlooked some small and relatively unimportant part of what God had commanded, because he feared the people (or the soldiers²). It is ironical that Saul became king because of the voice of the people (8:9, 22; 12:1), but he was rejected because he listened to the voice of the people—instead of listening to God's voice. Saul evidently believed that it was easier to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

What God called rebellion Saul called an oversight. Saul's greater sin was putting himself in God's place. He was guilty of a kind of treason, namely, trying to usurp the ultimate authority in Israel. Samuel refused to accompany Saul because Saul had refused to accompany God (v. 26).

"Most of us like to think that however serious our disobedience, once we repent of that sin, we are forgiven and experience no real loss. The Scripture teaches that genuine repentance always meets forgiveness, but it does not teach that there are no losses. Actually, every reflective Christian knows of permanent losses that are the result of our failure to live up to God's ideals for our lives."³

When Saul seized Samuel's robe (v. 27), he was making an earnest appeal. The phrase "grasped the edge of his robe" was a common idiomatic expression in Semitic languages that pictured a gesture of supplication.⁴ Later, David would cut off the hem of Saul's robe in a cave while the king relieved himself (24:4). The hem of a garment identified the social status

¹Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading*, p. 98.

²Josephus, 6:7:4.

³Chafin, p. 130.

⁴See Edward L. Greenstein, "'To Grasp the Hem' in Ugaritic Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:2 (April 1982):217, and Ronald A. Brauner, "'To Grasp the Hem' and 1 Samuel 15:27," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (1974):135-38.

of the person who wore it.¹ David was symbolically picturing the transfer of royal authority from Saul to himself when he did this. When Saul tore Samuel's hem, he symbolically, though perhaps unintentionally, seized the prophet's authority inappropriately. Samuel interpreted his action as symbolizing the wrenching of the kingdom from Saul (cf. 1 Kings 11:29-33).

Verse 29 poses a problem in the light of other passages that say God changed His mind (e.g., Exod. 32:14; Num. 14:12, 20; 1 Chron. 21:15). What did Samuel mean? I believe he meant that God is not fickle.² God does sometimes relent (change His course of action) in response to the prayers of His people, or when they repent (cf. Jer. 18:7-10; 1 John 1:9).³ However, when He determines to do something, He follows through and will not be deterred (cf. Jer. 14:11-12). God is initially open to changing His mind about how He will deal with people, but He does not remain open forever. He is patient with people, but His patience has its limit (2 Pet. 3:9-10). God allows people time to make their choices, but then He holds them responsible for those choices. The language "changed His mind" or "does not change His mind," when applied to God, is anthropomorphic (describing God in human terms). Obviously God does not have a mind or brain as humans do, since He is a spirit being. Anthropomorphic (human form) and anthropopathic (human feeling) expressions indicate that God is like human beings in these comparisons.

"When God issues a decree that is plainly intended as irrevocable, as in the rejection of Saul, then, says our text, there is no possibility of that decree being rescinded (cf. Nu. 23:19)."⁴

¹See Jacob Milgrom, "Of Hems and Tassels," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9:3 (May-June 1983):61-65.

²See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 250.

³For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Thomas L. Constable, "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 105-6; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):387-99; and idem, "Does God Deceive?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):11-28.

⁴Gordon, p. 146.

"There is a deeply rooted paradox about God's nature, but his integrity is emphasized: he responds to human actions, but his purposes do not change ..."¹

John Calvin understood "changed His mind" language differently. He believed that God does not change His mind, but that expressions like this represent God to us as He seems to be, not as He really is.² I think anthropomorphic language pictures God as He really is, though in terms of human analogy.

Saul had established a long record of rebellious behavior. God knew that Saul's confession was not genuine and his repentance was not real. Saul may have thought that he could "con" God, but he could not. He behaved toward God as a manipulative child deals with his or her parents. Rather than having a heart to please God, as David did, Saul only obeyed God when he felt that it was to his advantage to do so. He wanted to maintain control and to receive at least some of the glory; he wanted Samuel to honor him so that he would not lose face with the people (v. 30). Samuel reminded the king that Yahweh was the "Glory of Israel" (v. 29), Saul may have been bowing down in repentance in Samuel's presence, though the text does not say that, but he was standing up inside. It was that unbending resistance to God's complete sovereignty that made Saul unusable as Israel's king.

"Saul, as this chapter in particular would have us understand, was a man in contention with Yahweh in a way that David, for all his lurid sins, never was."³

Saul's lack of submission was an even more serious sin than David's sins of murder and adultery. God did not remove the kingship from David for his sins, but He did from Saul.

"To be king in Israel was ... quite a different matter from being king in the countries round about. Saul did not understand this distinction, and resented Samuel's 'interference,' whereas David appreciated the point that the Lord his God was the focus of authority, and therefore he was willing to submit to the word of his prophet even though, in the eyes of the watching world, it must have seemed that David's own

¹Firth, p. 178.

²See Calvin, 1:17:12-14.

³Gordon, p. 142.

authority would thereby be weakened. Here lay the crucial distinction between Saul and David. The man after God's own heart submitted to God's word, obeyed his prophets, and found acceptance and forgiveness, despite his many glaring faults and failures. Saul obstinately clung to his rights as king, but lost his throne."¹

Perhaps Samuel consented to honor Saul by worshipping with him (vv. 30-31) because Saul was still the king. Or perhaps Samuel did so out of his personal concern for Saul, or out of concern for the nation if it became known that God had rejected Saul.² It was good that Saul wanted to honor Yahweh in the eyes of the people by worshipping Him. Perhaps Saul's sincere, though shallow, contrition moved Samuel to be more cooperative and gracious (cf. v. 26). Some of the commentators believed Samuel sinned in returning with Saul.³ Note Saul's continuing obsession with external appearances: in his desire to remain united with Samuel in the eyes of the people.

"Saul's request for forgiveness and desire to worship God suggests that, despite his flaws, he was a sincere believer in God."⁴

Samuel proceeded to obey God, as Saul should have, by slaying Agag (vv. 32-33). (Josephus wrote that Samuel gave an order to kill Agag.⁵) The departure of Samuel and Saul to their respective hometowns pictures them going their separate ways. They had little in common, since their allegiance to Yahweh was quite different, so they saw nothing more of each other (v. 35).⁶ Saul's attitude toward Yahweh, and its resultant judgment, grieved the prophet who felt, like God, sorrow over the king's fate (15:35; 16:1).

God has feelings about people's responses to Him. He is not a machine but a Person. God regretted that He had made Saul king because of Saul's decisions, not because God thought He had made a mistake by providing Saul as Israel's king. This is an anthropopathism. God felt about Saul the way we feel when someone whom we have favored greatly disappoints us

¹Baldwin, p. 35.

²Tsumura, p. 408.

³E.g., Peter N. Greenhow, "Did Samuel Sin?" *Grace Journal* 11:2 (1970):34-40.

⁴*The Nelson ...*, p. 477.

⁵Josephus, 6:7:5.

⁶See David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*, p. 147.

greatly. Note that God regretted that He had made Saul king, not that He had made Saul one of His children (if he was one). There is no indication in the text that Saul lost his salvation because he failed to obey God completely, but he did lose his opportunity to serve God by ruling over God's people (cf. Prov. 25:19; 1 Cor. 9:27).¹

Chapters 12—15 present the negative side of Saul's character, whereas chapters 8—11 emphasize Saul's positive traits. The writer structured these sections parallel to each other to make the contrast striking.

Samuel was one of the most staunchly committed servants of God in the Bible. His speech in chapter 12, and his uncompromising dealings with Saul's sins in chapters 13 and 15, are certainly praiseworthy. Yet his sons did not follow the LORD (8:5). People like Samuel need to make a special effort to train their children to love and follow the Lord, because they can often come across as hard and unbending.

The motif of fertility continues as the major theological emphasis in this section of 1 Samuel (chs. 7—15). Samuel, the innocent and obedient servant of the LORD, won the privilege of continuing to communicate God's Word by his faithful commitment to God. Saul, the apparently ideal Israelite, who personified the hopes and ambitions of Israel, lost his privilege of leading God's people because he was unfaithful to God.

"Saul was an impetuous person who wanted to take matters into his own hands rather than trusting the Lord. He had the opposite of the proper covenant mentality. His sin was so serious that there could be no atonement for it. This is similar to Eli's sons, for whose sins no atonement was available. Their sin resulted in a change of order, from Eli to Samuel. In Saul's case the change in order was from Saul to David."²

The writer recorded four more conflicts and reversals of fortune in chapters 7—15: the Philistines and Samuel (7:2-17), the Ammonites and Saul (chs. 8—11), Saul and Jonathan (12:1—14:46), and Saul and Samuel (14:47—15:35). In the first two sections, God's two anointed servants, Samuel and Saul, defeated Israel's external enemies by depending on God. They both gave God the credit for their victories (7:12; 11:13-15). In the third and

¹See Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47:4 (October 1985):597.

²Martin, p. 35.

fourth sections, because Saul refused to obey God, Saul replaced the external enemies of Israel as the object of God's and Samuel's anger. Jonathan became Israel's deliverer when his father failed. The son saw the spiritual significance of events to which the father was blind.

The section of Samuel that begins with 1 Samuel 15 and runs through 2 Samuel 8 is remarkably similar to a thirteenth-century B.C. document called the *Apology of Hattusilis*. In this document, a Hittite king outlined the reasons for the legitimacy of his rule. These similarities illustrate clearly that this section of Samuel serves as an apology for David's reign.

"Such an apology was particularly important in the case of a king—like David—who founded a new dynasty."¹

IV. SAUL AND DAVID CHS. 16—31

The basic theme in Samuel, that blessing, and, in particular, fertility of all kinds, follows from faithful commitment to God's revealed will, continues in this section. However, another major motif now becomes more prominent. We might call it the theme of the LORD's anointed.

"The theological thread running through Samuel and Kings is God's choice of a leader to represent Him as He implements His covenants with Israel."²

Saul had been God's anointed vice-regent, but with Saul's rejection God began to move David toward that position. These chapters record the gradual transition and slow transformation of the nation as the Israelites, and others, increasingly realized that David was now God's anointed. Saul remained the Lord's anointed as long as he lived. Part of the reason David succeeded was that he recognized this and related to Saul accordingly. However, David too was God's anointed, though God was still preparing him to take leadership and mount the throne of Israel. While the hero of this last half of 1 Samuel is David, Saul is also prominent. Saul declined as the old anointed, while David arose as the new anointed. In chapters 16—17

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 450, which see for six elements in Hattusilis' defense and their parallels in 1 Samuel 15—2 Samuel 8.

² Heater, p. 117.

Saul and David were on friendly terms, but in chapters 18—26 they were on unfriendly terms.¹

"There will be many twists in the story of David's progress towards the throne, and not a few crisis-points, yet all is told in the knowledge that God can put his men where he wants them to be, whether the route is direct, or ever so circuitous."²

CHRONOLOGY OF DAVID'S LIFE ³			
Event	Date	Age	Scripture
Birth	1041	0	2 Sam. 5:4-5
Anointing by Samuel	1029	12	1 Sam. 16:1-13
Defeat of Goliath	1024	17	1 Sam. 17
Exile from Saul	1020- 1011	21- 30	1 Sam. 21—31
Anointing as King over Judah	1011	30	2 Sam. 2:1-4
Anointing as King over all Israel	1004	37	2 Sam. 5:1-3
Philistines Wars	1004	37	2 Sam. 5:17-25; 23:8-17
Conquest of Jerusalem	1004	37	2 Sam. 5:6-10
Mephibosheth's Move to Jerusalem	996	45	2 Sam. 9:1-13
The Three Year Famine	996-993	45- 48	2 Sam. 21:1-14

¹Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 216.

²Gordon, p. 150. Compare Joseph's career.

³Based on Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 244.

The Ammonite Wars	993-990	48-51	2 Sam. 10—12
Adultery and Murder	992	49	2 Sam. 11
Birth of Solomon	991	50	2 Sam. 12:24-25
Rape of Tamar	987	54	2 Sam. 13:1-22
Death of Amnon	985	56	2 Sam. 13:23-36
Exile of Absalom	985-982	56-59	2 Sam. 13:37-39
Absalom's Return to Jerusalem	982-980	59-61	2 Sam. 14:21-24
Construction of Palace	980-978	61-63	1 Chron. 15:1
Construction of Tabernacle	977	64	1 Chron. 15:1
Move of Ark to Jerusalem	977	64	2 Sam. 6:12-19
Absalom's Rebellion and David's Exile	976	65	2 Sam. 15—18
Rebellion of Sheba	976	65	2 Sam. 20:1-22
The Census	975	66	2 Sam. 24:1-17
Purchase of Temple Site	973	68	2 Sam. 24:18-25
The Davidic Covenant	973	68	2 Sam. 7
Co-regency with Solomon	973-971	68-70	1 Chron. 23:1
Rebellion of Adonijah	972	69	1 Kings 1:5-37
Coronation of Solomon	971	70	1 Chron. 29:22-23
Death	971	70	1 Kings 2:10-11

"It is important to recognize that the text is not interested in providing biographical information on David. We know little about him prior to this time apart from hints provided in ch. 17. Rather, the text is theologically driven by the need to demonstrate Yahweh's choice. ... Although the narrative of Samuel is broadly chronological, there are points where the narrator varies this because of the need to highlight thematic issues."¹

A. DAVID'S RISE AS THE NEW ANOINTED 16:1—19:17

According to Chuck Swindoll, more was written in the Bible about David than about any other character: 66 chapters in the Old Testament plus 59 references to his life in the New Testament.² This large amount of material reflects his great importance for Bible readers. Abram Sachar called David: "the most human character of the Bible."³

1. God's selection of David for kingship ch. 16

"Chapter 16 is divided into two sections. In the first section, vv. 1-13, God chooses David; in the second, vv. 13 [*sic* 14]-23, it is Saul who chooses David. The reader knows that the second choice was the result of the first. It will take some time for Saul to know this fact and admit it; see 18:8; 24:20."⁴

"One of the many indications that the two halves (vv. 1-13, 14-23) of chapter 16 are closely related is that each section is framed by an *inclusio*: 'Horn with/of oil' is found in vv. 1 and 13, and the phrase 'Spirit ... departed from' constitutes the first words of v. 14 and the last words of v. 23 ..."⁵

¹Firth, p. 180.

²Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny*, p. 4. Cf. Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 269.

³Sachar, p. 34.

⁴Tsumura, p. 414.

⁵Youngblood, p. 682.

David's anointing 16:1-13

Understandably, Samuel grieved over Saul's rebellious behavior (v. 1).

"In his grief, Samuel must have felt like a dismal failure as a father, a spiritual leader, and a mentor to the new king."¹

This time God's choice was not a king for the people according to their desires, but a king for Himself (v. 1)—one who would put Him first (13:14; cf. Gal. 4:4-5). Saul would have perceived Samuel's act of anointing another man king as treason (v. 2). He continued to show more concern for his own interests than for the plan of God. In contrast, Samuel faithfully carried out the LORD's command to go to Bethlehem despite the possible risk to his life. Evidently Samuel had gained a reputation as an executioner, since he had killed Agag (v. 4; cf. 15:33).

Samuel judged Jesse's sons by their external qualities, just as the Israelites had judged Saul acceptable because of those characteristics (v. 6). Verse 7 clarifies how God evaluates people, namely, on the basis of their hearts (affections and commitments), not their appearances or abilities (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 10:31; 1 Cor. 1:27). As He had done earlier in Scriptural history, God chose the son that was not the natural choice, showing that He does not limit Himself to what is traditional. It is unusual that Jesse did not have David (lit. "Beloved") present for Samuel's inspection since he, too, was one of his sons.

According to verses 10 and 11, and 17:12, Jesse had eight sons. But according to 1 Chronicles 2:15, David was Jesse's seventh son. Perhaps one brother had already died; only seven sons are named in 1 Chronicles 2:13-15.² Another explanation follows:

"... the Samuel passages, here and 17:12, probably adopt the practice of epic writing, explaining the number of Jesse's sons as climactically 'eight' even though the actual number was seven, while the Chronicle passage follows the usual practice of listing the actual number, that is, seven, of sons by name."³

¹Wiersbe, p. 247.

²Ibid., p. 248; Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, pp. 174-75.

³Tsumura, p. 421.

The fact that Jesse did not have David present for Samuel's visit, as his other sons were, may suggest that Jesse did not think as highly of David as he did of his other sons (cf. Ps. 27:10, where David wrote: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me."). Was David a neglected or even an abused child whom his father viewed more as hired help than as a son? I tend to think not. Probably his comment in Psalm 27 was in reference to some particular occasion in which David's parents forsook him, rather than it being an indication of their lifelong disrespect of him. The fact that his name means "Beloved" seems to indicate that his parents loved him.

"It's remarkable, isn't it, how Jesse reveals two very common mistakes parents make. Number one, he didn't have an equal appreciation for all of his children. And number two, he failed to cultivate a mutual self-respect among them. Jesse saw his youngest as nothing more than the one who tended the sheep."¹

"The shepherd/flock image is a kind of *Leitmotif* for David from this point on. ... The book's last story shows David deeply concerned for the flock [2 Sam. 24:17]."²

A *leitmotif*, literally a leading or guiding theme, is a phrase or image that recurs with and represents a given character, situation, or emotion in a piece of literature or music.

David was physically attractive (v. 12; cf. Isa. 53:2). David is the only person with that name in the Bible. The Old Testament described two men as naturally red: Esau and David. The Hebrew word *'admoni*, translated "reddish," usually refers to the color of one's hair.³

"Some have interpreted this to mean that David was a redhead, but it may only mean that, unlike the average Semite, he was fair of skin and hair."⁴

It may also mean that David's skin was dark because of his exposure to the sun, since he served his father as a shepherd (cf. Song of Sol. 1:5-6). David

¹Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 20.

²S. D. Walters, "The Light and the Dark," in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, p. 574, n. 17.

³Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 223.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 249. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, p 169.

also had "beautiful eyes," which may suggest that he was a straightforward, honest person.

God did not choose David for his appearance, however, but because of God's sovereign authority and because of David's heart attitude. God's sovereign election to salvation does not depend on human initiative (Rom. 9:16), but His sovereign election to service sometimes does (1 Tim. 1:12).

"What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? Seems to me, it means that you are a person whose life is in harmony with the Lord. What is important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. When He says, 'Go to the right,' you go to the right. When He says, 'Stop that in your life,' you stop it. When He says, 'This is wrong and I want you to change,' you come to terms with it because you have a heart for God."¹

There were several purposes for anointing, so David and his family may not have known the significance of Samuel's anointing at this time.² Another view is that David and his family were the first, after Samuel, to learn that he would be the next king—or perhaps that he would become Samuel's successor, like Elisha became Elijah's successor.³ Eventually, all Israel would learn that David would become the next king: as he became the instrument through whom God blessed the nation. David became successful because God's Spirit came upon him, empowered him for service, and remained with him from then on (cf. 10:9; Matt. 3:16-17).

"The first mention of his [David's] name [in the Bible] in connection with the onrush of the spirit of the Lord [in v. 13] is significant and climactic. From now on, David's entire life would have a special relationship with the Lord's spirit (see 2 Sam. 23:2), while by contrast the spirit of the Lord would depart from Saul (v. 14)."⁴

¹Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 6.

²Tsumura, p. 423. On the significance of anointing, see my comments on 10:1.

³Young, p. 286.

⁴Tsumura, p. 424.

"The oldest extra-biblical attestation of David is in the ninth-century B.C. Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan."¹

Verse 13 records Samuel's departure for his home in Ramah. At this point in the book he becomes a minor figure who no longer plays an active role in the progress of events. His anointing of David was the climax and capstone of his career.

David's introduction to the royal court 16:14-23

Verses 13 and 14 are a hinge in the narrative. They identify a transition and the reason for the change in the writer's emphasis from Saul to David.

"Two key themes that emerge through this account are Yahweh's presence with David and how others are drawn to him."²

"In addition to being the middle chapter of 1 Samuel, chapter 16 is pivotal in another way as well: Its first half (vv. 1-13), ending with a statement concerning David's reception of the Spirit of God, describes David's anointing as ruler of Israel to replace Saul; its second half (vv. 14-23), beginning with a statement concerning Saul's loss of the Spirit and its replacement with an 'evil spirit' sent by God, describes David's arrival in the court of Saul. Thus the juxtaposition of vv. 13 and 14 delineates not only the transfer of the divine blessing and empowerment from Saul to David but also the beginning of the effective displacement of Saul by David as king of Israel. The transition at vv. 13-14 can thus be arguably defined as the literary, historical, and theological crux of 1 Samuel as a whole."³

Verse 14 describes God's relationship to Saul following the Lord's rejection of him. Yahweh had less and less contact with His faithless representative. His empowering Spirit left him without the divine enablement that he had once enjoyed (cf. Judg. 9:23; 16:20; 1 Kings 22:21-23; Ps. 51:11).

¹Ibid. Cf. pp. 25-26.

²Firth, p. 186.

³Youngblood, p. 682.

"When YHWH's Spirit came upon David his anointer [Samuel] left, leaving him in good hands. When YHWH's Spirit left Saul an evil spirit came upon him, leaving him in dire straits."¹

The evil spirit that Yahweh permitted to trouble Saul has been the subject of considerable interest among Bible students. It may have been a spirit of discontent (cf. Judg. 9:23), an angel from the LORD who afflicted him periodically (cf. 1 Kings 22:20-23), or a demon who indwelt or at least influenced him from then on.² In any case, this "spirit" was God's instrument of discipline for departing from Him. When people depart from God, their troubles really begin.

"His own gloomy reflections, the consciousness that he had not acted up to the character of an Israelitish king, the loss of his throne, and the extinction of his royal house, made him jealous, irritable, vindictive, and subject to fits of morbid melancholy."³

"Saul is afflicted by a form of insanity which manifested itself in sudden fits of terror, unreasoning rages and on occasions homicidal violence. The symptoms suggest manic depressive psychosis."⁴

"Saul's evil bent was by the permission and plan of God. We must realize that in the last analysis all penal consequences come from God, as the Author of the moral law and the one who always does what is right."⁵

The writer mentioned Saul's fits of terror, in addition to his deteriorating mental state, to explain: why Saul called for a musician, and how David gained access to the royal court. Saul evidently first met David in about the twenty-fifth year of his forty-year reign.⁶ It is tempting to suggest that

¹David M. Howard Jr., "The Transfer of Power From Saul to David in 1 Sam 16:13-14," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32:4 (1989):481.

²See Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 149; Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 224; Gaebelein, 1:2:163.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 217.

⁴S. Goldman, *Samuel*, p. 96.

⁵Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, p. 180.

⁶Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 216.

Saul's mental problems may have resulted from his spiritual rebellion, which is common, but the text does not state that connection outright.

Evidently some people already regarded David as "a valiant mighty man" and "a warrior" (v. 18), possibly because he had single-handedly defeated lions and bears (17:34-35). This initial description of David, in verse 18, finds confirmation in chapter 17, where David defeats Goliath. The writer evidently narrated the events of chapters 16 and 17 in non-chronological order. Saul's young servant also described David as "a skillful musician," "skillful in speech," and "a handsome man" (v. 18), all of which would have made David an acceptable aide to Saul. Most important, people had observed that the LORD was with David (v. 18; cf. 17:50-54).¹

The fact that Jesse could provide a donkey suggests that he was fairly prosperous, since this is how the more wealthy classes traveled (v. 20). Yet David's family was not outstanding in Israel (cf. 18:18).

Initially, Saul loved David greatly, as Jonathan did (cf. 18:1, 3; 20:17). However, Saul's attitude would change. A king appointed his armor-bearer to that position because of his courage, his ability to handle weapons, and his ability to get along with the king. David was probably a teenager at this time, since he was 30 when he began to reign (2 Sam. 5:4). He was not Saul's bodyguard. He just helped the king handle his armor. Whatever kind of spirit afflicted Saul, David's sweet music reduced its ill effects. Saul was becoming dependent on the one who would replace him.

God was elevating David from the ranks of a shepherd of sheep (v. 11) to become the shepherd of His people, and David's musical ability (v. 18) enabled him to lead the Israelites in the worship of Yahweh later.

"This story of how David first met Saul and how he came to the royal court makes two points. The first is that David did not engineer it. David was no ruthlessly ambitious man, determined to rise up the social ladder—any more than Saul himself had been (cp. chapter 9). David's hands were clean. The second point is that God overruled to bring David to court, through the sheer chance (as it seemed) that one of Saul's courtiers knew something about him and brought him to Saul's attention [cf. Joseph]. So it was God, not David, who was

¹Walters, pp. 570-71; Tsumura, p. 430; and Gordon, p. 160, identified the LORD being with David as another *leitmotif* for David (cf. 17:37; 18:12, 14, 28; 2 Sam. 5:10).

responsible for the young man's first steps towards the throne."¹

Verse 21 states that David came into Saul's presence, stood before him, Saul loved him greatly, and David became Saul's armor bearer. This description suggests that Saul knew David well. Yet in 17:55-56, Saul referred to David as "this youth." He seems not to have known David well at all; he did not know whose son David was. This is a strong indication that probably the events of chapter 17 took place before those in 16:14-23.² Another solution to this problem may be that the writer added verse 21 at this point in the narrative because it fits well with his description of David's early service in Saul's court. A third possibility is that these two passages should indeed be understood as in chronological sequence, and that after what we read here, David fell out of favor with Saul, who then forgot about him. This seems unlikely to me.

2. The reason for God's selection of David ch. 17

The exciting story of David and Goliath illustrates what it was that God saw in David's heart that led Him to choose David for the position of king.³ It also shows how and why others in Israel began to notice David. David fought the LORD's battles, as Samuel did (ch. 7). He also did so as Saul, God's previously anointed king, had done (chs. 10—11, 14—15).

Saul's defeat of the Ammonites (11:1-11) followed Saul's anointing (10:1). Similarly David's defeat of the Philistines (ch. 17) follows the record of his anointing (16:13). Both victories demonstrate God's blessing on His newly anointed leaders.⁴

The Philistine challenge 17:1-11

The Elah ("Oak" or "Mighty One") Valley is an S-shaped valley just south of the Sorek Valley, where Samson earlier lived. It runs east and west parallel to it. Socoh stood to the east and Azekah to the west. Some authorities

¹David Payne, p. 85.

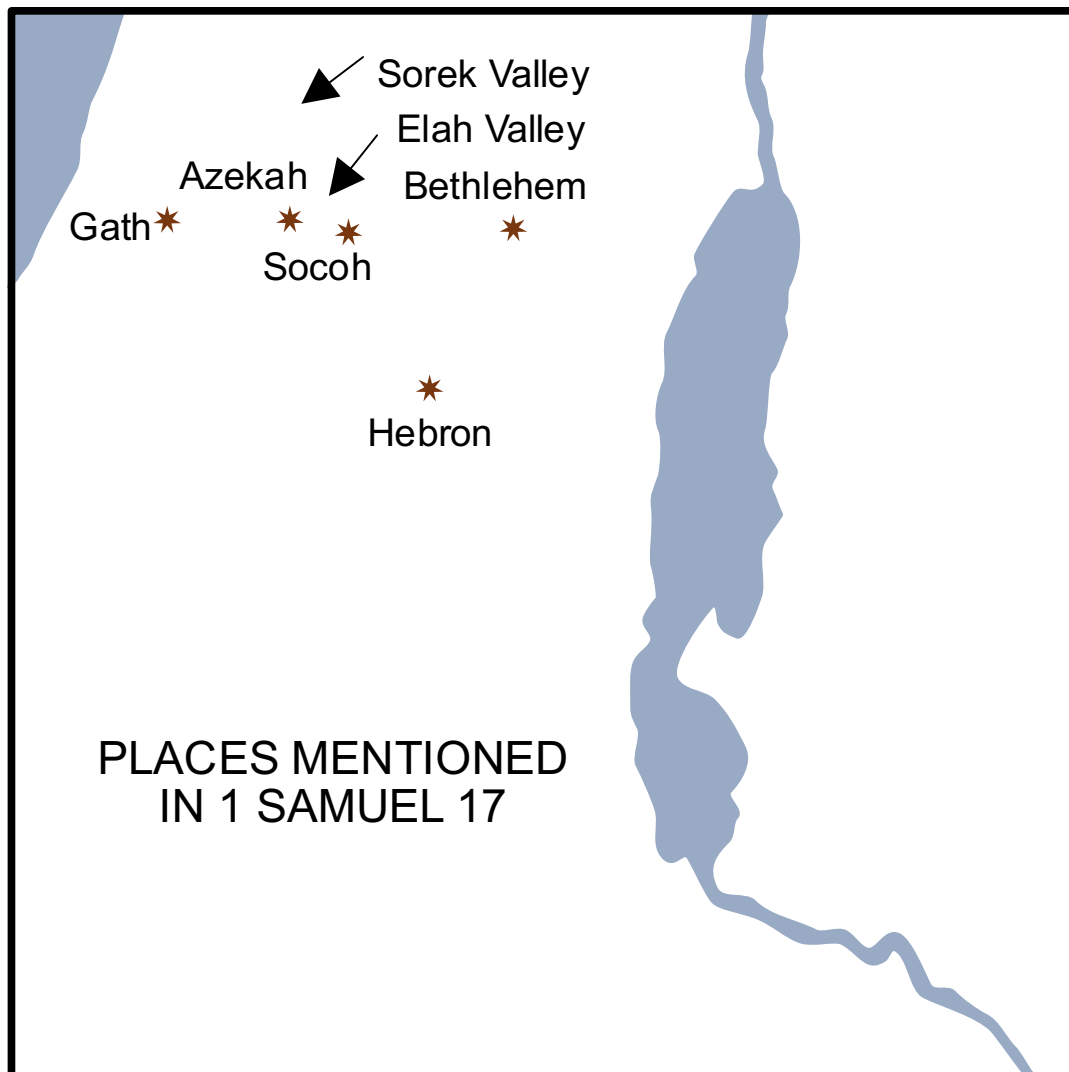
²Firth, pp. 180, 186.

³See Abraham Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What is the Author *Doing* with What He is *Saying*?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:3 (September 2015):487-506.

⁴For a brief discussion of the problem of the shorter Septuagint version of chapters 17 and 18, see *The NET2 Bible* note on 1 Sam. 17:1.

believe Ephes-dammim stood west of Socoh and south of Azekah, but its location is debated. Gath was 7 miles to the west and was the closest Philistine town.

"Set against this geographical background, the goal of this strategically important battle was certainly to secure the Valley of Elah, the natural point of entry from the Philistine homeland into the hill country of the Saulide kingdom. The battle was thus crucial."¹



¹Tsumura, p. 437.

"That Saul now came to meet the Philistines, even at the west end of the Elah Valley—and so before the enemy could penetrate Israelite country very far—shows that he had not given up in his rule just because he had been rejected. As far as he was concerned, apparently, he was still king and he was going to carry on as though nothing had changed."¹

Goliath was apparently 9 feet 9 inches tall. The huge size of his weapons supports this conclusion. Another view is that he was 6 feet 9 inches tall.² He was probably a descendant of the Anakim who had moved to Philistia after Joshua drove them out of Hebron (Josh. 11:21-22). Five thousand shekels' weight equals 125 pounds (v. 5). His "saber" (v. 6; Heb. *kidon*) may have been a scimitar (a short sword with a curved blade that broadens toward the point; cf. v. 45).³ Goliath's spearhead weighed 15 pounds (v. 7), about the weight of a standard shot-put. This is an unusually long description of an individual for the Old Testament. The writer evidently wanted to impress Goliath's awesome power and apparent invulnerability on the readers so we would appreciate David's great courage and faith. Saul was taller than any of the Israelites (9:2), but he met his match in Goliath.

Later, we read that "Elhanan ... the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite" (2 Sam. 21:19; cf. 1 Chron. 20:5). One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that Goliath was an old name for a giant-hero, applied to two different individuals.⁴

The Philistines proposed a battle in which two representative champions, from Israel and Philistia, would duel it out, a not uncommon method of limiting war in the ancient world (cf. 2 Sam. 2).⁵ However, the Israelites

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 151.

²Josephus, 7:9:1. See the note on verse 4 in *The NET2 Bible*; J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:4 (December 2005):701-14; Clyde E. Billington, "Goliath and the Exodus Giants: How Tall Were They?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):489-508; J. Daniel Hays, "The Height of Goliath: A Response to Clyde Billington," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):509-16; Firth, p. 196.

³*Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴Tsumura, p. 440.

⁵Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "A Hittite Analogue to the David and Goliath Contest of Champions?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968):220. See also George I. Mavrodes, "David, Goliath, and Limited War," *Reformed Journal* 33:8 (1983):6-8.

had no one who could compete with Goliath physically. That was the only dimension to the conflict that Saul and his generals saw. Since Saul was the tallest Israelite and the king, he was the natural choice for an opponent. However, as earlier (14:1-2), Saul was staying in the background when he should have been leading the people.

The reason for David's presence at the battle 17:12-25

At this time in his life David was assisting Saul as his armor-bearer when he was not tending his father's sheep (v. 15). Moses, too, had been tending sheep before God called him to shepherd His people Israel (Exod. 3:1). The site of battle was 15 miles due west of David's hometown, Bethlehem. The Old Testament writers sometimes used Ephratah (v. 12), an older name for Bethlehem, to distinguish the Bethlehem in Judah from the one in Zebulun (cf. Mic. 5:2). David journeyed to the battle site to bring food (including cheeseburgers? v. 18) to his brothers and their fellow soldiers, and to collect news to bring back to his father. Compare the similar events in young Joseph's life, who was also anointed in the midst of his brothers, and then went on an errand to find his brothers, only to experience a life-changing encounter. Little did Jesse expect that the news David would bring back home was that he had slain Goliath and that the Israelites had routed the Philistines. The battle had been a standoff for 40 days (v. 16). The number 40 often represents a period of testing in the Bible (cf. the Israelites' testing in the wilderness for 40 years, Jesus' testing for 40 days, etc.). This was another test for Israel. Would the nation trust in the arm of the flesh or in God?

Part of the reward for defeating Goliath, that Saul had promised, was that the victor's family would be tax free in Israel (v. 25).¹ The giving of the leader's daughter in marriage to a valiant warrior was not without precedent in Israel (cf. Caleb's challenge in Josh. 15:16).

David's interest in God's reputation 17:26-30

David seems to have considered himself capable of defeating Goliath from the first time he heard of Goliath's insults to Yahweh. The fact that he referred to Yahweh as the living God (v. 26) shows David's belief that Yahweh was still the same Person who could defeat present enemies as He had done in the past. His was the simple faith of a child. He had apparently

¹See McCarter, p. 304; and Shemaryahu Talmon, *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies*, pp. 65-66.

heard about God's promises to Moses and Joshua, that if the Israelites would attack their enemies, God would defeat them (Deut. 31:1-8; Josh. 1:1-9). Faith in God always rests on a word from God in Scripture. Most of the Israelites took Goliath's challenge as defying Israel (v. 25), but David interpreted it as defying the living God, the only true God (v. 26). Here David's heart for God begins to manifest itself (cf. 16:7).

"Eliab [lit. "My God Is Father"] sought for the splinter in his brother's eye, and was not aware of the beam in his own. The very things with which he charged his brother—presumption and wickedness of heart—were most apparent in his scornful reproof."¹

"Eliab's anger is the anger of a man who feels small because of the Israelite army's inability to deal with Goliath, and he particularly resents looking small in the eyes of his young brother [whom Samuel had anointed king-elect in his presence instead of himself]."²

"Whenever you step out by faith to fight the enemy, there's always somebody around to discourage you, and often it begins in your own home."³

David continued to inquire about the prize for slaying Goliath, probably to make sure he understood what he would risk his life to obtain. Some commentators have seen an indication that David was ambitious and interested in material gain in his question.⁴

David's qualifications to fight Goliath 17:31-40

When David volunteered to be Israel's champion, Saul scoffed at him because he evaluated David's chances for success solely in physical terms—as usual. Saul here resembles the 10 spies who saw the giants in the land and concluded that victory was impossible (Num. 13:28-29). The Hebrew word *na'ar* translated "youth" (v. 33) usually describes an older teenager (cf. 3:1).

¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 181.

²Gordon, p. 156.

³Wiersbe, p. 252.

⁴See Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 127.

"The opposite of the fear of the Lord is the fear of man. No greater contrast of these opposing fears could be presented than when David confronted Goliath. Saul and his men feared Goliath the man, but David by virtue of his fear of Yahweh did not."¹

David responded that if experience was the criterion Saul wanted to use, he had already defeated two formidable beasts (v. 34). (Josephus wrote that David told Saul, "I took him [the lion] by the tail, and dashed him against the ground."²) However, David's real confidence lay in the fact that Goliath had set himself against the living God (v. 36). David viewed Goliath as just another predator that was threatening the safety of God's flock, Israel, and the reputation of Israel's God.³ He gave credit to God for allowing him to kill the lion and the bear (v. 37). The same faith in Yahweh had inspired Jonathan's deed of valor (14:6). Saul again showed that he trusted in material things for success by arming David as he did (v. 38). Gordon wrote that Saul tried to turn David into an armadillo, the animal whose body is covered with bony plates.⁴ David preferred the simple weapon that he could handle best: his sling (v. 40).

"Nothing comes more naturally to people than trying to get someone to fight our battles the way we would were we fighting them."⁵

"Let's not try to be something we are not, or try to do something we are really not called to do. If God has called you to use a slingshot, friend, don't try to use a sword. If God has called you to speak, then speak. If God has called you to do something else, well, do that. If God has called you to sing, sing. But if He has not called you to sing, for goodness sake, don't do it. Too many people are trying to use a sword when the slingshot is really more their size."⁶

¹Homer Heater Jr., "Young David and the Practice of Wisdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 53.

²Josephus, 6:9:3.

³See T. A. Boogaart, "History and Drama in the Story of David and Goliath," *Reformed Review* 38 (1985):209.

⁴Gordon, p. 157.

⁵Chafin, p. 145.

⁶McGee, 2:157.

Some students of this passage have suggested that David chose five stones because Goliath had four brothers (cf. 2 Sam. 21:16-22), and he wanted to be ready to attack them too. However there is no indication in the text that David had any concern for them or even that they were present at this battle. He probably chose five stones simply so he would have some in reserve if his first shot missed its mark.

The sling David used was not the toy catapult with which children play, namely, a slingshot. It was an ancient offensive weapon that shepherds also used to control their sheep. Shepherds usually made a sling out of a long, thin strip of leather and formed a pouch in its middle. Talented slingers could propel small objects hundreds of feet at very high speeds with great accuracy (cf. Judg. 20:16).¹ Pictures of slings and stones from this time show the stones typically being from two to three inches in diameter.² Probably David's stones were about the size of a modern baseball or even larger. David beat Goliath, not with the weapons of a warrior, but with the tools of a shepherd. Critics of the Bible have tried to prove that David did not really kill Goliath as the Bible says, but there is no reason to doubt the truthfulness of this story.³

David's victory by faith 17:41-49

Goliath disdained David because the lad had no battle scars; he was not a warrior at all but simply a fresh-faced boy (v. 42).⁴ Goliath assumed that he would win because his physical power and armaments were superior. He trusted in his own abilities and his weapons. As often happens, pride preceded a fall (Prov. 16:18).

"But the adversary [Goliath] seeing him [David] come in such a manner, disdained him, and jested upon him, as if he had not such weapons with him as were usual when one man fights against another, but such as are used in driving away and avoiding of dogs; and said, 'Dost thou take me not for a man,

¹ *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Armor, Arms," pp. 89-93.

² See Ovid R. Sellers, "Sling Stones in Biblical Times," *Biblical Archaeologist* 2:4 (1939):41-42, 44; Davis, in *A History ...*, pp. 226-27.

³ See Norvelle Wallace Sharpe, "David, Elhanan, and the Literary Digest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 86 (July 1929):319-26.

⁴ See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Cracks in the Foundation: Ominous Signs in the David Narrative," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:686 (April-June 2015):154-76.

but a dog?' To which he [David] replied, 'No, not for a dog, but for a creature worse than a dog.'"¹

According to G. Earnest Wright: "The dog appears some 40 times in the Bible, mainly as a scavenger; the cat but once."²

Verses 45-47 give the clearest expression to David's faith in Yahweh. He viewed Yahweh as the commander of Israel's armies, a view of God that Saul never accepted but which made the difference between Saul's failure and David's success as the LORD's anointed (v. 45). He also saw God as the real deliverer of Israel (v. 46). Furthermore, David was jealous for the reputation of God (v. 47), not his own glory, which so preoccupied Saul. His faith must have rested on God's promises concerning victory against the enemies of God's people for their confidence in Him and their obedience to His word (Gen. 12:3; Deut. 31:1-8; Josh. 1:1-9).

"David has grasped the special nature of Israel's role before the nations in a way that Saul never does—Israel exists as a witness to the nations of the reality of Yahweh."³

"Intimidation. That's our MAJOR battle when we face giants. When they intimidate us, we get tongue-tied. Our thoughts get confused. We forget how to pray. We focus on the odds against us. We forget whom we represent, and we stand there with our knees knocking. I wonder what God must think, when all the while He has promised us, 'My power is available. There's no one on this earth greater. *You trust Me.*' ...

"David lived by a very simple principle: *nothing to prove, nothing to lose*. He didn't try to impress anybody in the army of Israel. He didn't try to impress his brothers. He didn't even try to impress God. He just ran to meet Goliath."⁴

¹Josephus, 6:9:4.

²G. Earnest Wright, "In the Days of Israel's Glory," in *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, p. 242.

³Firth, p. 200.

⁴Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 46.

The results of David's victory 17:50-58

God used a humble weapon to give His people a great victory in response to one person's faith.¹ This is another instance of God bringing blessing to and through a person who committed himself to simply believing and obeying God's Word (cf. 14:1). Stoning was the penalty for blasphemy in Israel (Lev. 24:16; Deut. 17:7). Usually death by stoning required many large stones, but David executed this Philistine blasphemer with only one stone. God's unseen hand propelled and directed it. One small stone was all God needed to get what He wanted done.

The stone that hit Goliath in the forehead evidently only knocked him out. David then approached the fallen giant, slew him with his own sword, and cut off his head.² Verse 50 seems to be a summary of the whole encounter. Verses 49 and 51 apparently describe what happened blow by blow. By cutting off Goliath's head David completed the execution of the giant and demonstrated to everyone present that he really was dead. Cutting off a defeated enemy's head was very common in antiquity.³ Like the image of Dagon, that had previously fallen before the ark and had its head broken off (5:4), so Dagon's champion now suffered the same fate.

"David cuts off the head of Goliath with his own sword, like Him who by death destroyed him that had the power of death."⁴

The Israelites chased the fleeing Philistines back home to their towns. The towns mentioned stood to the north and northwest of the battlefield (v. 52). David took Goliath's head as a trophy of war to Jerusalem and put the giant's weapons in his own tent temporarily (v. 54). They became memorials of God's great deliverance on this occasion. It is unclear whether David took the giant's head to Jerusalem immediately, or if he took it there later when David captured Jerusalem and made it his capital. The latter explanation seems preferable. Jerusalem had been captured by the Judahites (Judg. 1:8), and then apparently retaken by the native Jebusites (Judg. 1:21). In David's day, the city was initially in the hands of the Jebusites, until David captured it (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-9). Goliath's sword

¹See idem, *Come before Winter*, "The Shadow of the Giant," pp. 147-48.

²Baldwin, p. 128; Ariella Deem, "'And the Stone Sank Into His Forehead': A Note on 1 Samuel xvii 49," *Vetus Testamentum* 28:3 (1978):350.

³Josephus mentioned this practice numerous times in his writings.

⁴Darby, 1:468.

eventually went to Nob near Jerusalem (21:1-9). The central sanctuary (tabernacle) may have stood there even at this time.

Saul needed to know the name of David's father to deliver the prize that he had promised to anyone who would defeat Goliath (v. 25). Perhaps he had never asked David about this before or had forgotten whose son he was. Saul's unstable mental condition may have affected his memory.¹ Since Saul was a very self-involved person, and Israel's king, it is unlikely that he had paid much attention to his minstrel-servant who also took care of his armor.²

"It is well known that adolescents sometimes change rapidly and drastically in a year or two, so it is altogether possible that David, though still a youth here, had matured considerably since he had last served Saul."³

Another explanation of Saul's strange ignorance (cf. 16:21) is that the events of chapter 17 may have happened chronologically before those of chapter 16.⁴

"... the text is not focused on chronological reporting but intends rather a dual topical introduction of David, who as a young man already manifested the gifts that would gain him renown as the sweet psalm-singer of Israel as well as the mighty warrior of the Lord."⁵

Another possibility is that Saul's words could have been an idiom for: "What is his background?" Saul may have been inquiring about the wealth and social position of David's father, and not about David.⁶ Probably the writer's description of David serving in Saul's court, in 16:21, is a general summary statement, and describes David's relationship to Saul following David's victory over Goliath (ch. 17), and Saul's bringing David into his court as a musician (16:14-20).

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 482.

² Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, p. 175.

³ Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 212. Cf. Jamieson, et al., p. 218.

⁴ W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:365.

⁵ Longman and Dillard, p. 23.

⁶ Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 228.

Perhaps the writer included this reference to David's family in the text because David's trust and obedience resulted in his family enjoying special blessings from God through Saul. Verses 55-58 focus on the question of whose son David was. This event proved that David was a true son of God who had the reputation and interests of his Father and his Father's people at heart (cf. John 8:29).

David emerges as superior to Saul as well as Goliath in this story. We have already seen that Yahweh was superior to Dagon (chs. 4—6). David's victory over Goliath was a major step toward Israel's throne for him. It was a turning point in his life. God did not base David's election for salvation on David's conduct. God chooses whom He will to save. However, God did choose David to serve as Israel's king because of David's conduct, which resulted from his devoted heart. God promotes the faithful to higher positions of service (cf. Luke 19:12-27).

"His victory that day in the valley of Elah made a national hero of him, as well as entitling him to the hand of the king's daughter in marriage; but it also evoked jealous feelings in Saul, thus indirectly setting in motion the events which fill the rest of 1 Samuel."¹

In applying this story, I believe it is legitimate to see Goliath as representing the many enemies that frustrate individual believers as we seek to live for God. However, I believe primarily the application deals with defeating those enemies bent on defeating and destroying God's people *en masse*. Contemporary movements designed to discredit God and remove His followers from a land are what Goliath personifies.

We remember too that a great son of David arose who defeated another Goliath in His day, namely, Jesus Christ. While Satan is not yet dead, Jesus Christ has felled him. He has won a great victory over this enemy, who was behind Goliath, and is behind all the enemies of God and His people.

3. The results of God's selection of David 18:1—19:17

Earlier the writer narrated Saul's anointing, military success, and the popular reaction to him (chs. 10—11). Now he followed the same pattern by recording David's anointing, military success, and the popular reaction

¹Gordon, p. 153.

to him (16:1—19:17). The popular reaction to Saul was fairly simple: most of the people supported him, though a few opposed him (11:12-15). The popular reaction to David was much more complex and significant (18:1—19:17). In chapter 18, the writer emphasized the love and hatred toward David that were growing as a result of David's increasing popularity.¹

"This section's [chapter 18's] larger goal is to show the nature of David's life at court and how Saul begins to seek David's death."²

Jonathan's love for David 18:1-5

We have already seen that Jonathan was a man of faith and courage (14:1-15). Jonathan found a soul brother in David: a man who committed himself to trusting and obeying God as he did. This common purpose on the deepest level of life is what accounts for the love Jonathan and David shared for one another (v. 1). Jonathan loved David as he loved himself (vv. 1, 3; cf. Lev. 19:18). He loved David, and became loyal to him, as he should have, since David had committed himself to glorifying God and fulfilling His will—even at the expense of David's personal safety.

Some homosexuals have tried to use the writer's statements of Jonathan's love for David as support that their lifestyle has good biblical precedent.³ However the Hebrew word *'ahab*, translated "love" here, nowhere else describes homosexual desire or activity. Rather, when homosexual relations are in view, the Holy Spirit used the word *yada*, translated "know" in the sense of "have sex with" (cf. Gen. 19:5; Judg. 19:22).

It appears from the first part of verse 1, and verse 6a, that the events of chapter 18 happened immediately after those in chapter 17. However, since chapter 17 evidently precedes 16:14-23 chronologically, as argued above, it seems more likely that they happened after both episodes—at an unspecified time "when he [David] had finished speaking to Saul." Firth argued that the reference to "the Philistine," in verse 6, should be

¹Tsumura, p. 471.

²Firth, p. 206.

³E.g., Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*, pp. 20, 26-28, 31-39.

understood as a generic reference to Philistines (plural), not as a reference to David's killing of Goliath.¹

Saul responded to Jonathan's commitment to David, and presumably his respect for David's bravery, by keeping David with him even more than the king had done previously (v. 2; cf. 14:52). Evidently Jonathan realized David's gifts and God's will for David's life (cf. 23:17), and he humbly deferred to him (vv. 3-4).

The crown prince of Israel, Jonathan, gives us one of the classic examples of self-humbling for the glory of God and the welfare of His people that we have in all of Scripture (cf. Phil. 2:5-8). Jonathan's humility is all the more remarkable since chronological references in Samuel seem to indicate that Jonathan was about 30 years older than David.² His response to David's anointing was appropriate, and it contrasts sharply with Saul's response, which follows.

"The covenant of friendship referred to in verse 3 was a unilateral (binding on one party only) covenant in which Jonathan committed himself to David with complete disregard for self. The gift given by Jonathan served to ratify the covenant and honor David."³

"... when Jonathan took off his robe (a symbol of the Israelite kingdom; cf. 15:27-28 ...) and gave it to David (v. 4), he was in effect transferring his own status as heir apparent to him ..."⁴

"To receive any part of the dress which had been *worn* by a sovereign, or his eldest son and heir, is deemed, in the East, the *highest* honor which can be conferred on a subject (see on Esther 6:8)."⁵

"This is a virtual abdication by Jonathan, the crown prince."⁶

¹Firth, p. 209.

²See the chronological chart at the beginning of these notes, and Wiersbe, p. 256.

³Laney, p. 61.

⁴Youngblood, p. 707. Cf. Gunn, p. 80.

⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 218.

⁶Gordon, p. 159.

Jonathan's selfless action reflects his submission to Samuel's oracle that Saul would not have a continuing dynasty (13:13-14). Rather than trying to perpetuate Saul's dynasty, as Abner later tried to do (2 Sam. 2:8-9), godly Jonathan turned over the symbols of the crown prince to David.

"In our political world, where power plays such an important role, what would be thought of a prince who voluntarily renounced his throne in favor of a friend whose character and godly faith he admired?"¹

"Grudge not your neighbour his divinely ordained promotion or praise. But, rather, as you have opportunity, strengthen his hand in God."²

David's commitment to God resulted in his prospering. (Note the fertility motif.) David acted wisely, and so was successful (vv. 5, 14, 15). He was also successful because God was with him (vv. 12, 14; cf. 16:13). Not only did Jonathan love David, but all the people, including even Saul's servants—those people who were most loyal to the king—did too (v. 5). God blesses personally those who relate to Him properly. They also become channels of blessing to others (cf. 2:30; Gen. 12:2).

Saul may or may not have known at this time that Samuel had anointed David. His growing jealousy seems to have mounted as a result of David's increasing ability, success, and popularity with the people that stemmed from God's help (grace).

David's popularity with the people 18:6-9

These verses show how David had captured the affection of many Israelites by his victory over Goliath. Successful military heroes still do so today. Notwithstanding David's popularity, not everyone was ready to join David's fan club, as the text proceeds to clarify. He became a controversial figure in Israel. This is usually the public reaction to any leader God raises up. Leaders always receive some criticism as well as praise. If you take on leadership, you can count on some criticism as well as some praise.

Apparently Saul suspected that with such popularity David might attempt to overthrow his government. However, it was personal jealousy that took

¹Baldwin, p. 129.

²Whyte, 1:266.

root in Saul's mind and led to his downfall. The women's song did not intend to insult Saul. It is typical Hebrew parallelism in which both heroes received honor for slaying multitudes of Israel's enemies, albeit David received the higher commendation. While David's actions pleased the people (v. 5), they displeased the king (v. 8). The problem was Saul's desire to be popular with the people more than with God. Contrast humble John the Baptist, who wanted Jesus to receive more honor than himself (John 1:26-27; 3:30).

Saul's first direct attempt to kill David 18:10-16

The evil spirit from the LORD (cf. 16:4, whatever it was) afflicted Saul the very next day. David and Saul each had something in their hand. David held a harp with which he sought to help the king by playing soothing music. Saul held a spear with which he sought to harm his helper.

"Note the contrast between the harp ' [sic] *with* [lit., in] *his* [David's] *hand* and the spear *in Saul's hand*. This contrasting picture illustrates well the roles and characters of these two men."¹

The writer stated the reason Saul attempted to pin David to the wall clearly in verse 12: God was with David, and He had withdrawn from Saul (cf. v. 14).

Saul's unchecked jealousy bred the symptoms of paranoia; he began to think that his most loyal subject was his mortal enemy. Contrast Jonathan's implicit confidence in David. The difference was that Saul saw David as a threat to his security, whereas Jonathan saw him as the savior of God's people.²

"The writer H. G. Wells says of one of his strange characters, Mr. Polly, 'He was not so much a human being as a civil war.'³ I think that is a perfect description of Saul. He became a living civil war, miserable, possessed of an evil spirit, mentally breaking, a suspicious, angry, jealous man. As a result, he

¹Tsumura, p. 479. Cf. Henry, p. 309.

²For a very interesting comparison of Saul, David, and Absalom, that emphasizes David's submissive responses to his enemy's attacks, see Gene Edwards, *A Tale of Three Kings*.

³"H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, p. 5."

struck out against the most trusted and trustworthy servant in his camp—David."¹

Next, Saul sent David out from the palace, evidently so he would not be a constant aggravation to the king. Saul placed David, whom he had already appointed as his commander-in-chief (v. 5), over a large unit of soldiers in the field (v. 13). The Hebrew word *elep* can mean either 1,000 or a military unit. However, Saul's decision only gave David more exposure to the people and increased his popularity with them.² When Saul observed what was happening, he dreaded David even more (v. 15), but the people of both Israel and Judah loved him even more (v. 16; cf. vv. 1, 3, 20). The terms "Israel" and "Judah" reflect the division of the kingdom in later years and suggest that the writer wrote this account after that event. However, even during David's reign these names appear to have been characterizing the northern and southern parts of Israel.³ God was causing the wrath of Saul to praise Him, to contribute toward the fulfillment of His plans. Verses 13 through 16 set the growing approval of the people and the mounting disapproval of Saul in vivid contrast.

Saul's indirect attempts to kill David 18:17-30

Since he had been unsuccessful in murdering David himself, Saul also tried to get other people to kill him (cf. 2 Sam. 11:15). Saul had promised his daughter in marriage to Goliath's victor (17:25). In spite of this, Saul now added the condition that David also had to fight more battles for his king. Saul's offer of his daughter in marriage to David may have sprung from the assumption that, as the king's son-in-law, David would have to go into a great many battles with the Philistines and, hopefully, be killed.⁴ David did not aspire to marry the king's daughter, even though such a marriage would have advanced his career greatly (v. 18; cf. 16:18). He evidently dismissed this possibility since he could not afford the dowry (bridal price, v. 23). Saul went back on his promise to give David his older daughter, Merab, anyway (v. 19; cf. Judg. 14:20—15:2).

¹Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 60.

²See Timothy Yap, "The Function of the Women's Victory Song in 1 Samuel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:2 (June 2022):277-88.

³See Zechariah Kallai, "Judah and Israel—A Study in Israelite Historiography," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28:4 (1978):251-61.

⁴Firth, p. 211.

Michal, like her brother Jonathan, had come to love (affectionately, or possibly passionately) and to respect David (v. 20). It is a testimony to God's choice of David that two of Saul's children protected David while their father was trying to kill him. Evidently Saul meant that Michal would become a snare to David (v. 21), because as the son-in-law of the king David would have been in line for the throne. This would have made David an even more important target for the Philistines in battle. This time Saul tried to break down David's humble resistance to becoming his son-in-law by sending servants (courtiers, leading men of the kingdom) to persuade him. They assured David that his lack of wealth would not be a problem. Normally grooms paid their prospective fathers-in-law a price to compensate for the loss of their daughter (a dowry).¹ But Saul was willing to take 100 uncircumcised Philistine foreskins (Josephus wrote, "six hundred heads"²) instead.

"Such mutilations on the bodies of their slain enemies were commonly practised [*sic*] in ancient war, and the number told indicated the glory of the victory."³

Saul probably thought that David would respond to the challenge and perhaps die in his encounter with the Philistines. Saul used Michal as the bait to lure David into what he thought would be a fatal encounter with the Philistines. We see a repetition of this attempt to get rid of an unwanted soldier in David's decision to send Uriah to the most dangerous place during a battle with the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:14-17). David was successful, unfortunately; Saul was unsuccessful, fortunately.

God protected David, and he was able to provide the king with twice as many foreskins as Saul had specified (v. 27). David's accomplishment was similar to scalping practices in the Native American wars in the United States. This time Saul gave David his daughter.⁴ Saul saw in these events evidence that Yahweh's blessing was with David (v. 28), and this made him even more fearful of him (v. 29). Ironically, Saul from then on became David's enemy continually (v. 29), even though David had become his son-

¹See Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):244.

²Josephus, 6:10:2 and 3, 6:11:2, and 7:1:4.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 219.

⁴For a study of four important women in David's life, see Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (July 1982):69-85.

in-law, as well as his faithful commander-in-chief and his effective field general. By setting himself against David, Saul was setting himself against God, since David was the LORD's anointed (cf. Gen. 12:3).

"Saul's playing the part of a latter-day Laban (*cf.* Gn. 29:15-30) has rebounded upon himself, for now a second member of his own family has made her special contribution to the theme 'all Israel and Judah loved David' (v. 16)."¹

David's behavior and wisdom in battle, guided and provided by God's Spirit, caused him to become increasingly effective and appreciated in Israel (v. 30). David had regarded himself as lightly esteemed (v. 23), but God made him highly esteemed (v. 30; cf. 9:2).

"Three themes interweave themselves through this chapter: Saul's fear of David manifesting itself in three attempts on his life, the people's love for David (including members of Saul's family), and Yahweh's presence with David."²

Throughout this chapter the writer balanced statements that credit God for David's successes (vv. 12, 14, 28) with others that credit David for them (vv. 5, 14, 15, 30). Both reasons were true. God's choice of David and David's choice of God worked together to make him successful. The opposite was also true of Saul. The LORD had forsaken Saul, but Saul had also forsaken the LORD, and the result was tragedy.

This chapter illustrates the fact that the godly often suffer through no fault of their own. It shows too that God causes even the worst intentions of the ungodly to strengthen the godly (cf. Ps. 7:12-16; Rom. 8:28). We see here that the selfishness of the ungodly can produce irrational behavior (e.g., paranoia, v. 12, and schizophrenia, vv. 11, 17), and it leads to their ruin. I am not implying that this is the only cause of these mental problems. If we allow jealousy to take root in our hearts, it will devour us like a cancer. We should desire God's glory, as Jonathan did, rather than our own glory, as Saul did.

¹Gordon, p. 162.

²Firth, p. 212.

Jonathan's attempt to protect David 19:1-7

Saul now abandoned pretense (18:22) and ordered Jonathan and his soldiers to put David to death (cf. v. 11). He became more committed to his purpose to do away with David. Saul "went public" with his attacks against David feeling driven, like the Pharaoh of the plagues, to more desperate measures. This created a conflict of loyalties for Jonathan, who needed to honor his father and king, but who also loved David (cf. 18:1, 3). Jonathan chose to tell David what Saul's intentions were, but he also tried to honor his father by urging him not to kill David. He appealed to Saul logically and rationally. He reminded Saul that he was the king and that David was his servant, that he needed to be fair with David, and that it was in Saul's best interest to let David live (v. 4). He also reminded Saul that David was the LORD's instrument who had defeated Israel's enemies, and that Saul had rejoiced in his success. Moreover he appealed for justice since David's death was unwarranted (v. 5). Jonathan's words echo Saul's own statement when he had freed Jabesh-gilead earlier in his reign (11:12-15). Then Saul had generously refused to punish his detractors. Perhaps it was this memory that moved him to promise Jonathan that he would be merciful to David.

Jonathan's appeal was successful, at least temporarily, and resulted in Saul solemnly vowing not to kill David (v. 6)—which vow he broke shortly (v. 10). Later Jonathan was not as successful (20:28-29). Nevertheless this time his appeal resulted in David's restoration to the court and his continuing ministry to the king (v. 7).

David's continuing success and Saul's renewed jealousy 19:8-10

This section records Saul's fourth attempt to kill David. The writer set his account of these attempts in chiastic form:

- A Saul directly tried to kill David. 18:10-16
- B Saul indirectly tried using the Philistines. 18:17-20
- B' Saul indirectly tried using Jonathan and Saul's men. 19:1-7
- A' Saul directly tried to kill David. 19:8-10

This literary structure emphasizes how thoroughly Saul wanted to do away with his rival. Not only did those who desired the best for God love David, but those who desired the best for themselves hated him.

This is the third reference to an evil spirit afflicting Saul (cf. 16:14; 18:10). This influence overcame Saul's good intentions and resulted in his breaking his vow to God (v. 6). Now David "fled and escaped." This phrase occurs three times in this chapter (vv. 10, 12, 18), and it contrasts with David serving in Saul's presence (v. 7). From now on David was no longer able to stay in Saul's presence, but he had to flee and escape, seeking refuge from the king wherever he could find it. David's days as a fugitive (living beyond the king's reach), which began here, would continue until Saul died.

David's experience is typical of that of all people who choose to commit themselves to following God faithfully. Because God blesses them and makes them a blessing to others, many people appreciate them. However, others who want those blessings for themselves, but are not willing to do what is necessary to get them, despise them.

Michal's attempt to protect David 19:11-17

God's preservation of His anointed servant David stands out in this section, as it does in the first one in this chapter (vv. 1-7). In both cases it was, ironically, one of Saul's own children who came to David's rescue. Jonathan protected David at the beginning of this section (18:1-5), and Michal did so at its end (19:11-17). These acts of devotion bracket the chiasm noted above.

Saul reactivated his mission of putting David to death, this time by using Saul's servants (cf. v. 1). As Jonathan had done (v. 2), Michal told David what Saul was planning (v. 11). Then she aided his escape, first by helping him flee from a window (cf. Acts 9:24-25), and then by fashioning a dummy in his bed and concocting a story that he was sick. The "household idol" (Heb. *teraphim*) was usually a small image three or four inches high that many people carried on their persons or set up in their homes as good luck charms. Archaeologists have found many such images in Canaan. Evidently Michal intended the presence of this image to convince Saul's servants that David was seriously ill. Some interpreters believe the *teraphim* image was quite large and was in the bed.¹

¹E.g., Tsumura, p. 494; Wiersbe, p. 259; the note on verse 16 in *The NET2 Bible*.

"Since neither the true meaning of the word 'teraphim' nor the expression translated 'pillow of goats' hair' in the Authorized Version is clear, there is no reason to suppose that any cult object is referred to."¹

"Michal's ruse was probably effected by piling clothing, carpets, or the like on David's bed and covering it with a garment, allowing only the goats' hair [cf. Gen. 27:15-16] at the head to show."²

The account of Michal's plan to provide David enough time to escape portrays her as a woman who had not committed herself completely to God. Was the household idol hers or David's? The text does not say, but other references to Michal and David elsewhere lead me to conclude that it was hers. The possessor of the household idols was sometimes the heir of the family in the ancient Near East, so perhaps Michal kept this idol for inheritance purposes as well as for worship. The *teraphim* may have had some connection with childbearing (fertility; cf. Gen. 31:19, where barren Rachel kept *teraphim*).³ It is noteworthy that Rachel and Michal both were the second daughters of their fathers, both deceived their fathers with *teraphim*, and both proved to be disappointments to their husbands.

"Laban was powerless because he could not find the teraphim; Saul is powerless when he does ..."⁴

Both the Septuagint translation and Josephus translated the obscure Hebrew word *cebir* ("a quilt of goat's hair," v. 13) as "a goat's liver."

"... she ... put under the bed-clothes a goat's liver ... and made them [Saul's messengers] believe, by the leaping of the liver, which caused the bed-clothes to move also, that David breathed like one that was asthmatic."⁵

¹Albright, *Archaeology and ...*, p. 114.

²Youngblood, p. 716. Cf. Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 231.

³On the disputed significance of possessing the family idols, see Stuart A. West, "The Nuzi Tablets," *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981):70; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 70; and Kenneth L. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, p. 135.

⁴Firth, p. 218.

⁵Josephus, 6:11:4.

Saul expected more loyalty from his daughter than he received. Jonathan had described David as Saul's servant (v. 4), but Saul now called him his enemy (v. 17). Michal seems to have considered her lie justifiable (cf. v. 11). Jonathan had not lied to Saul (vv. 4-5). Both Jonathan and Michal's words resulted in David's safety, temporarily, but Jonathan and Michal's characters contrast in what they said to their father and king.

"A recurring theme in the ensuing chase is that Saul is always too late."¹

Saul's daughter, as well as his son, were protecting David from death. God's care for David resulted in the breaking of strong loyalties. In the ancient world, a daughter's loyalty to her father normally remained strong even after marriage. God overcame what was natural to protect His anointed and faithful servant.

This incident provides the historical background of Psalm 59.

B. DAVID DRIVEN OUT BY SAUL 19:18—20:42

The previous section of text (16:1—19:17) gave evidence that God was preparing David to become king. This one (19:18—20:42) narrates the events that resulted in the rift that separated Saul and David. There were two events that were especially significant: God's overruling Saul's hostility against David at Ramah (19:18-24) and Jonathan's failure to heal the breach between Saul and David (ch. 20).

1. God's deliverance in Ramah 19:18-24

How natural it was for David to seek refuge with the faithful prophet Samuel, who resided less than an hour's walk from Saul's headquarters. Naioth (lit. "Dwellings") was evidently a compound within Ramah where Samuel headed a school of prophets (cf. 2 Kings 2:3, 5; 4:38).² God here rescued David, not by any human intermediary but directly by the overpowering influence of His Spirit.

¹Firth, p. 218.

²For extended notes on the schools of prophets, see Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 199-206, Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, ch. V: "The Schools of the Prophets," and Wood, *The Prophets ...*, pp. 164-66.

Prophesying involved praising the LORD (cf. 10:10-13; 1 Chron. 25:1-3). Saul's three groups of messengers, and even the king himself, ended up serving God rather than opposing Him. The Holy Spirit overrode the king's authority. In 2 Kings 1:9-16 King Ahaziah sent three groups of messengers to arrest Elisha, but the prophet called down fire from heaven and consumed the first two groups. The commander of the third group did not seek to oppose God's anointed prophet and received mercy. Saul's disrobing (v. 24) probably symbolized the loss of his regal dignity and status, as well as the loss of his personal dignity.¹ Such a person was not fit to be king.

"Saul could have worn his inner tunic and still be described as *naked* (see Isa. 20:2; Mic. 1:8)."²

This reference to Saul's prophesying (vv. 23-24), which happened near the place where he prophesied shortly after his anointing (10:12), became "an ironic comment on Saul's life story."³ Saul had begun his reign with great potential plus God's enabling Spirit, which resulted in his praising God (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1-3; 1 Cor. 12:3). Yet now he was almost a raving madman.

"These two events [of Saul prophesying] prove that a person can have a remarkable religious experience and yet have no change in character. ... Special religious manifestations aren't evidences that a person is even saved (Matt. 7:21-23)."⁴

This passage does not support the theory that the prophets became ecstatic when they prophesied.⁵ Neither do 18:10; 1 Kings 18:29; 22:10-12; 2 Kings 9:1-12; Jeremiah 29:26; Hosea 9:7; or any other passages.⁶ Saul drove himself to the brink of insanity by refusing to submit to God, who still exercised sovereign control over him despite the king's attempts to go his own way.

It is significant that this chapter closes with the repetition of the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (v. 24). This derogatory saying

¹Robert P. Gordon, "Saul's Meningitis According to Targum 1 Samuel XIX 24," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:1 (January 1987):39.

²Tsumura, p. 499.

³Baldwin, p. 134.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 260.

⁵See Tsumura, p. 497.

⁶See Wood, *The Prophets ...*, pp. 40-56, 92-93.

brackets the story of Saul's contacts with Samuel and with the Holy Spirit (cf. 10:11). It reminds the reader that Saul had the potential to be a great king, because of Samuel and the Spirit's resources that were available to him. The narrative that the two occurrences of this saying enclose explains Saul's failure. He lost the opportunity to found a dynasty, he lost his own throne, and he lost his personal dignity because he refused to act like a prophet. That is, he refused to put the honor, glory, and will of God before his personal ambitions and pride.

"... To question the genuineness of Saul's prophetic behavior was to question his legitimacy as king of Israel ..."¹

Saul lost the privilege of reigning, he became a vessel unto dishonor, he created problems for others, and he eventually destroyed himself. Another Saul, Saul of Tarsus, perhaps learning from the experiences of Saul of Gibeah—who may have been his namesake—feared the possibility that he might similarly disqualify himself (1 Cor. 9:27). We must not confuse disqualification from service with loss of salvation. The former is possible for every believer, but the latter is not (cf. Rom. 8:31-39).

The three instances of David's deliverance in this chapter show how God preserved His anointed. He used both natural and supernatural means to do so. Since God has anointed Christians with His Spirit (1 John 2:20), this record of how God preserves His anointed should be an encouragement to us.

2. Jonathan's advocacy for David ch. 20

This chapter records Jonathan's last attempt to reconcile Saul to David. The emphasis is on the hardening of Saul's heart that God allowed since the king refused to genuinely repent (cf. the Pharaoh of the Exodus).

David's concern for his own safety 20:1-11

David was wondering if he had done something wrong that had provoked Saul's hatred (v. 1). Walking with God is sometimes confusing. We need to learn, as David did, that, when we try to follow God faithfully, some people will oppose us simply because we want to do God's will. Their antagonism is not the result of our sinfulness but theirs (cf. 1 Cor. 3:19). Jonathan

¹Youngblood, p. 717.

assured David that he had done nothing wrong (cf. 14:45), but Jonathan did not understand the intensity of Saul's hatred for David (cf. 19:6). He was in a state of denial.

There are several oaths and strong affirmations in this chapter (vv. 3, 12, 13, 16, 17, 23, 42). The one that David made in verse 3 is very strong. He believed correctly that he was in mortal danger, and he tried to make Jonathan see this. Jonathan was open to anything David wanted to suggest to prove his point (v. 4).

The appearance of the new moon in the western sky introduced the new month that the Israelites celebrated with a sacrificial meal. They determined the appearance of the new moon by actual personal observation, not by astronomical calculation.¹ It was both a religious and a civil holiday (Num. 10:10; 28:11-15; Ps. 81:3; cf. 2 Kings 4:23). In certain months, the new moon festival lasted for two nights, because it could not be observed on the evening of the first day of the festival.²

David would normally have been present at the king's table since he was one of Saul's high-ranking military commanders. However, David evidently believed that Saul would try to kill him again if he ate with the king (cf. 18:11; 19:10, 11). Hiding in a field seems to be an extreme measure. Why could David not have gone home to Bethlehem or stayed with friends who would have kept his presence secret from Saul? Perhaps David trusted no one but Jonathan now.

Apparently David's family held a reunion on one of these holidays each year (v. 6; cf. 1:21; 2:19). David told a lie; he did not go to Bethlehem but hid in a field. At the beginning of his period of flight from Saul, David resorted to trickery as well as trust in Yahweh. As this trials wore on, he learned to trust God more completely, as we shall see. His trials purified his character, because he responded properly to them (cf. James 1).

David proposed his test (v. 7) to convince Jonathan that Saul really intended to kill David. The covenant to which David referred was the one he and Jonathan had previously made (18:3-4). David appealed to it and asked Jonathan to kill him himself if he must die, rather than allowing Saul to do it. David wanted to die at the hand of his friend rather than at the

¹Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 289.

²Tsumura, pp. 505, 525-26.

hand of his enemy. David had temporarily lost sight of God's promise that he would rule over Israel.

Jonathan refused to kill David but promised to tell him if Saul responded angrily, as David predicted he would (v. 9). Jonathan then suggested a plan by which he could communicate with David without revealing David's location (vv. 10-11).

Jonathan and David's long-range covenant 20:12-17

Jonathan appealed to the LORD in an oath, indicating the seriousness of the situation (vv. 12, 13). He prayed that God would be with David as He had been with Saul, namely, as Israel's king (v. 13). These verses indicate clearly that Jonathan believed David would someday be king and subdue his enemies, including Saul (vv. 13-15; cf. 13:14). He had come to appreciate Yahweh's faithfulness (Heb. *hesed*, v. 14), and now called on David to deal similarly with his descendants in the future. He secured a promise from David that when he reigned he would protect Jonathan's family. The Hebrew word *hesed*, translated "faithfulness" and "loyalty" (vv. 14, 15), is a covenant term of commitment (v. 16, 42; cf. Deut. 7:7-9).

Previously David and Jonathan had made a covenant that Jonathan would yield the throne to David and support him (18:3-4). Now David promised not to kill Jonathan's descendants after David became king. It was common in the ancient Near East for kings who began a new dynasty to kill all the descendants of the former king, in order to keep them from rising up and trying to reclaim the throne. Jonathan called on God to require an accounting for antagonism at the hands of David's enemies (v. 16). This was the second vow that David had made after the one in which he pledged his love for Jonathan personally (v. 17; cf. 18:3-4).

The plan for communicating Saul's intentions to David 20:18-23

Saul would miss David at his feast, not only because his seat would be vacant, but because warriors normally expressed their support for their king by eating with him at important meals (v. 18). David's absence would have raised a question in Saul's mind about David's commitment to him. The writer did not identify the exact place where David had previously hidden himself on some "eventful day" (i.e., the day after the new moon festival, v. 19). Evidently it was near the Ezel Stone, a site unknown today but well

known then. Probably Jonathan chose this place to communicate with David because it was convenient and secure, and was evidently near Gibeah.

The shooting of arrows was probably just a practical way to signal David. Jonathan reminded David of their agreement as they parted (v. 23; cf. Gen. 31:48-53).¹ If Jonathan had shot only one arrow, the boy might have guessed that it served as a signal, but by shooting three arrows, Jonathan led the boy to think that he was just practicing shooting.²

"Friendships are one of the most enriching of life's experiences: how poor is the man or woman who is friendless! Friends enrich life because they *give*, without counting the cost. Jonathan was a man who gave to David more than he received; and in doing so he showed how different he was from the typical king described in 8:11-17, whose sole function was to *take*. Life has its givers and its takers; Jonathan was supremely a giver—and David, though destined to become a king, persistently declined to take anything away from Saul. He patiently waited for God to give him the crown of Israel."³

Saul's anger over David's absence 20:24-34

Saul concluded at first that David had not come to the new moon sacrificial meal because he was unclean (cf. Lev. 7:20-21; 15:16). His continued absence, on the second day, required an explanation, which Saul looked to David's friend Jonathan to provide.

Saul hated David so much he could not bring himself to use his name (vv. 27, 31). "The son of ..." (v. 30) was a mild insult (cf. 10:11).⁴ By insulting Jonathan's mother, Saul was intensifying his insult (v. 30). *Today's English Version* translated Saul's epithet, "You bastard!" *The New Jerusalem Bible* rendered it, "You son of a rebellious slut!" The note in *The NET2 Bible* says, "You stupid son of a bitch!" Jonathan had chosen David as his friend to his own shame (v. 30) in the sense that, because he had made him his friend, rather than killing him, as Saul wanted him to do, David would take

¹For discussion of a minor textual problem in verse 23, see Emunah Finkelstein, "An Ignored Haplography in Samuel," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4:4 (October 1959):356-57.

²G. R. Driver, "Old Problems Re-examined," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1968):177; Tsumura, p. 514.

³David Payne, p. 106.

⁴Youngblood, p. 723.

Jonathan's place as the king of Israel. That would be a shame for Jonathan. Jonathan had chosen David to the shame of his mother's nakedness in that Jonathan's conception and birth were useless if David replaced him. Jonathan would fail to achieve the purpose for which he had been born, in Saul's way of thinking (v. 31). Saul perceived David as a threat to his continuing dynasty, not just to his personal rule. Clearly Saul was rejecting and opposing God's will that his reign and his dynasty would not endure. Saul said he would kill David so that David could not do what God had said he would do.

Jonathan's ambitions were not the same as Saul's. He wanted God's plans to succeed more than he wanted to become Israel's king. Therefore he interceded for David again (v. 32; cf. 19:4). Saul, exasperated by what he interpreted as Jonathan's selfless folly, tried to execute David's advocate as he had formerly tried to kill David himself (v. 33; cf. 18:11; 19:10). This brush with death finally convinced Jonathan that David had been right about Saul's intentions after all (cf. v. 3). It also convinced him to get out of the king's presence.

Jonathan departed in hot anger because of Saul's attitude toward David and because of Saul's attitude toward himself. Saul had said David would not allow Jonathan to rule, but Saul himself almost prevented that from happening by attacking the crown prince. Jonathan's departure from Saul's table symbolized his departure from his father's fellowship.

David's final departure from Gibeah 20:35-42

The next morning Jonathan proceeded to communicate Saul's intentions to David in the way they had previously planned. Jonathan probably used a very young boy as his arrow retriever so the lad would not ask embarrassing questions or figure out what was happening. God permitted David and Jonathan to say good-bye face to face. They had anticipated that such a parting might be impossible (cf. 20:22).

David gave proper respect to Jonathan as the king's son even though they were best friends (v. 41). Saul's rebellion against God's will had made their companionship impossible. They parted, reminding themselves of the commitments they had made to each other and to their descendants (v. 42; cf. vv. 16, 23; 2 Sam. 9). David and Jonathan decided not to see each other again for their mutual protection (but cf. 23:16-18).

This chapter reveals that both Saul and Jonathan realized that David was the LORD's anointed who would one day replace Saul. However, their responses to this inevitable situation were opposite, because their desires were opposite. Saul wanted to see his own plans fulfilled, but Jonathan wanted to see God's will done.

Jonathan ended up choosing David, his natural rival, in preference over Saul, his natural father. His sister Michal had made the same choice. David later kept his covenant with Jonathan (2 Sam. 9:1), showing that he was a covenant-keeping individual similar to Yahweh. This is another evidence that David was a man after God's own heart (13:14).

The main character in this pericope is Jonathan. His attitude to God's will contrasts positively with Saul's attitude. Rather than opposing God's will and His anointed, as Saul did, Jonathan humbled himself before God's will and supported the LORD's anointed, David. Jonathan faced a terrible tension since Saul's attitude divided Jonathan's loyalty. He solved this problem by putting God's will first. He submitted to the domestic authority of his father, and to the civil authority of his king, by obeying Saul, except when obedience to Saul conflicted with obedience to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

C. DAVID IN EXILE CHS. 21—31

In chapters 21—30 we see David's forces growing stronger and stronger while Saul's forces get weaker and weaker. This is a further demonstration of the fertility theme. However, these chapters also develop the motif of the proper response to Yahweh's anointed.

These chapters are highly instructive for us for two reasons. First, they help us see how the difficulties that God permitted David to experience refined his character and prepared him for the throne (cf. Heb. 12). Second, these chapters illustrate the sovereignty of God in working out His plans for both Saul and David. They help us see how God works and uses the choices people make to accomplish His will.

Interesting, too, are the parallels between David's experiences as the LORD's anointed and Jesus Christ's as the LORD's anointed. Rejection preceded acceptance, and suffering preceded reigning, in both cases. God blessed both of these servants personally, and they became a blessing to others because of their commitment to Yahweh and His Law.

"The true servant of God must willingly suffer affliction with the full assurance that God is performing His purposes. Positions of prominence and prestige are not to be sought and worked for. Rather, the leader who desires Christ's blessing must wait patiently on Him for advancement and promotion to opportunities of greater service."¹

Several of the Psalms have their backgrounds in these chapters (Ps. 18; 34; 52; 54; 56; 57; 63; 124; 138; 142; and possibly others).

1. David's initial movements chs. 21—22

"The two chapters comprise a literary unit of three sections arranged in chiasmic order. Chapters 21:1-9 and 22:6-23 are concerned with the priestly compound at Nob in Benjamin while the central section (21:10—22:5) summarizes David's flight to Gath in Philistia, Adullam in Judah, and Mizpah in Moab."²

David's flight to Nob 21:1-9

Nob stood one and one-half miles northeast of Jerusalem and two and one-half miles southeast of Gibeah. It stood on what is now called Mt. Scopus. There Ahimelech (lit. "My Brother Is King") served as high priest.

"*Ahimelech* was the brother of Ahijah, who had joined Saul as his spiritual adviser after Samuel withdrew his services (1 Sa. 14:3; *cf.* 22:9). For that reason David was unsure whether to trust Ahimelech, and decided to make up a plausible story to account for the fact that he was on his own."³

"David probably supposed, like many other persons, that a lie is quite excusable which is told for the sole purpose of saving the speaker's life. But what is essentially sinful, can never, from circumstances, change its immoral character; and David had to repent of this vice of lying (Ps. 119:29)."⁴

¹Tucker, p. 159.

²Youngblood, p. 727.

³Baldwin, p. 137.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 221.

Priestly activity, and evidently the tabernacle, were now at Nob (cf. 17:54).

"Since Ahimelech (otherwise known as Ahijah [or perhaps the brother of Ahijah]; cf. 1 Sam. 14:3; 22:9) was the great-grandson of Eli, it is reasonable to assume that either his father Ahitub or he himself had removed the tabernacle from Shiloh and installed it at Nob. One can only speculate as to why this site was selected. The ark, of course, still remained at Kiriath Jearim in the custody of the family of Abinadab."¹

It is significant that David's first place of refuge was among God's chosen representatives on earth: the priests. He wanted to get help from the LORD through them (cf. 22:10) as he had done in the past (22:15). Apparently Ahimelech was trembling because David was alone (cf. 16:4). Had Saul sent him to harm the priests (cf. 22:6-23), or was David in some kind of trouble? David was Saul's general, and as such he usually traveled with escorting soldiers.

According to verse 1, David was alone; no one was with him. But according to Matthew 12:3-4, Mark 2:26, and Luke 6:4, David had his men with him. Apparently David entered Nob and met Ahimelech alone, but his men were close by, at "a certain place" (v. 2). Then his men joined him, and they ate the consecrated bread together (vv. 4-6).

David appears to have lied to Ahimelech (v. 2). However, he may have been referring to Yahweh when he mentioned "the King" who had sent him (cf. 20:22; 21:8). Even so, he wanted Ahimelech to think that Saul had sent him. This was deception at best and a lie at worst, rooted ultimately in selfishness and lack of faith in God. David made some mistakes in his early years as a fugitive, but he handled himself better as time passed. During this time, God was training him for future service. David proceeded to explain that the reason he was alone was that he had sent his soldiers elsewhere (v. 2). He intended to summon them shortly, and had come to Nob, initially by himself, to obtain provisions, protection, and prayer (cf. 22:10).

Ahimelech gave David the showbread that the priests ate (Exod. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9). This was the bread that for a week lay on the table in the tabernacle. Each Sabbath the priests replaced this bread with fresh loaves.

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 215.

Ahimelech was careful that David's men were ritually clean, not having had sexual relations with women that day (v. 4; cf. Lev. 15:8; Exod. 19:14-15). David assured him that their bodies were clean ritually (v. 5). This made it permissible for them to eat the consecrated bread. Ahimelech correctly gave David the provisions he needed (v. 6).

Jesus said this was proper for David to have done, when His critics criticized His disciple for eating the heads of grain from a grainfield on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-4). The reason was that human life takes precedence over ceremonial law with God.¹ David was probably not at the point of starvation. Certainly the Lord's disciples were not. Nevertheless, meeting a human need should always trump the observance of a ritual used to worship God.

Christians acknowledge the same priority today. Suppose you pass a house that is on fire. You stop, run up to the front door, bang on the door, and ring the doorbell. You look in the window and see someone lying on the floor. You then kick in the door and drag the unconscious person outside to safety. Even though breaking into someone else's house is a criminal offense, the law will not prosecute you, since you saved that person's life.

The mention of Doeg, whose name may mean "Fearful," an Edomite who had risen high in Saul's government (v. 7), prepares the reader for his informing Saul about what happened at Nob, which comes later in the narrative (22:9-19). (Josephus called Doeg "by birth a Syrian ... one that kept the king's mules."²) Doeg may have been a proselyte, or an Israelite who had lived in Edom, or one of the captives that Saul had brought into Israel from Edom (cf. 14:47).³ Perhaps Doeg was "detained before the LORD" (v. 7) because he had come to the tabernacle to present an offering or to conduct some other business there.

Having previously requested provisions from Ahimelech (v. 3), David now asked for protection, namely, a sword (v. 8). Goliath's huge sword, which had initially rested in David's tent (17:54), was now in the tabernacle wrapped in a cloth with the priest's ephod, perhaps because it was considered to be a historic relic. David eagerly accepted it from Ahimelech, since there was "none like it" (v. 9)—it had no equal. It is interesting that David, and later Solomon, used the same expression to describe the LORD

¹See F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, p. 33.

²Josephus, 6:12:1, 4, and 6.

³Davis, in *A History ...*, pp. 235-36.

(2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:23). Though there was no better protection than Goliath's sword physically, the LORD was an even better protector spiritually. There is none like Him.

David's flight to Gath 21:10-15

David's next refuge also proved to be insecure. It is a mystery why he sought refuge with Goliath's sword in that giant's hometown. As Chuck Swindoll once said: David would have been as conspicuous in Gath as Dolly Parton in a convent. Evidently he thought he would be welcome in Gath since he was fleeing from Saul. Perhaps he went there since Achish was an enemy of Saul's, as David was. Gath was also the Philistine town closest to David's hometown: Bethlehem. Abimelech may have been the title of the king of Gath, who is called Achish in the superscription of Psalm 34, or Abimelech may be the Semitic form of the Philistine name Achish.¹

The people identified David at once and called him Israel's king (v. 11). This may have been a slight on his authority; they may have meant that he was only a local ruler (cf. Josh. 12:7). Alternatively, they may have heard of David's anointing as Israel's next king. In any case Achish's advisers viewed David's presence as a threat (v. 11; cf. 29:1-5).

Perhaps they felt like the American president might have felt if a high-ranking Russian general defected and sought asylum in the United States during the Cold War. The potential of his helpfulness against the enemy had to be weighed against the chance that he would prove disloyal, turn on his host, and do much damage.

David sensed his personal danger and pretended to be insane—to save his life. Evidently Achish dismissed him as a threat, concluding that David was mad and could be of no help to him or Saul (cf. 29:3, 6, 9; Ps. 34 title, where Achish is called Abimelech). Ancient Near Easterners typically regarded the insane as harbingers of evil and so avoided them. They felt it was bad luck to kill a madman.²

"... insanity was often believed in the ancient world to be an affliction of the gods, and it was customary to treat madmen

¹Ibid., p. 236.

²Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 219.

as taboo if not holy, people who should not be harmed in any way."¹

In both Nob and Gath, David resorted to deception to protect himself, and in each case some bad consequences resulted: Doeg killed the priests, and David had to abandon Gath. However, David also trusted in the LORD. He wrote Psalms 56 and 34 during and after his time in Gath, according to the titles of those psalms. They reveal that he was trusting God. His ultimate hope for provision and protection was not the priests, or Saul's enemies, but the LORD Himself. This faith undoubtedly explains the fact that God preserved him, and some good consequences came out of these experiences—especially that David survived them. David had two more encounters with Achish, both of which were beneficial for David. 1 Samuel 21 helps us see the mixture of right and wrong in David's actions, but David's psalms clarify the proper response that the godly should make when opposition assails them.

David's flight to Adullam 22:1-2

The town of Adullam (lit. "Refuge" or "Closed in Place") stood a mile or two south of the Elah Valley—where David had slain Goliath—and about 10 miles east-southeast of Gath. It was halfway between Gath and Bethlehem. There are many huge caves in the limestone hills in that area, several of which can accommodate over 400 people. Evidently David's family was no longer safe from Saul in Bethlehem, which was 10 miles east-northeast of Adullam. David composed Psalm 142 at this time.

"If Saul would attack his own family (20:33), there was no telling what he might do to David's."²

David now became the leader of a group of people who, for various reasons, had become discontented with Saul and his government and were passionate for change.

"The original Mafia. They all had one thing in common—a bad record. ... They were so tough they'd make Al Capone sleep with a night light. They were gross. Anybody who got near that

¹David Payne, p. 113. Cf. Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 216; Hans Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, p. 183.

²Gordon, *I & II Samuel ...*, p. 172.

gang stayed as quiet as a roomful of nuns. They had a quaint name for those who crossed their paths ... *victims*."¹

One cannot read verse 2 without reflecting on how needy people later sought, and now seek, refuge in David's greatest son: Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 11:28; John 7:37). This growing movement of support behind David led eventually to his coronation as king of all Israel.

David's flight to Moab 22:3-4

Moab was a reasonable place for David's parents to seek protection since David's great-grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess. Like the town of Gath, the country of Moab was one of Saul's enemies (cf. 14:47). The ruler of Moab would have been willing to support anyone who could weaken Saul.

The exact location of Mizpah (lit. "Watchtower") of Moab is unknown. David may have wanted to secure the support of the Moabites since he could use help from neighboring kingdoms, if Saul's antagonism led to full-scale war. The stronghold (v. 4) was probably another name for Mizpah, or another place close to it, in Moab.

David's flight to the forest of Hereth 22:5

Gad appears to have been a prophet who remained with David throughout his reign (cf. 2 Sam. 24:11). God provided another prophet through whom He communicated to the king-elect other than Samuel. The forest of Hereth was somewhere in the tribal territory of Judah, but its exact location is unknown.²

Saul's slaughter of the priests 22:6-23

The writer's attention focused next on Saul's activities. He used the literary device of focusing on David, then on Saul, then on David, etc. He used the same technique in chapters 1—3 with Samuel and Eli's sons, in order to contrast Samuel's goodness with the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas. The same purpose is in view in chapters 21—31 with David and Saul.

¹Swindoll, *Come before ...*, p. 145.

²On the alternate reading, "David ... had departed," (v. 6), see D. Winton Thomas, "A Note on *noda'* in I Samuel XXII. 6," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21:2 (October 1970):401-2.

Saul was aware that some in his army, apparently even some of his tribal kinsmen from Benjamin, had deserted to David (v. 7). By referring to his servants as Benjamites (lit. "Sons of Benjamin"), Saul revealed that he had a rather narrow power base.¹ Saul showed signs of paranoia when he claimed that Jonathan had encouraged David to ambush him (vv. 8, 13). There is no indication that Jonathan had done this. Doeg was obviously loyal to Saul (vv. 9-10), but he proved disloyal to Yahweh (vv. 18-19). This event is the historical background of Psalm 52.

Ahimelech appealed to Saul on David's behalf much like Jonathan had done earlier (vv. 14-15; cf. 17:4-5). Nevertheless this time Saul did not respond to reasonable persuasion (v. 16). Saul's disregard for Yahweh's will is obvious in his command to kill the priests—whom God had appointed to serve Him. This punishment was entirely too severe, since the crime Saul charged them with was simply failing to tell Saul where David was.

Saul's soldiers had too much respect for the priesthood to slay the anointed servants of the LORD (v. 17; cf. 14:41-46). Moreover they probably realized that Saul's order was irrational. Doeg was an Edomite, a foreigner who obviously had less respect for the Mosaic Law (cf. 21:7). He not only obeyed the king but went beyond Saul's command and slaughtered all the men, women, children, and animals in Nob (v. 19). The Mosaic Law prescribed that it was illegal to put children to death for the sins of their parents, which Doeg did here (v. 19; Deut. 24:16). Nonetheless Saul was also responsible (v. 21). Earlier Saul had failed to slay all the Amalekites at the LORD's command (15:9). Now he was slaying all the Nobites without divine authorization.²

"Saul treated Nob like some enemy city that had been put under the 'ban' (cf. 15:3)."³

"Saul is becoming a classical Near Eastern king, falling into the pattern against which Samuel warned (8:10-17)."⁴

The text says that Doeg killed 85 priests, but Josephus wrote that he killed "Ahimelech and all his family, who were in all three hundred and eighty

¹Firth, p. 241.

²Miscall, p. 136.

³Tsumura, p. 546.

⁴Firth, p. 243.

five."¹ The Septuagint also has 385. In another place, Josephus wrote that Saul slaughtered "three hundred priests and prophets" on this occasion, "as if he were endeavoring in some sort to render the temple [tabernacle] destitute both of priests and prophets ..."²

God preserved one of Eli's descendants, even though 85 other priests died. This man, Abiathar (v. 20), fled to David, so from then on the priesthood was with David rather than Saul. David acknowledged that his deception of Ahimelech was responsible for the slaughter of the priests (v. 22; cf. 21:2). As partial atonement for his act David became the protector of the priesthood. The king-elect and the priest-elect now became fellow fugitives from Saul. Psalm 52 provides insight into how David felt during this incident.

When people refuse to submit to God's authority over them, they begin to deteriorate: spiritually, socially, psychologically, and physically (Rom. 6:23). Eli and Saul had both refused to submit to God's authority. Eli, the priest, put his family before God. Consequently God cut off his family. Even though David was the cause of 85 priests' deaths, this was one way God partially fulfilled the prophecy concerning Eli's descendants (2:27-36). God used David's folly to accomplish His will. So even in this David became a blessing. This in no way justifies David's lie (21:2), but it does show how even in his sinning, David was used by God for blessing (cf. Ps. 76:10; Rom. 6:1-2). Saul, the king, put himself before God. He became increasingly paranoid, isolated from others, hateful even toward his supporters as well as his enemies, and guilty of shedding innocent blood. God ended his life prematurely.

Conversely, when people submit to God's authority over them, they really begin to thrive (John 10:10). David submitted to God's authority over him. His sins, including deceiving Ahimelech, bore bad consequences for himself and others. Nevertheless God continued to bless and use David. He blessed him personally: David continued to rise to the throne. God also blessed him by using him to accomplish God's will, here the pruning of Eli's descendants.

Therefore we conclude that the most important issue is one of long-term authority, not incidental acts. Acts are important, but who is in control—God or self—is even more important. For a believer, the most important issue is authority. Believers can determine who is in control of our lives

¹Josephus, 6:12:6.

²Ibid., 6:12:7.

fairly easily by asking ourselves two test questions: Do I ask God for guidance, or do I ignore Him and make my own plans and decisions without praying? And, do I submit to His Word, or do I disobey it, having ignored it or disregarded it?

2. Saul's pursuit of David ch. 23

The literary spotlight now moves back from Saul to David and his activities. As Saul's disregard for God's law increased, David's submission to the LORD increased.

"We have just witnessed how Saul, in an outburst of rage, became responsible for the destruction of the priestly city of Nob. In ch. 23, David, even while on the run from Saul, is shown saving a city from Philistine attack."¹

"What is most notable is that the self-interest demonstrated in 21:2-16 [English translation 21:1-15] has receded, and the concern for others at which 22:1-5 hinted has not become apparent."²

"In the second chapter of his book *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington wrote, 'I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.' Measured by this standard—and it's a valid one—David was a very successful man."³

David at Keilah 23:1-14

David went to rescue the people of Keilah from the Philistines, but then he had to flee from that town, because the citizens were going to hand him over to Saul.

David's rescue of Keilah 23:1-5

Keilah was about three miles southeast of Adullam in the Shephelah, the foothills between the coastal plain on the west and the hill country of Judah

¹Gordon, *I & II Samuel ...*, p. 175.

²Firth, p. 249.

³Wiersbe, p. 269.

on the east. The Philistines were plundering the threshing floors there. The threshing floors were places where the Israelites stored their threshed grain after threshing it, as well as places where they threshed it (cf. 2 Kings 6:27; Joel 2:24). David sought to defend his countrymen and fellow Judahites from their hostile foreign enemy, even though he was also watching out for Saul at the same time. Saul should have come to their rescue, since he was the king, but there is no mention of him doing so.

The writer recorded in this passage that David inquired of the LORD four times (vv. 2, 4, 10, 11). He placed himself under God's authority, though Saul did not. For this reason, God could and did work through David as His vice-regent. God manifested His will through the Urim and Thummim in the priestly breastpiece on his ephod (vv. 6, 9; cf. Exod. 28:30). The Urim (lit. "Lights") and Thummim (lit. "Perfections") were evidently two stones or similar objects, one light and the other dark in color. The high priest carried them in the pocket on the front of his ephod (apron). He ascertained God's will by drawing one out after mentally assigning a meaning to each. Evidently Abiathar (lit. "The Great One Is Father") interpreted the will of God for David.

David was not just defending himself during this period of his life. He was aggressively carrying out the will of God by defeating Israel's enemies as the LORD's anointed servant. God told David to go against the Philistines first. Then, in response to David's second prayer, He promised that He (emphatic in the Hebrew text) would give the Philistines into David's hand. David's men were understandably afraid to attack the Philistines, who had greater numbers and stronger forces. Nevertheless, David attacked and soundly defeated the Philistines, because of God's promise and power. The writer gave credit to David for the victory (v. 5), but clearly it was God who enabled him to win against such a daunting foe (v. 4).

David's escape from Keilah 23:6-14

Abiathar had evidently remained in the forest of Hereth (22:5) when David took his men to attack the Philistines in Keilah (cf. 22:20-23). Now the priest joined David at Keilah (v. 6). The presence of the ephod made it possible for David to continue to obtain guidance from the LORD in answer to his prayers.

Saul piously claimed that God had delivered David into his hands (v. 7). Obviously God had not done this, since David was the LORD's anointed king-

elect. God did not want Saul to hunt him down, much less kill him. Keilah evidently had only one gate by which people could enter and exit the town. Saul felt confident that he could control the gate and so trap David.

Saul summoned soldiers to accompany him to Keilah (v. 7), but there is no mention that he prayed for divine guidance, as David had done (vv. 2, 4). David prayed again and requested answers to two questions (vv. 10-11). He opened and closed his prayer with an appeal to the "LORD God of Israel," the ultimate ruler of His people. He also described himself as the LORD's "servant" twice (vv. 10, 11). David voiced concern for his men (v. 12) as well as for himself (v. 11). God gave the answer to David's second question first, and then He answered his first question.

The willingness of the people of Keilah to hand their savior over to Saul demonstrates base ingratitude for David's deliverance of them. It also reveals how fearful they were of Saul, who had recently destroyed another town, Nob, for harboring David (22:19).

"From their standpoint, David had gotten them into much more trouble than he had saved them from."¹

David left Keilah after he learned that he would be vulnerable if he stayed there (v. 13). He did not take revenge on the citizens of Keilah for telling Saul where he was. Saul had taken revenge on the citizens of Nob for not telling him where David was. The number of David's supporters had grown from 400 (22:2) to 600 (v. 13). More people were siding with David and were turning away from Saul. Saul abandoned his plans to attack Keilah, and David moved on to the wilderness near Ziph.

David in the wilderness of Ziph 23:15-23

David had sought and received divine guidance and had succeeded at Keilah (vv. 1-14). Now Saul sought and received human guidance and failed near Ziph (vv. 15-23). Jonathan visited David to encourage his friend in this wilderness (cf. John 3:30), but David had to flee again because the inhabitants of Ziph also threatened to betray him.

¹Tsumura, p. 556.

Jonathan's encouragement of David 23:15-18

The town of Ziph ("Refinery") was 12 miles southeast of Keilah, and the wilderness of Ziph was near the town. Ziph stood in the wilderness area of Judah, whereas Keilah was in the more hospitable Shephelah. The sites of Horesh (v. 15) and Hachilah (v. 19) are not certain. The name Horesh means "The Wood."

Jonathan risked his own safety to encourage his friend again. God had used Abiathar to encourage David recently in Keilah (v. 6). Jonathan encouraged David "in God" (v. 16; cf. 30:6). What he said to David rested on God's promises and plans for David, which both Jonathan and Saul now knew (cf. 20:2, 31). Jonathan's humility stands out in his statement that David would become king and that he would be "second in command to you" (v. 17). Unfortunately, Jonathan died before David became king, but he would have made a much better "second in command" than Joab proved to be.

Jonathan cooperated with God's plans, but Saul resisted them. It is curious that Jonathan could find David, but Saul and his intelligence experts could not locate him. God was protecting His servant. Jonathan and David made another covenant, probably recommitting themselves to their former pledges to one another (v. 18; cf. 18:3; 20:8, 12-17). This is the last meeting of these "soul brothers" that the text records.

David's escape from the wilderness of Ziph 23:19-23

Again the writer directed the reader's attention back to Saul. Psalm 54 tells us what David was thinking and praying during this experience. He trusted in God.

Evidently the Ziphites thought that they would be better off if they informed Saul of David's presence in their area than if the king discovered that he was there. He might have blamed them for sheltering David and taken revenge on them as he had on the people of Nob.

Again Saul spoke piously (cf. v. 7) and praised the Ziphites for having compassion on him. Really it was David who was in need of compassion from these people, but he found none. Saul proceeded to seek human help in finding David from his allies ("go," "be more persistent," "investigate," "see," "look," "learn," "return" (vv. 22-23). However there is no mention of his seeking divine help in prayer (cf. vv. 2, 4, 11-12). He attributed cunning to David, but Saul was really the cunning hunter in this story. Herod

the Great was another cunning ruler, who also was not worthy to be king, who tried to execute the LORD's anointed, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 2:1-12). Saul was projecting his own deceitful behavior onto David. Whereas God promised to go with David and deliver the Philistines into his hands (vv. 2, 4), Saul promised to go with the Ziphites to destroy David among the Judahites (v. 23). Saul's personal ambitions took precedence over his desire for God's glory.

David in the wilderness of Maon 23:24-29

The town of Maon stood about five miles south of Ziph in the large wilderness of Judah area. It was the hometown of Nabal (25:2). The "Arabah" describes the low-lying area that extends from Mt. Hermon to the Red Sea, including the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea regions. Jeshimon means "Desert" or "Waste" in Hebrew, so it may have been the name of a region east of Ziph. The wilderness of Maon was undoubtedly the section of Judean wilderness near the town of Maon.

Some of David's sympathizers ("they," v. 25) informed him that Saul was approaching with soldiers. David and his men then sought refuge behind a huge rock in the area. Just as Saul's men were about to close in on David, news reached Saul that the Philistines had invaded an unspecified area of Israel. Saul had to break off his personal vendetta to respond to the Philistine danger (cf. v. 1). David then moved on to Engedi, 14 miles east of Ziph, to increase his safety.

This chapter encourages all of God's servants who, like David, feel vulnerable to attacks by people who do not fear the LORD:

How did God deliver David? He saved him by bringing information to his ears that David needed to protect himself (vv. 2, 4, 11-12, 25). He also did it by distracting David's enemy (vv. 27-28).

What did David do while he trusted God? He did not become anxious and just wait. He sought God in prayer (vv. 2, 4, 11, 12; cf. Ps. 54; Phil. 4:6), and he proceeded to serve God (vv. 2, 5; cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

How did David receive strength during his trials? God answered his prayers (vv. 2, 4, 11, 12; cf. Saul). Moreover, other godly people encouraged David, namely, Abiathar the priest, who helped him in prayer (v. 6), and Jonathan the prince, who reminded him of God's promises (vv. 16-18).

3. David's goodness to two fools chs. 24—26

"... chapters 24—26 form a discrete literary unit within 1 Samuel. Chapters 24 and 26 are virtually mirror images of each other, beginning with Saul's receiving a report about David's latest hiding place (24:1; 26:1), focusing on David's refusal to lift a hand against Saul, 'the Lord's anointed' (24:6, 10; 26:11), and concluding with the words of a remorseful Saul and his returning home from his pursuit of David (24:17-22; 26:21, 25). The two chapters form a frame around the central chapter 25, where the churlish Nabal functions as an alter ego of the rejected Saul. In addition, divine protection that keeps David from shedding innocent blood runs as a unifying thread through all three chapters."¹

Saul, who had disregarded God's Law, became a deadly threat to David (23:19-28). However, David, who regarded God's Law highly, became a source of life to Saul (23:29—24:22) and to others in Israel (ch. 25). Throughout these chapters, a question recurs: Will David use force to achieve his ends? David refused to do so in each episode.

In the previous section, Saul sought the opportunity to take David's life. In this one (23:29—24:22), given the opportunity to take Saul's life, David spared him. Instead of being one whose life is endangered, David now becomes the one who spares life.²

David's first sparing of Saul's life ch. 24

The incident recorded in this chapter concerns "cutting off" (vv. 4, 5, 11, 21). David had the opportunity and received encouragement to cut off Saul's life but chose to cut off only the hem of his robe. He ended up promising not to cut off Saul's descendants and name.

"The verb 'cut off' forms something of a recurring theme, a *leit-motiv*, in 1 Samuel 20-24."³

¹Youngblood, p. 745.

²Bruce C. Birch, "'The First and Second Books of Samuel,'" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 2:1157, n. 155.

³Baldwin, p. 146. Cf. 15:28; 20:14-17; 24:4.

David's cutting off of Saul's hem 24:1-7

Engedi lay near the Dead Sea's western shore close to its mid-point north to south. Even today it is a refreshing oasis with waterfalls, pools, tropical plants, and wild goats. The Hebrew word means "Spring of the Kid." It may have been while David was hiding in this cave that he wrote Psalm 57 and/or Psalm 142 (see their titles; cf. 22:1).

Saul pursued David with 3,000 of his finest soldiers, which gave him a five-to-one advantage over David, who had only 600 men (23:13). The "Rocks of the Wild Goats" was evidently a local site near Engedi, which archaeologists have not yet identified. There Saul discovered a sheepfold that evidently encircled the mouth of one of the caves in the limestone hills. The king entered the cave to evacuate his bowels unaware of the mortal danger in which he was placing himself—because David and his men were hiding in the recesses of the same cave.

"Nobody, even his personal bodyguard, would accompany him into the cave for this purpose."¹

"... these caverns are as dark as midnight, and the keenest eye can not see five paces *inward*; but one who has been long within, and is looking *outward* toward the entrance, can observe with perfect distinctness all that takes place in that direction. David, therefore, could watch Saul as he came in, and notice the exact place where he 'covered his feet,' while he [Saul] could see nothing but impenetrable darkness."²

David's men interpreted Saul's vulnerable position as a divine provision whereby David could free himself from his enemy (v. 4). There is no record in the text that God had indeed told David what they said He had. He may have told David that he would overcome his enemy, but certainly He had not given David permission to assassinate His anointed: King Saul. David's advisers seem to have been resorting to pious language to urge David to kill the king (cf. 23:7). They interpreted David's opportunity as a providential act of God. Interpreting providence is complex, but we must always evaluate our opportunities, and the advice of friends, in the light of God's Word, even when others claim to know God's will. Their counsel

¹Tsumura, p. 565.

²Thomson, 2:420.

unfortunately moved David to take some action against Saul, which he soon regretted.

The hem or edge of a person's garment in the ancient Near East made a statement about his or her social standing. A king's hem was especially ornate and identified him as the king.¹ By cutting off this piece of Saul's robe, which Saul may have laid aside as he relieved himself (v. 3), David suggested that he could cut off Saul's reign just as easily (cf. v. 21). His act constituted mild rebellion against Saul's authority.²

Almost immediately David realized that his clever trick was inappropriate. Since Saul was the king, David had no right to tamper with his clothing. Furthermore, David realized that any attempt to take the kingdom from Saul, as he had taken the symbol of that kingdom, was contrary to God's will. Since Saul was God's anointed (v. 6), it was God's place to remove him, not David's.

This little incident provides another window into David's thinking. David was acknowledging Yahweh's sovereignty by submitting to His authority in setting Saul up as king (cf. Prov. 24:21). David refused to take revenge for the trouble that Saul had caused him (Prov. 16:32). He remained sensitive to God's will, having committed himself to doing it.

"Perhaps no greater example of wisdom practice is found than in David's response to Saul."³

"David respected the *office* of king, although he may not have respected the man."⁴

"When we take things in our own hands, we are no longer walking by faith. We are not trusting God. What we are really saying is, 'Lord, we cannot trust You to handle this the way we want it handled, so we are going to do it ourselves.' David, however, is going to let God handle Saul."⁵

¹See Milgrom, pp. 61-65.

²D. J. Wiseman, "Alalakh," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, p. 128.

³Heater, "Young David ...," p. 54. Cf. Prov. 24:21.

⁴McGee, 2:170.

⁵Ibid.

It is interesting that God prevented David's enemies from assassinating him later, when he was Israel's king (cf. Gal. 6:7). Compare also Jesus' refusal to take vengeance on His enemies (Luke 23:34).

David's verbal defense to Saul 24:8-15

The object lesson that David presented to Saul, the hem of Saul's robe, had a double application. David proved that he was not trying to kill Saul, because Saul was the LORD's anointed. Furthermore he showed that it was inappropriate for Saul to seek to kill him because he, too, was the LORD's anointed, as Saul now knew (v. 20). David modeled for Saul what the king's dealings with him should have been.

"Our tendency is to say, 'Oh, just leave it alone. It'll all work out.' But David didn't leave it alone. He said, 'King Saul, you're listening to false counsel. People are telling you lies about me. Why do you listen to them?' Then he said, 'Let me give you proof, verbal and visual proof, O King!' ...

"David told Saul the whole unvarnished truth; he told it to the person to whom it mattered most. Not to his comrades or to Saul's friends or to the people of Israel, but to Saul himself. He came to terms with the individual with whom there was the battle."¹

By addressing Saul as his lord (v. 8), his king (v. 8), and his father (v. 11), David expressed respect, submission, and affection. People sometimes used the term "father" to imply a covenant relationship, and David may have had that in mind here (cf. 26:25).² He was Saul's son-in-law and successor ("son," v. 16) under Yahweh's covenant with Israel (cf. 18:3; 20:16, 42; 23:18; 2 Sam. 9:1).

David called on Yahweh to judge (respond to his actions) and to avenge (reward David for his dealings with Saul, v. 12; cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:17-21). He promised that he would not usurp God's role by judging Saul or by rewarding him in kind for his evil deeds. He may have compared himself to a dead dog and a single flea (v. 14) to help Saul realize that he viewed himself as harmless and insignificant, beneath Saul's dignity to pursue.

¹Swindoll, *David ...*, pp. 88, 89.

²J. M. Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.," *Iraq* 18 (1956):68-110.

These comparisons may also have been warnings that Saul should not think of David as helpless and insignificant. David also voiced his reliance on God to defend and save him (v. 15; cf. Ps. 35:1). David's defense here recalls Samuel's *apologia* (speech defending himself) to the nation when he reached the end of his career (ch. 12).

Saul's confession and David's promise 24:16-22

David's words and actions convicted Saul of his actions (v. 17), and the king wept tears of remorse (or self-pity, v. 16). He referred to David as his "son" (v. 16), as David had earlier called Saul his "father" (v. 11). Saul confessed David's superior righteousness (v. 17) and goodness (v. 18). There is no more powerful tribute than one that comes from an adversary. Saul even called on the LORD to reward David with blessing for his treatment of the king (v. 19). Saul then confessed that he realized that David's ultimate succession to the throne of Israel was inevitable (v. 20; cf. 23:17).

Finally, Saul asked David not to cut off his descendants when he came to power (v. 21). As noted earlier, it was customary in the ancient Near East for a new king to kill all the descendants of the ruler whom he replaced. This prevented them from rising up and reestablishing the dead king's dynasty. David had already promised Jonathan that he would not kill his descendants (20:14-17), and he now made the same promise to Saul (v. 22). To cut off someone's name meant to obliterate the memory of him. David even agreed to spare Saul's reputation in Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 1:17-27).

Saul's remorse was evidently genuine, but David had learned that it would probably be only temporary. Consequently when Saul departed and returned to Gibeah, David again sought protection in "the stronghold," perhaps the one at Adullam (22:1), or one of the refuges near Engedi (perhaps the site of Masada, v. 22; cf. 23:29).

This chapter helps us deal with the common temptation to get even, by showing us David's example of trusting God and not retaliating. It also deals with how we should view securing what God has promised us. David let God determine how and when he would become king. He refused the temptation to take matters into his own hands and thereby control his destiny (cf. 2 Kings 8:14-15). We see David growing in this chapter. He began by threatening the king, but then he backed off and declined to kill Saul. Finally, he determined even to trust God to control Saul's descendants, as well as Saul himself, and to preserve Saul's memory in Israel. God

presumably rewarded David for his trust and obedience by giving him a peaceful conscience immediately, and safety later, when his own son Absalom rose up against him.

David's sparing of Nabal's life ch. 25

"Chapter 25 is the central panel in the triptych that comprises chapters 24—26. As such it not only anchors the literary unit but also facilitates the fact that chapters 24 and 26 mirror each other."¹

"Sandwiched between the accounts of David's not killing Saul, this narrative demonstrates that violence, even for a just cause, is not something David can initiate."²

This central chapter also has a chiasmic structure. It focuses attention on Abigail's effective appeal to David.

- "A Samuel dies (v. 1a).
- B David the fugitive is in the vicinity of the wealthy Nabal and his beautiful wife Abigail (vv. 1b-3).
- C Hearing of Nabal's situation and later rebuffed by him, David prepares to avenge the insult (vv. 4-13).
- D Abigail prepares food to take to David (vv. 14-19).
- E David meets Abigail (vv. 20-35).
- D' Abigail returns home to find Nabal gorging himself on food (vv. 36-38).
- C' Hearing of Nabal's death, David praises the Lord for having upheld his cause against Nabal (v. 39a).
- B' David the fugitive has taken the beautiful Abigail as his second wife (vv. 39b-43).

¹Youngblood, p. 752.

²Firth, p. 272.

A' Saul treats David as though he were dead (v. 44)."¹

The death of Samuel 25:1

Samuel's years of being a blessing to all Israel ended at this time. David took his place as God's major channel of blessing to the nation. It is appropriate that the notice of Samuel's death occurs here, since Saul had just admitted publicly that David would be Israel's next king (24:20). Samuel's ministry of providing a transition to the monarchy had therefore ended. People all over Israel mourned Samuel's death.

"... Samuel's death is noted only after Saul confesses that David will be king (24:21 [English translation: 24:20]. Hence his death closes off one stage of David's move towards the throne. ... this narrative [of David, Nabal, and Abigail, in chapter 25] demonstrates that Yahweh's word continues to resolve itself, even when the one who announced it has died."²

Samuel was the last of the judges. Josephus wrote that Samuel served God in Israel alone after Eli's death 12 years, and 18 years with King Saul.³ David would probably have continued Samuel's ministry and become Israel's first king without the hiatus of Saul's tragic reign if Israel had not insisted on having a king prematurely.

"Since the days of Moses and Joshua, no man had arisen to whom the covenant nation owed so much as to Samuel, who has been justly called the reformer and restorer of the theocracy."⁴

This chapter opens with one disappointment for David, the death of his anointer, and it closes with another, the departure of his wife (v. 44). This suggests that the events of chapter 25 took place when David was at a low point in his life emotionally. This may account for the fact that David did not conduct himself completely honorably at this time. He is not the hero of this chapter. Abigail is. God used a woman to avert a tragedy in Israel's history, again (cf. Judg. 4; 2 Sam. 14:2-20; 20:16-22). The

¹John Stek, *The Former Prophets: A Syllabus*, p. 65A. Quoted by Youngblood, p. 752.

²Firth, p. 266.

³Josephus, 6:13:5.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, p. 238. Cf. Jer. 15:1.

wilderness of Paran, to which David fled next, lay just southeast of Maon (v. 2).

David's request of Nabal 25:2-8

The towns of Maon and Carmel ("Garden Spot") stood about 14 miles west of Engedi and about 7 miles south-southeast of Hebron. The reference to Nabal's 3,000 sheep brings to mind Saul's 3,000 soldiers (24:2). As the story unfolds, we will discover many similarities between Nabal and Saul, and the writer may have dropped this and other clues to help the reader compare the two men. He used a literary device called narrative analogy in which ironic parallelisms abound.¹

Nabal's name must have been a nickname, since it means "Fool" in Hebrew. Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, who had received Hebron and its environs as his inheritance from Joshua (Josh. 15:13). Nabal was unlike his ancestor in many ways. He was foolish, but Caleb was wise. Nabal did not take God into account, but Caleb counted on God's promises. Nabal opposed God's purposes and died prematurely, but Caleb cooperated with God and lived long.

The Old Testament prophets regarded those who are ungodly, namely, those who do not take God into account, as fools (Ps. 14:1; Prov. 18:2, 7; Isa. 32:6). God promised to punish the ungodly (Deut. 28), and He will punish fools (vv. 25-26).

The contrast between Nabal and Abigail (lit. "My Father Is Rejoicing" or "My Father Was Delighted") could not be clearer. Someone has called this chapter the story of Beauty and the Beast. Nabal was foolish; Abigail was wise. He was evil; she was good. He was repulsive; she was attractive. He was arrogant; she was humble. He was ungodly; she was godly. He was antagonistic; she was peacemaking. They were one of the mismatched, odd couples of the books of Samuel—along with Hannah and Elkanah, and David and Michal. The rabbis considered Abigail one of seven women in the Old Testament whom the Holy Spirit had graced unusually.²

¹Robert P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24—26," *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980):42-43.

²Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978):231. See also Herbert Lockyer, *The Women of the Bible*, pp. 23-25.

"The story of the stupid shepherd with a beautiful and intelligent wife is one of the most delightful in Samuel. Its purpose is to lay one more brick in the edifice of David's legitimacy, however, and not to entertain."¹

David's armed followers had been patrolling the wilderness of Paran in Judah, where Nabal's shepherds had been tending his flocks. They had made that area safe from raiding Amalekites, Philistines, and occasional wild animals that might have harassed Nabal's shepherds. It was only common courtesy that wealthy Nabal would have expressed his appreciation to David by providing some food for David's men. Sheep-shearing was a happy time for shepherds and usually involved feasting (cf. 2 Sam. 13:23-24).² We can see in these verses that David, as one committed to the Mosaic Law, and as the LORD's anointed, was a blessing and an indirect source of fertility to his companions.

By referring to himself as Nabal's "son" (v. 8) David was placing himself in a subordinate position to Nabal. David had earlier called Saul his "father" (cf. 24:11, 16). This is another clue that suggests that the writer wanted us to view Nabal as Saul's alter ego. One writer suggested that David's request for food and his reference to himself as Nabal's "son" implied more:

"This would seem to be an instance of negotiation with an invitation to Nabal to enter into a regulated covenant with David."³

Nabal's foolish response to David 25:9-13

Nabal was a political loyalist, a supporter of King Saul, who regarded David simply as a rebel. Perhaps he felt that David was running a protection racket to finance his outlaw way of life. More probably, I think, miserly Nabal simply did not want to part with anything that he had (cf. Luke 7:44-47). He failed to admit that David had been a blessing to him. He also refused to acknowledge David as the LORD's anointed. Ironically, Nabal's servants were

¹Heater, "Young David ...," p. 56.

²Baldwin, p. 147. Cf. v. 8.

³D. J. Wiseman, "'Is it peace?'—Covenant and Diplomacy," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:3 (1982):318.

about to abandon him, the very thing he falsely accused David of doing to Saul (v. 10; cf. 22:7-8).¹

David overreacted to Nabal's insulting rebuff (v. 13). He prepared to attack and kill every male in Nabal's household that very night (vv. 22, 34).

A servant's appeal to Abigail 25:14-17

Nabal's servant appealed to Abigail to reverse Nabal's orders. He testified that God had blessed Nabal's shepherds greatly through David. David's soldiers had been a wall of protection for them (v. 16). As in the case of Saul, Nabal's family and servants sided with David.² One of the characteristics of a fool is that he or she does not listen to other people. "Worthless man" (v. 17) translates the Hebrew "son of Belial," meaning "son of worthlessness." The same Hebrew word described Eli's sons (2:12) and the men who disrespected Saul after he was presented to the Israelites as their king (10:27). Nabal was such a fool that he did not even listen to God. If he had, he would have known that David was the LORD's anointed servant (cf. v. 30).

The Hebrew words for "good" and "evil" each occur seven times in chapter 25 (vv. 3, 8, 15, 21, 30, 31, 36, and 3, 17, 21, 26, 34, 39 [twice]).³

"Together they underscore one of the major themes of the story: Good brings its own reward, while evil recoils on the head of the wicked."⁴

Abigail's preparations for appealing to David 25:18-22

As Abimelech had done earlier (21:4), Abigail prepared to sustain the LORD's anointed and his men with food. Compare Jacob's similar scheme to placate Esau (Gen. 32:13-21). Was it proper for Abigail to do this without telling her husband? I would say that it was, since she was attempting to save Nabal's life. If she had told him, he probably would not have permitted her to go and would have died at David's hand as a result.

¹Levenson, p. 225.

²Tsumura, p. 582.

³Gunn, p. 96.

⁴Youngblood, p. 753.

"Those that desire conditions of peace must send when the enemy is yet a great way off, Luke xiv. 32. 2."¹

Abigail's appeal to David 25:23-31

Abigail's approach to David was a model of tact and courage (cf. 2 Sam. 14:2; 20:16-19). Visualize this solitary woman, riding a donkey, approaching 400 armed men, who were riding horses and were bent on slaughtering her household. It took immense courage and boldness, as well as great wisdom, for Abigail to take her life in her hands and do what she did.

"Dismounting in presence of a superior is the highest token of respect that can be given; and it is still an essential act of homage to the great."²

In her words to David, Abigail took all the blame for her husband's foolish actions. In this she reminds us of Jesus Christ, who also rode into the presence of His enemies on a donkey, took on Himself the sins of generations of fools, and was willing to suffer the consequences unselfishly. Abigail begged David to listen to her; her own husband would not (cf. v. 17). Nabal had proudly described David as a runaway servant (v. 10), but Abigail presented herself humbly as a slave to David (v. 24).

She described her husband as a fool (v. 25). Is this how a wife should speak of her husband, even if he is a fool? Perhaps she meant that in responding to David as he had, Nabal had substantiated what others called him. If David had interpreted her description of her husband as disloyal, it is doubtful that David would have asked her to marry him later (v. 40). She might have proved disloyal to him too. Perhaps Abigail meant: Forgive him, for he knows not what he does (cf. Luke 23:34).³

Abigail proceeded to help David view his situation from God's perspective. She referred to the LORD as the One who, in response to her words, was restraining him from shedding innocent blood (v. 26). She was anticipating David's proper response to her appeal. She further wished that all who opposed David, as Nabal had done, would be ineffective. She presented her gift of food and asked for David's forgiveness, again as the substitute for

¹Henry, p. 318.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 224.

³Henry, p. 318.

her husband (v. 28; cf. v. 24). She believed that Yahweh would give David an enduring dynasty because he fought the LORD's battles (v. 28), not just Saul's battles, and because David would do the LORD's will. In this she again anticipated David's proper response to her request. She believed God would preserve David alive, which was a blessing promised in the Mosaic Law for those who obeyed God (cf. Deut. 4:10; 8:1; 16:20; et al).

Shepherds carried two bundles, one in which they carried food for themselves and the other in which they placed stones to hurl at the enemies of their sheep.¹ This figurative description of David, as kept alive by God, rather than thrown out in death by Him, would have appealed to David as a shepherd. Abigail also believed that David would reign as king one day, which she had learned that God had revealed (v. 30). Samuel had recognized David as the future king (16:12), then Jonathan did (20:15), then Saul did (24:20), and now Abigail did. She anticipated that day and viewed David as having a good conscience then for not taking vengeance against Nabal, since vengeance belongs to God. Often the early sins of leaders come back to haunt them, and sometimes bring them down, when they later attain high office.

"He [David] was about to attack fellow Judeans and wipe out a whole family. This act would surely have brought reprobation on David and would have undone all his carefully crafted relationships with his fellow Israelites."²

Abigail concluded with a request that David would remember her when he attained his throne (v. 31; cf. Gen. 40:14). In all that she said, Abigail revealed a godly perspective that was totally absent in her husband. There are many similarities between Abigail's appeal to David here and the appeal of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14:1-20.³

Abigail was careful "neither to exculpate Nabal [present him as not guilty of wrongdoing] nor to appear disloyal to him. ... In short, she must win David without betraying Nabal. Abigail devises the perfect solution to the dilemma: she intercedes on behalf of Nabal (v. 24), although conceding that he has no case and no hope of survival (vv. 25-26). In other words, while

¹G. M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 33.

²Heater, "Young David ...," p. 56.

³Cf. D. M. Gunn, "Traditional composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 26:2 (1976):221-22.

overtly defending him, she covertly dissociates herself from him."¹

David's response to Abigail's appeal 25:32-35

David heard the LORD's voice behind Abigail's words. Consequently he blessed the LORD, her discernment, and her. God had used David's conscience to keep him from killing Saul (24:5), and now He used Abigail's appeal to keep him from killing Nabal. Wise David, who listened to the words of a woman—who was a stranger to him—contrasts with foolish Nabal, who would not listen to the words of his wise wife or his fearful servants. Thus godly Abigail, another wise person, became a blessing to David. Earlier he, a godly person, had been a blessing to her and her household. She kept him from sinning (v. 33), and in return he blessed her further by sparing the males of Nabal's household (v. 35).

Nabal's response to the news of Abigail's appeal 25:36-38

When she returned home, Abigail discovered that her foolish husband was drunk as a result of celebrating. He was totally oblivious to his mortal danger. He was feasting rather than fasting. He was behaving like a king, the ultimate authority, rather than like a servant of the next king (cf. v. 24). Here is another allusion to the similarity between Nabal and Saul, who both viewed themselves proudly as kings. Pride was the root of Nabal's folly as well as Saul's folly, and it preceded destruction in both of their cases.

"Nabal's idea of happiness wasn't to praise God or feed the hungry, but to eat to the full and get drunk [cf. Phil. 3:19]."²

"There is not a surer sign that a man has but little wisdom, not a surer way to ruin the little he has, than drinking to excess. Nabal, that never thought he could bestow too little in charity, never thought he could bestow too much in luxury."³

Abigail wisely waited until morning before telling her husband what a close brush he had had with death. By then the wine had gone out of him. The writer made a clever play on words here. The Hebrew word for wineskin is

¹Levenson, p. 230.

²Wiersbe, p. 278.

³Henry, pp. 318-19.

nebel. It is as though he was suggesting that Nabal was a *nebel*. When the wine had gone out of him, he was nothing. The writer may even have been suggesting that all there was to Nabal was his bladder, his personal wineskin. David had earlier vowed that he would not leave any male in Nabal's household alive (v. 22). A literal translation of the Hebrew is: he would not leave anyone alive "who urinates against the wall." The writer pictured Nabal in the most uncomplimentary terms.

Nabal's heart died within him, literally, when he finally realized what a fool he had been. The Hebrews used the heart metaphorically to describe the seat of courage. No courage remained in him. When he realized what had happened, the shock immobilized him. He evidently had a heart attack. Ten days later he died, perhaps of a stroke. The writer gave God the credit for terminating his life prematurely. Sometimes people who fail to respond to the will of God die prematurely (cf. ch. 31; Num. 3:2; 16:32; Josh. 7:25; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

God struck Nabal dead for his pride and opposition to the LORD's anointed. God would do the same to Saul for the same reasons. Nabal's death undoubtedly encouraged David to believe that God would take vengeance on Saul. David's experiences with Nabal were a microcosm of all that he had been enduring for so long with Saul: another fool. Saul admitted he was a fool in 26:21.

David's marriage to Abigail 25:39-43

David thanked God for vindicating him and for preventing him from doing evil. Abigail had been the instrument that God had used to do this (v. 39). It was proper for David to give thanks, since he had left Nabal in the LORD's hands and had not sought revenge (cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

It is easy to see why David found Abigail so attractive. Not only was she intelligent (cf. 2 Chron. 30:22; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 13:15) and beautiful (v. 3; cf. Gen. 29:17; Esth. 2:7), but she was also a soul-sister with David (cf. Jonathan). She shared his view of life and his commitment to God.

However, since from creation God's will has been monogamy (Gen. 2:24), it was wrong for him to marry her (v. 39). He had also previously married Ahinoam (lit. "My Brother Is Pleasant") of Jezreel (v. 43). Perhaps he justified his second marriage with the fact that Saul had taken Michal from him (v. 44). Perhaps he got into polygamy also because it was customary

in the ancient Near East for great warriors and monarchs to have many wives and concubines (women who lived with men but had a lower status than wife). Yet God forbade this of Israel's kings (Deut. 17:17).

"While it is perfectly true that we have no right to measure David by the standards of our own time, it is equally clear that at this point we have evidence of a weakness which presently was to lead him into the most terrible sin of his life and cause him the greatest difficulty and the acutest suffering."¹

"With Nabal removed, David was free to marry Abigail. Such a marriage was political more than anything else, as David knew he needed support from the Calebites, which marrying into the clan could ensure. For Abigail the marriage promised security, linking her clan to the nation's future king. ... Marriage to Abigail meant David could establish influential links in the region, and marriage to Ahinoam achieved this with another important town."²

David did not restrain himself in his relations with women, and this caused him major problems later in his life. The same Hebrew words appear both here (v. 40: "sent" and "take you") and in the account of David's affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4: "sent" and "had her brought"). We see here the seed problem that bore bitter fruit in David's adultery.

Should Abigail have agreed to become David's wife? She may not have had a choice. If she did have a choice, I do not believe she should have agreed to marry David, who was already married to someone else (Gen. 2:24). Abigail may have felt a need for security, since her husband had died, and David was an attractive man with whom she shared much in common. Furthermore, he was destined to become king. Yet he was married. Her decision is certainly understandable, though not commendable—if she had a choice.

We can learn a great deal from wise Abigail. We can see how a godly person responds to a spouse's folly: by preserving and protecting the spouse rather than by ignoring the folly. We see how a godly person responds to a foolish spouse: by honoring him or her rather than by despising him or her.

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 124.

²Firth, p. 272. Paragraph division omitted.

We see how a godly person responds to favors bestowed: by returning them generously rather than by taking them for granted. We see how a godly person responds to other godly people: by helping them rather than by opposing them. We see how a godly person responds to being vulnerable: by sacrificing oneself for others rather than by becoming arrogant. We see how a godly person responds to the threat of danger: by trusting in God and behaving wisely rather than by ignoring the danger. We see how a godly person responds to the desire for security. In this last lesson Abigail is a negative example rather than a positive one. We do so by relying on God to provide legitimately rather than by seizing security.

David's loss of his wife 25:44

As mentioned before, this chapter opens and closes with a tragedy in David's life: the death of Samuel and the departure of Michal. Evidently Saul considered David as good as dead, and so, sometime during these events, he gave his daughter, David's wife, to another man. He may also have done this to remove the possibility of David claiming Saul's throne because he was Saul's son-in-law. David later reclaimed Michal (2 Sam. 3:13-16), which proved to be a source of grief for David, since Michal did not appreciate how David constantly bowed to Yahweh's authority (cf. 2 Sam. 6:16-23; 1 Chron. 15:29).

David's second sparing of Saul's life ch. 26

Again the scene shifts to Saul (cf. ch. 24). The writer contrasted his improper attitudes and behavior, and their consequences, with David's proper attitudes and behavior, and their consequences. There are many similarities between this chapter and chapter 24, which records David sparing Saul's life in the cave of Adullam. Perhaps the most significant difference is that in chapter 24 David was on the defensive, whereas in chapter 26 he was on the offensive. Chapter 26 is the third and final episode in the mini-section on David's treatment of two fools: Saul and Nabal. A prominent theme in this pericope is David's learning to trust God to repay his enemies rather than taking vengeance himself.

The general structure of the chapter is chiastic:

"A Saul searches for David, who then responds (vv. 1-5).

B David keeps his man Abishai from killing Saul (vv. 6-12).

B' David rebukes Saul's man Abner for not protecting Saul (vv. 13-16).

A' Saul talks to David, who then responds (vv. 17-25)."¹

Saul's encampment near the hill of Hachilah 26:1-5

The Ziphites betrayed David a second time (cf. 23:19). David was again hiding by the hill of Hachilah (23:19). Jeshimon (lit. "Waste" or "Desert") may refer to the general wilderness area around Ziph, rather than being a proper name.

When Saul came down from Gibeah with his 3,000 (or three military units of) soldiers, he camped near the main road. David had only 600 men (23:13; 25:13). David evidently stayed on the other side of the hill (v. 3). Perhaps he went up on the hill at night to survey Saul's encampment and there spotted Saul and Abner in the middle of the camp (v. 5). Saul should have been very secure, surrounded as he was by his men, but really he was very vulnerable (cf. v. 12).

The names Saul and David alternate in these verses: Saul followed by David in verses 1-3a, then David followed by Saul in verses 3b-5 (cf. 23:24-28). This pattern shows clearly who is taking the initiative in each section: Saul the pursuer, and then David the pursued.²

Abishai's offer to kill Saul 26:6-12

Ahimelech the Hittite was probably a native Canaanite from the Hittite tribe (cf. Gen. 15:20; et al.) who had joined David's band of soldiers (cf. Uriah the Hittite, 2 Sam. 11:3). The writer may have mentioned his Hittite connection to show the extent of David's appeal. Abishai was David's nephew, one of the sons of his sister Zeruah (cf. 1 Chron. 2:15-16). Joab, who later became David's commander-in-chief, was Abishai's brother.

Saul had used his spear to attack David three times (cf. 18:10; 19:9-10; 20:33). It was, therefore, an instrument of death. It was also the symbol of Saul's rule, similar to a scepter (cf. 22:6).

¹Youngblood, p. 767.

²Tsumura, p. 596.

"This traditional sign of authority still exists among some bedouin Arabs today. A spear stuck in the ground outside the entrance distinguishes the tent of the sheikh."¹

Abishai's viewpoint was carnal. He concluded that, because God had given David the upper hand, he should use it to do away with his rival (v. 8; cf. 24:4). David had used similar words when he promised to kill Goliath (cf. 17:46), as had Saul in describing how he would kill David with his spear (cf. 18:11).

David believed, however, that, since God had anointed Saul, it was not his place to do him harm (v. 9; cf. 24:6-7). His reply to Abishai begins (v. 9) and ends (v. 11) with the reason David would not permit Abishai to kill Saul: he was the LORD's anointed. In the middle of this reply, David mentioned alternative ways by which God might terminate Saul's life (v. 10): He might die from some physical affliction, as Nabal had (cf. 25:38), or of natural causes, or in battle (cf. ch. 31). David reminded Abishai that God could deal with Saul without their help (cf. Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30).

"The Arabs sleep heavily, especially when fatigued. Often, when traveling, my muleteers and servants have resolved to watch by turns in places thought to be dangerous, but in every instance I soon found them fast asleep, and generally their slumbers were so profound that I could not only walk among them without their waking, but might have stolen the very *'aba* with which they were covered. Then the cruse of water at Saul's head is in exact accordance with the customs of the people at this day. No one ventures to travel over these deserts without his cruse of water, and it is very common to place one at the 'bolster,' so that the owner can reach it during the night."²

David's reason for entering Saul's camp was, not to kill him, but to teach him a lesson. By taking Saul's spear, David would teach the king that he had the power of death, but chose to spare Saul's life rather than take it. This symbolic act also communicated that the right to rule would be David's eventually. By taking his water jug, a life-giving vessel, since life in the Judean wilderness depended on drinking water, David taught him that he

¹Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 244. See also Thomson, 2:20.

²Ibid., 2:21.

had the power to take Saul's life. Perhaps the jug of water also symbolized that refreshment and blessing would also be David's portion from the LORD. It was really the LORD who defended David by making Saul and all of his men sleep soundly (v. 12).

David's rebuke of Abner 26:13-16

David crossed the ravine that separated Saul's troops from David's men in order to put some distance between himself and Saul. David addressed Abner because he was responsible for leaving the LORD's anointed unprotected. The person who came to destroy Saul was Abishai (v. 15; cf. v. 8). David, rather than Saul's bodyguard, Abner, was responsible for sparing his life. Abner deserved to die for his failure in duty, but David spared his life too. David more faithfully defended Saul's life than even Saul's most trusted servant!

David's appeal to Saul 26:17-20

Evidently the realization that David or Abishai again could have killed him, but did not, led Saul to respond to David tenderly, calling him his son (v. 17; cf. vv. 21, 25). Indeed, David had behaved like a loyal son toward Saul. David, however, did not now address Saul as his father, as he had previously (cf. 24:11). He had come to view Saul less affectionately, since he continued to hound David without cause after repeated promises to stop doing so. Moreover, Saul was no longer David's father-in-law (cf. 25:44).

David said that if violation of the Mosaic Law had prompted Saul to hunt him down, he was ready to offer the sacrifice the Law prescribed to atone for it (v. 19). However, if David's enemies had stirred up Saul's hostility without cause, David prayed that God would judge them for that. Saul's attacks had resulted in David's separation from the LORD's inheritance (i.e., the blessings that God had given Israel, especially rest in the Promised Land), since he had to live as a fugitive. David's enemies had, in effect, encouraged him to abandon Yahweh, by driving him out of his home territory (v. 19).¹ The common conception in the ancient Near East was that the various gods ruled their own particular areas.

¹On the possibility that God had incited Saul to seek David's life, and the larger issue of God's use of deception to judge sinners, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God Deceive?" pp. 11-12, 19-21.

"For the god of the country, according to ancient ideas, could be properly worshipped only in his own land: hence banishment was equivalent to being told to go and serve foreign gods. Cf. Hos. 9, 3."¹

Evidently some people were saying that, because David had departed from His area, the LORD would not protect him. David appeared to be seeking the protection of other gods by living in areas that they supposedly controlled (e.g., Philistia and Moab).² This looked like David was violating the first commandment (Exod. 20:3). Nevertheless, David wanted to live and die in the center of God's will and presence (v. 20).

David again compared himself to a mere flea, essentially harmless but annoying to Saul (v. 20; cf. 24:14). He was making a word play on Abner's question, "Who are you who calls [Heb. *qarata*] to the king?" (v. 14) by referring to himself as a partridge (v. 20, Heb. *haqqore*, lit. "caller-bird"). The partridge darts from one bush to another when a hunter pursues it, as David had been doing, though it tires fairly quickly and then can be caught easily.³

"[It is] a very innocent harmless bird, which, when attempts are made upon its life, flies if it can, but makes no resistance."⁴

"The common species of partridge in the Holy Land attempts to save itself by running rather than by flight. The bird is continually chased until it is fatigued; then it is knocked down with sticks thrown along the ground. This, in a very vivid way, reflects the nature of Saul's pursuit. Even more interesting is the fact that David compared Saul's actions to a partridge hunt *in the mountains*, a very unlikely place. Who would hunt a single partridge which had flown into the mountains or had run there, when these birds can be found in large coveys in the fields below?"⁵

¹S. R. Driver, p. 208.

²See Youngblood, *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 84; and Daniel Isaac Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*.

³Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 771.

⁴Henry, p. 320.

⁵Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 245.

David's point in comparing himself to a partridge and a flea was that Saul's search for such an insignificant person as David was beneath the king's dignity.

David's trust in God 26:21-25

Saul again confessed that he had sinned, as he had done when he had sacrificed at Gilgal (v. 21; cf. 15:24, 30), and when David had spared his life in the cave (24:17). Nevertheless he seems to have failed again to follow through with genuine repentance (cf. 27:1). He also admitted that he had played the fool (similar to Nabal) and had committed a serious error (cf. 13:13). Contrast Paul's testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." The writer did not record Saul as having gone this far in admitting his faults in the preceding chapters. Even though Saul's words went further in confession, his behavior continued unchanged.

"Perhaps this ["I have played the fool"] is the briefest and, at the same time, the most accurate autobiography in existence."¹

David returned Saul's spear to him (v. 22), the symbol of the right to rule. Perhaps David did not return the jug of water in order to remind Saul that he still had the power to end Saul's life. He felt confident that God would repay each of them eventually, and he determined to wait for Him to do so (v. 23). David acknowledged that Yahweh was his real deliverer (v. 24). This may have been the occasion when David composed Psalm 54 (see its title) the last verse of which ascribes David's deliverance from his enemies to Yahweh. Saul could have overwhelmed David's smaller band of followers. Instead, he departed with a prophetic declaration of David's final success (v. 25; cf. 24:20).

These are the last recorded words of Saul to David. The text does not record another meeting of David and Saul before Saul died. After this incident, David left "the territory of Israel" (27:1) and moved to the territory of the Philistines, only to return to Israelite territory after Saul's death.

The main lesson of chapter 26 appears in verse 23: "the LORD will repay" (cf. Prov. 20:22; 24:29; Rom. 12:17, 19). The Lord Jesus Christ is our

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 125.

greatest example of someone who trusted the Father to vindicate Him (cf. Luke 23:46). The vindication of Christians does not always come in this lifetime, as David's did. Sometimes it comes after death, as Jesus' vindication did. Another great revelation is God's patience with Saul. God gave him many opportunities to repent and to experience God's blessing, within the sphere of his judgment (cf. 15:26), but Saul did not repent.

David had borne witness twice to Saul's guilt before God (chs. 24 and 26; cf. Num. 35:30). God proceeded to put him to death not long after this (ch. 31). David became God's instrument in passing judgment on Saul for his sin and so became a blessing to all Israel.

4. The end of Saul's reign chs. 27—31

David's commitment to God resulted in his continuing to be God's instrument of blessing to the Israelites and His instrument of judgment to Israel's enemies. This was true in spite of David's failure to seek guidance from the LORD before moving back into Philistine territory. David's strength continued to grow as Saul's continued to wane. In these last chapters of 1 Samuel, the writer continued to move back and forth: first describing David's activities, and then Saul's, then David's, and then Saul's. This technique puts the fates of the two men in stark contrast side by side. Thus the book closes with the narrative contrast technique with which it opened, in which the writer contrasted Samuel and Eli's sons.

David's return to Philistia 27:1—28:2

This section records David's relocation to Ziklag in Philistia, his raids of southwestern Canaan from Ziklag, and the Philistines' preparations for war against Saul. Philistia is where David spent the final stage of his "outlaw" career. David's experiences among the Philistines undoubtedly prepared him for the future.

"When he would become king, he would have considerable knowledge of Philistine geography and military tactics, which would be a decided advantage in planning attacks and conquering their territory. Again we have an excellent example of God's providential preparation of a man. In many respects, David's time in Philistia was parallel to Moses' days in Egypt.

While Saul's pursuit of David was fully intended for evil, God meant it for good (cf. Gen. 50:20)."¹

David's relocation to Ziklag 27:1-7

Was it God's will for David to leave Israel and move to Philistia? The text does not say, but there are indications that lead me to believe that he should not have done this, even though he must have felt almost forced to do it. First, there is the statement that David consulted with himself, but he had previously asked God for guidance in prayer (cf. 23:2, 4).

Second, David said he believed he would die if he remained in Israel. Yet Samuel had anointed him as Israel's next king (16:13), Jonathan had said twice that David would be king (18:4; 23:17), as had Saul (24:20; 26:25), and so had Abigail (25:30). Saul's most recent statement about this occurs in the verse immediately preceding 27:1.

Third, the name of God does not appear in this chapter, suggesting that David did not get his guidance from the LORD. David's faith in God's ability to keep him safe seems to have weakened temporarily. The stress and strain of his hide-and-seek existence, with no end in view, seem to have worn on David.

In addition, fourthly, he had another wife to take care of now (25:42). All of these things led him to seek refuge from Saul in Philistia—again (cf. 21:10-15). This was only a weakness in trust, however, not disobedience to the revealed will of God.

"Though he had no reason to trust Saul's promises, had he not all the reason in the world to trust the promises of God? Unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. *Lord, increase our faith.*"²

"How far the child of God may go astray when he puts himself under the protection of unbelievers, instead of relying on the help of God in all the difficulties which beset the path of faith!"³

¹Davis, in *A History ...*, pp. 246-47.

²Henry, p. 320.

³Darby, 1:482.

Why would David have been welcome in Philistia? Probably Achish and the other Philistine lords rejoiced to see the rift that existed between David and Saul. Ironically, David found himself protecting a king of the Philistines, whereas he had previously killed the champion of the Philistines: Goliath.

"This seems to be a rather unusual decision on his [David's] part since he had been previously turned away from that site (v. 2; cf. 21:10-15), but some time had elapsed and David's status as an outlaw or a fugitive had been well established in Philistia as well as in the hills of Judah, thus making it possible to offer 'allegiance' to, and request protection of, Achish, the king of Gath."¹

If "Achish" is a title, this Achish may or may not have been the same person as the Achish mentioned in 21:10. The writer identified this Achish as "the son of Maach" (v. 2; cf. 1 Kings 2:39).²

"Without David, Saul lacked military leadership sufficient to eliminate the Philistine threat; without Saul, David lacked a power base from which to operate."³

"Secondly, Achish realized that as soon as David did attack his own people, he would lose for ever the possibility of changing sides."⁴

Consequently, Achish was willing for David and his men to live in Philistia, apparently as mercenaries (hired soldiers; cf. 2 Sam. 10:6; 15:18-22). Gath stood about 27 miles west-northwest of Ziph. Achish appears to have treated David as a vassal ruler and given him the town of Ziklag as a fiefdom.⁵ David's move was a fairly major relocation of his forces and his family (v. 3). He evidently planned to stay in Philistia until God disposed of Saul. Since David now enjoyed Philistine protection, Saul no longer searched for him. Saul would have had to take on the Philistines to get to David, and Saul would not have wanted to do that. David must have looked like the frustrated leader of an ineffective *coup d'état* (a sudden, violent, illegal seizure of power from a government) to Achish. Anyone who was the

¹Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 246.

²See Tsumura, pp. 609-10.

³Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 219.

⁴David Payne, p. 140.

⁵Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 222.

enemy of Saul was the friend of Achish. But David pretended to be more of a servant to Achish than he really was (v. 5).

Ziklag evidently stood on the southwestern edge of Philistia, about 27 miles south-southwest of Gerar, but its exact site is not certain.¹ It continued under Israelite control from the time David moved there until David incorporated it into his kingdom. This town became David's headquarters until he moved to Hebron 16 months later (v. 7; cf. 2 Sam. 1:1). In Ziklag David could come and go without constant observation by the Philistines, who lived mainly to the north of Ziklag.

David's raids to the south 27:8-12

David used the opportunity that his location afforded to defeat and to annihilate the common enemies of Israel and the Philistines that lived to Israel's southwest. In this he served as a double agent. David did not leave any survivors, as the LORD had commanded (Deut. 3:18-20; Josh. 1:13). He was clearing the Promised Land of foreign foes so the Israelites could occupy it. David walked a thin line of deception but was able to convince Achish that his victories were for the welfare of the Philistines. Really he was conquering Israel's surrounding enemies, but he gave Achish the impression that his raids were against the southern portions in Judah.

"... in later years, David suffered from being deceived by members of his staff and even of his own family."²

David continued to subdue Israel's enemy neighbors later when he became king (2 Sam. 8). Achish believed that David had alienated himself from the Israelites and would therefore be loyal to him from then on (v. 12; cf. 17:9). Josephus added that David sent part of the spoils that he took in war to Achish as a gift.³

"Like Nabal [in 25:10], Achish seriously underestimates David by regarding him as a servant or slave."⁴

¹J. D. Ray, "Two Etymologies: Ziklag and Phicol," *Vetus Testamentum* (July 1986):355-58.

²Wiersbe, p. 283.

³Josephus, 6:13:10.

⁴Miscall, p. 165. Cf. Gunn, *The Fate ...*, p. 107.

The Philistines' preparations for war against Israel 28:1-2

David's response to Achish was deliberately ambiguous. He did not promise to fight for the Philistines but gave the impression he would (v. 2). Achish interpreted David's words as a strong commitment to him and rewarded David with a position as his bodyguard for life.

David continued to be a blessing to Israel as he obeyed God in Ziklag, without giving any real help to Israel's enemy, the Philistines. This plan of David's, while yielding some positive benefits, involved him in deception and lying, plus leaving him vulnerable to Achish, if the Philistine king learned what was really happening.

This whole pericope illustrates that, when opposition from ungodly people persists, God's people should continue to pray and trust Him for protection rather than taking matters into their own hands. If we initiate a plan without seeking God's guidance, we may remove one source of aggravation and danger only to find ourselves in another. Such plans may result in some good, but they may also put us in situations where we find it even more tempting to disobey God (cf. Jacob). We should, instead, remember God's promises (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:3-9; 2 Pet. 1:2-4) and pray for His guidance (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

Saul's attempt to secure divine guidance from a medium 28:3-25

The story involving Saul's meeting with the "witch" of Endor is one of the best known in 1 Samuel. It contains some unique events that have troubled Bible students for many years. Again the spotlight of revelation turns back to Saul from David. We see here Saul's insensibility due to his departure from God.

"This visit to the medium of Endor is cited by the Chronicler as proof positive that Saul deserved the judgment that fell on him at Gilboa (1 Ch. 10:13)."¹

Chronologically, this section follows chapter 30. The writer evidently placed it here to provide background information for what follows.

¹Gordon, *I & II Samuel ...*, p. 192.

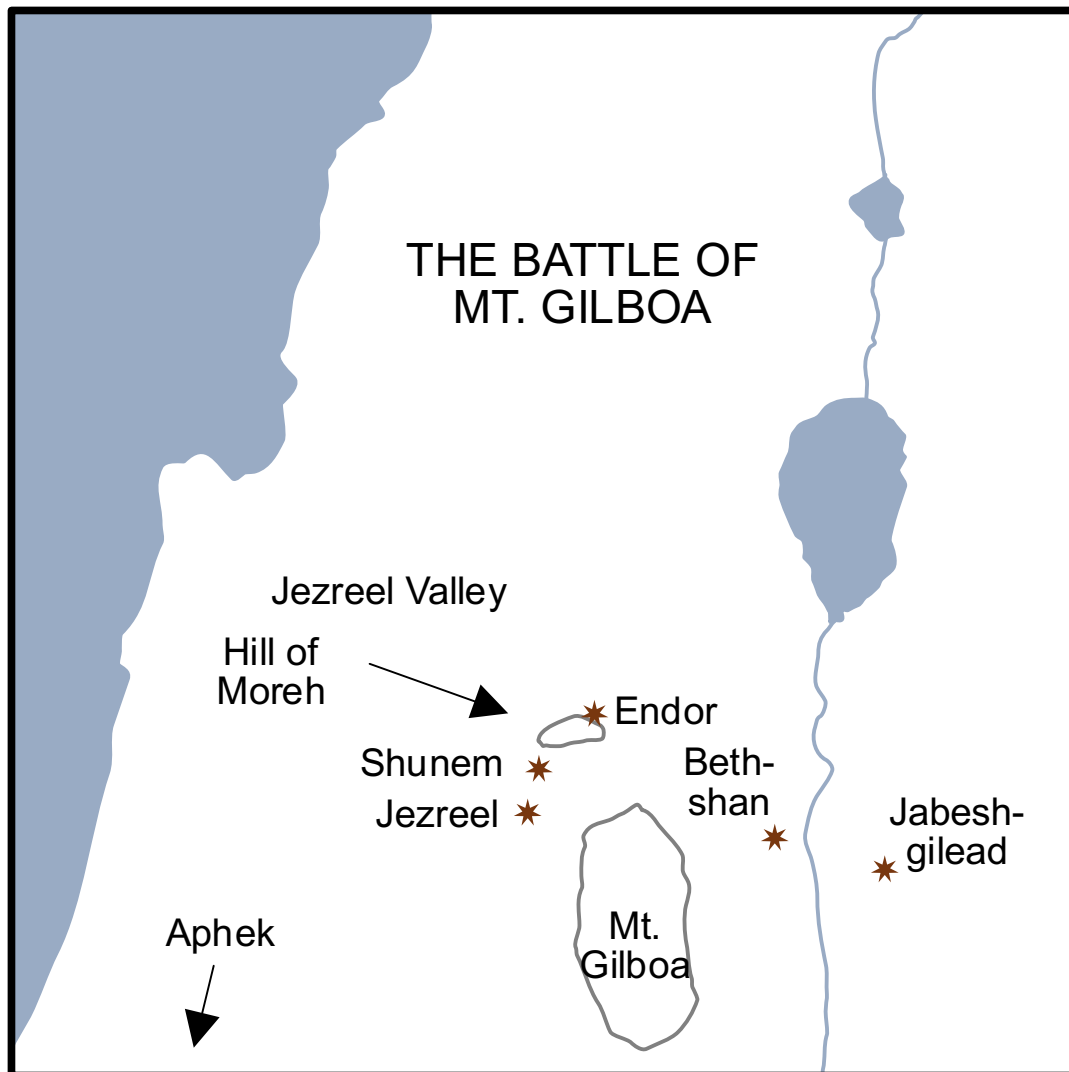
The threat of Philistine attack 28:3-7

Samuel's death, and the mention of Saul's commendable removal of mediums and spiritists from Israel, prepare for what follows (cf. Lev. 20:6; Deut. 18:10-11). Mediums and spiritists are people who try to communicate with the dead, but in reality communicate with evil spirits.¹ "Medium" is a term that stresses the mediating position of these people between the living and the supposed dead, and "spiritist" emphasizes the fact that they deal with demonic spirits.² The terms always go together in the Old Testament, indicating the close relationship that exists between these activities. Mediums and spiritists are different from witches, who seek to control events. The Mosaic Law prescribed death for mediums and spiritists, because God promised to give His people all the information He wanted them to have about the future from prophets (Deut. 18). It was unwise, even dangerous and therefore forbidden, for them to seek more information from these other sources (cf. 15:23).

Shunem stood on the south side of the hill of Moreh, which occupied part of the eastern end of the Jezreel plain in Issachar's territory. Gilboa lay opposite it farther south and was really the name of a mountain ridge. This was the same area where Gideon had routed the Midianites (Judg. 7). Endor (v. 7) stood on the north side of the hill of Moreh, on the other side from that on which the Philistines camped.

¹For an exposé and critique of Spiritualism written by a former Spiritualist minister and medium, see Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*, especially pp. 80-84. See also Kurt E. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*, pp. 123-66.

²See Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, pp. 20-50.



"The wording of this introduction (28:4f.) is notable, for it is strongly reminiscent of two other fateful confrontations between Saul and the Philistines, the first at Michmash/Gilgal (13:5f.), the second at Socoh/Elah (17:1f., 11)."¹

Saul again feared the Philistines (v. 5). If this enemy succeeded, they would cut Israel in half geographically. God gave Saul no guidance in response to his prayers. Since Saul had refused to listen to God in the past (chs. 13 and 15), God now refused to listen to him (cf. v. 18). He gave the king no revelation about how to proceed. Normally when people refuse to pay

¹Gunn, *The Fate ...*, p. 108.

attention to the word of God, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to hear the word of God (cf. Jer. 7:13-16; 2 Thess. 2:11-12).

Verse 6 says that God did not answer Saul by Urim. Abiathar, the priest, had taken the Urim and Thummim and joined David some time before this event (22:20; 23:6-12). So Saul did not have access to them now. Perhaps this verse means that, even when Saul did have access to them, God did not answer him. Since obtaining God's will by using the Urim and Thummim involved reaching into the priest's breastpiece and pulling one or the other of the objects out—one giving a positive answer and the other a negative answer—it seems that discovering God's will this way would be simple enough. But perhaps it was customary to repeat this process several times to insure accuracy. If so, we can better understand how Saul might not have been able to discern God's will this way. One writer suggested that Saul may have made a new Urim and Thummim, and that they are in view here.¹ But this is speculation.

"Could he that hated and persecuted Samuel and David, who were both prophets, expect to be answered by prophets? Could he that had slain the high priest, expect to be answered by Urim? Or could he that had sinned away the Spirit of grace, expect to be answered by dreams?"²

Verse 6 says that "Saul inquired of the LORD," but 1 Chronicles 10:14 says that he "did not inquire of the LORD." Probably Saul inquired of the LORD on this particular occasion, but he did not inquire of the LORD typically.

Saul then proceeded to try to obtain information about the future, specifically about his imminent encounter with the Philistines, from another supernatural source. Publicly Saul was against these diviners (v. 3), but privately he now sought one out. This is hypocrisy.

"... Saul's attempts at inquiry were of so unworthy a nature that it would be an abuse of language to speak of him as really 'inquiring of Jehovah.'"³

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 167

²Henry, p. 321.

³John W. Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, pp. 359-60.

Saul's conversation with the medium 28:8-14

Evidently Saul knew the woman would not cooperate with him if she knew who he was, so he disguised himself (v. 8). He further hid his hypocrisy by visiting her under cover of darkness.

"Saul began his reign at the dawning of the day when he was anointed king by Samuel the prophet (9:26), but he ended his reign by going out at night to visit a spirit medium."¹

"How sensible she is of danger from the edict of Saul, and what care she is in to guard against it; but not at all apprehensive of the obligations of God's law and the terrors of his wrath [v. 9]."²

Saul sank so low as to swear to the woman in the LORD's name that he would not punish her for breaking the LORD's Law (v. 10). This too was hypocrisy. He wanted to give a public impression of upholding the Mosaic Law, but really he broke it by seeking her out. Saul asked her to bring Samuel up from Sheol, the place of departed spirits.

Perhaps God allowed Samuel, or a vision or apparition of Samuel, to appear, as the text states (vv. 12, 15, 16), with still another prophecy (post-mortem!) from the LORD (vv. 16-19). The woman also saw who Saul really was, and this surprise terrified her, because she discovered that her life was in danger. (Josephus wrote that Samuel told her who Saul was.³) Some interpreters have concluded that a demon who impersonated Samuel came up.⁴ However, what "Samuel" proceeded to say in verses 16-19 may argue against this view. It seems to have been a message from God. Also, Saul identified the figure as Samuel (v. 14).⁵ Others have suggested that the woman tricked Saul into thinking that the person he saw was Samuel, but he was not. However, her own surprise argues against this view (v. 12).⁶ Evidently she expected contact with a demon posing as Samuel, but, to her

¹Wiersbe, p. 287.

²Henry, p. 321.

³Josephus, 6:14:2.

⁴E.g., Henry, p. 322; McGee, 2:180.

⁵See René Pache, *The Future Life*, pp. 74-77.

⁶See Haley, pp. 194-95; and Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, pp. 180-81.

amazement, God really permitted Samuel, or a vision of him, to appear.¹ Even less likely is the explanation that this was simply a hallucination that Saul saw in his deranged mind. Perhaps she was terrified because she was used to hearing voices from the dead but not seeing spirits.² This seems to have been a divine revelation to Saul, the last one God gave him.³

"The incident does not tell us anything about the veracity of claims to consult the dead on the part of mediums, because the indications are that this was an extraordinary event for her, and a frightening one because she was not in control."⁴

Mediums and spiritists do not have access to the dead but communicate with evil spirits posing as people who have died. That is why these spirits are called "deceiving spirits" (1 Kings 22:22).

"Spiritists, to-day, are deceived, in so far as they really believe they are communicating with the spirits of the dead; for it is easy for spirits of evil to impersonate any of the dead, even the most devoted and saintly Christians. They have watched them (Acts xix. 15) all their lives, and can easily counterfeit their voices, or say anything about them and their actions when on earth."⁵

This passage does not say that the medium brought up Samuel from the dead. God revealed Samuel to Saul.⁶ Similarly, God revealed Moses and Elijah to Peter, James, and John at Jesus' Transfiguration. Though departed saints do not have bodies, God gave them bodies for these special occasions, like He gave angels bodies for special appearances on earth.

Saul assured the medium that she did not need to fear him. Any supernatural guidance he could obtain with her help was worth her life to him. She described Samuel as a divine being (Heb. *elohim*, lit. strong one). This is, of course, a common name of God in the Old Testament. However

¹Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, p. 51. See also idem, *Biblical Demonology*, pp. 148-52.

²Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 185.

³See Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 265-69.

⁴Baldwin, p. 159. Cf. Tsumura, p. 624.

⁵Jessie Penn-Lewis, *War on the Saints*, p. 29.

⁶See Robert P. Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, pp. 175-76; Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, p. 181.

it also describes the judges in Israel who were divine beings in the sense that they served as judges under the Great Judge (Ps. 82:6; cf. John 10:35). Perhaps the woman meant that the man she saw looked like a judge, or like a divine being, because he was imposing. Samuel was one of the judges in Israel. She saw Samuel, or his ghostlike image, coming up out of the earth (i.e., Sheol, the place of departed spirits).¹ The ancients connected the area under the surface of the earth with the place of departed spirits because they buried people under the surface of the earth.

The writer identified Samuel as old and wrapped in a robe (v. 14). This is an interesting detail, since Saul had previously torn Samuel's robe when Samuel announced that God had rejected Saul from being king (15:27). Samuel had told Saul, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today" (15:28; cf. 24:4). Saul recognized Samuel and bowed before him out of respect. This too was hypocritical, since he had not previously obeyed Samuel, nor was he about to act on the warning that Samuel would soon give him.

Saul's conversation with Samuel 28:15-19

Samuel's soul had been at peace in the place of departed spirits, but now Saul had disturbed that rest. Saul described his reason for doing so: He wanted to obtain divine guidance concerning the Philistines from Samuel, since he could not get it from the LORD through other means. Samuel replied that Saul was wrong in thinking that Samuel would tell him what strategy to use, since the LORD would not. The prophet was, after all, simply the mouthpiece of God. The LORD had become Saul's real adversary, more so than the Philistines, since the king had refused to obey Yahweh. Samuel repeated God's judgment on Saul: "... the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David" (v. 17; cf. 15:27-28).

Samuel also explained that the LORD had ceased speaking to Saul because Saul had stopped listening to God. Specifically, he had failed to obey the LORD by slaying Amalek (ch. 15). Samuel's final revelation was that Yahweh would hand His people over to the Philistines tomorrow, and Saul and his sons would die in the battle. They would soon be with Samuel in Sheol, the place of departed spirits. Yahweh was still the true king of Israel and would

¹Gaebelein, 1:2:181-82. See Davis, in *A History ...*, pp. 254-58, for additional interpretations.

control the destiny of His people, even His king, though Saul always wanted to be the ultimate authority in Israel and to control his own destiny.

The reason God told the Israelites not to consult the spirit world was that He promised to reveal what was best for them to know about the future through prophets (Deut. 18:9-22). There are some things concerning the future about which people are better off ignorant. Samuel had knowledge of Saul's future, but he was a prophet. Nothing in Scripture indicates that demons know any more about the future than what God has revealed to people. In this case, Saul would probably have been better off not knowing he would die the next day. Yet knowing this, he still went into battle, evidently convinced that he could alter the will of God, as he had tried to do so many other times in his life. He still had not learned that Yahweh was his sovereign Master.

Saul's failure to listen 28:20-25

Why did the writer give us so much information about this woman's concern for Saul? For one thing, it is another instance of the reversal-of-fortune motif that is so common in 1 and 2 Samuel. Saul should have executed the woman for witchcraft, as the Law commanded, but instead she ministered to Saul. A disobedient medium became a source of blessing for the disobedient king. Saul had departed so far from God that even this woman, through whom he had just learned about his own death the next day, could nourish and refresh him.

Beyond this, the similarity between the woman's words and Samuel's words is striking. Samuel had said that because Saul had not obeyed God, God had done something to Saul (v. 18). The woman said that because she had obeyed Saul, Saul should do something for her (vv. 21-22).

"Saul realizes he has landed in a situation which resembles a covenant with the medium instead of with YHWH."¹

Samuel's words terrified Saul, but they did not move him to listen and obey. Saul had not eaten and was physically weak. Perhaps he had been fasting to get a word from God. The woman reminded Saul that she had listened to the king's promise that no harm would come to her, and her conduct reflected her faith in him. She then begged him to listen to her and to eat

¹W. A. M. Beuken, "1 Samuel 28: The Prophet as 'Hammer of Witches,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (1978):8.

something, since he was so weak, but Saul would not listen to her as he had not listened to God. Only after prolonged entreaty by the medium and Saul's servants did the king concede to eat.

"Such things are common even in our day. With the Bedawin [*sic*] it is nearly universal to cook the meat immediately after it is butchered, and to bake fresh bread for every meal."¹

The lavish meal that she prepared was truly "fit for a king" and was probably designed to place an obligation on Saul to spare her.² This proved to be Saul's "last supper."³ What a contrast it is with the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, the vice-regent who always listened to and obeyed God faithfully. Saul ate this meal in dread as he anticipated death the next day, whereas Jesus ate His Last Supper at peace with His Father anticipating death the next day.

"The final statement in the chapter reminds us of Judas—'He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night' (John 13:30, KJV)."⁴

We would expect that with such a striking warning, Saul would have withdrawn Israel's army and fled south toward Gibeah and safety, but he did not. He evidently still felt that he could oppose God's word and succeed. He went into battle the next day and perished. God removed His unfaithful anointed servant because he proved to be an insubordinate and inattentive vice-regent. He also disciplined the nation Saul represented by allowing the Philistines to defeat Israel.

This pericope helps the reader appreciate the serious consequences of not listening to God's word and not obeying His will. Saul could not get guidance from God because God had ceased giving His rebellious servant directions. People sometimes cannot get guidance from God because they have been unwilling to listen to God and obey Him. He stops speaking to them. Saul then tried to get guidance from elsewhere. God graciously provided it to him in the form of a final warning, but Saul disregarded that too. He plunged forward to his death. Similarly, Judas received a final warning from Jesus in the Upper Room, but he disregarded it and died within 24 hours. How

¹Thomson, 2:161. Cf. Gen. 18:6-8; Judg. 6:19; 13:15; Luke 15:23.

²Firth, p. 295.

³Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 196.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 288.

important it is not to harden our hearts when God speaks to us (cf. Ps. 95:6-11; Heb. 3:7-8, 15; 4:7)!

Yahweh's providential protection of David ch. 29

As Saul reached the depth of his distress, David attained the height of his success thus far. This chapter resumes the story that ended at 28:2, though some time later. The writer appears to have incorporated it in his narrative here in order to highlight the contrasts between Saul and David in chapters 27—31.

The Philistine commanders' fear of David 29:1-5

The commanders of the Philistine city-states mustered their troops and marched north to the town of Aphek. It is interesting that the first place the Philistines mustered their troops for battle against the Israelites in this book was at Aphek (4:1), and the last place they did so, that the writer recorded, was also at Aphek. This indicates that Israel had not subdued her neighbor enemy effectively during Saul's reign, because of his failure as her leader. Aphek stood near Philistia's northern border with Israel. The Philistine commanders were on their way to the Jezreel Valley to battle King Saul. Jezreel was a town on the northwestern slope of Mt. Gilboa, about three miles south of Shunem (cf. 28:4). The nearby spring (v. 1) would have been the Spring of Harod, southeast of the city at the foot of Mount Gilboa.

David and his 600 soldiers were bringing up the rear in the Philistine procession.

"If he [David] should, as was expected from him, fight for the Philistines against Israel, he would incur the imputation of being an enemy to the Israel of God and a traitor to his country, would make his own people hate him, and unanimously oppose his coming to the crown. If Saul should be killed (as it proved he was) in this engagement, the fault would be laid at David's door, as if he had killed him. So that on each side there seemed to be both sin and scandal. Into this strait he brought himself by his own unadvisedness, in quitting the land of Judah. Therefore, though God might justly have left him in this difficulty, to chastise him for his folly, yet, because his heart was upright with him, he would *not suffer him to be tempted*

*above what we was able, but with the temptation made a way for him to escape, 1 Cor. x. 13."*¹

God's way of escape took the following form: The Philistine commanders noticed David and his men and asked each other why Hebrew soldiers were accompanying them, since they were going to war against the Israelites. "Hebrew" is the common word that non-Israelites used to describe the Israelites, according to the Old Testament writers. It was an ethnic designation: the descendants of Heber. Achish, whom David had deceived into thinking that he was no longer loyal to Saul, came to his defense. David had lived in Philistia now for almost 16 months (cf. 27:7).

"The use of the [Hebrew] term *satan* ["adversary," v. 4] in this context is enlightening, for it gives important insight into the character and deceitfulness of the adversary of the believer. An adversary, as described in this context, would be one who would make out to be an ally, but at a crucial time would turn and bring disaster. This is precisely the apostle Paul's characterization of Satan, the adversary of the believer (cf. II Cor. 11:14; I Tim. 5:14)."²

The other Philistine commanders could hardly believe how naive Achish was being. They saw that David would probably turn against them in the upcoming battle in order to regain acceptance with Saul. They proceeded to use the same phrase Achish had used to defend David, "Is this not David?" (v. 5) to impress on their gullible comrade what a danger David posed to them. David had not only slain many of Israel's enemies, including many Philistines, but he also seemingly enjoyed solidarity with Saul in the minds of all the people, according to the song they quoted.

David's exemption from the battle 29:6-11

Achish swore in Yahweh's name to David, probably to impress the truth of what he was saying on David, that David had been upright and pleasing in his sight.

"... to polytheistic people, to make an oath in the name of gods other than the gods they normally serve is not unthinkable. So, this Philistine king made an oath by David's

¹Henry, p. 323.

²Davis, in *A History ...*, p. 260.

god either 'as a matter of courtesy'¹ or because he believed that David was really *just* and hence swore by his god *Yahweh* ..."²

Nevertheless, David had not won the confidence of the other Philistine commanders, and so he had to return to Philistia. David again (cf. 17:29; 20:1; 26:18) asked, "But what have I done?" (v. 8). He had done nothing to deserve this rejection. He then professed to want to go into the battle and to fight the enemies of "my lord the king" (v. 8). David probably wanted Achish to think that he was referring to Achish as "my lord the king," but he really meant Saul, I think. It seems incredible that David would really have entered the battle and fought for the Philistines against the Israelites. Thus David continued his deception.

For the third time Achish vindicated David (vv. 3, 6, 9). Note the parallel with Jesus' threefold vindication by His enemies (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; cf. Luke 23:22).³ David had been like a divine messenger to the Philistine king: a source of much blessing to him (cf. Gen. 12:2-3). David may have shared the booty that he had taken in his battles against his southern enemies with Achish (cf. 27:7-10).⁴ Nevertheless the other Philistine rulers would not allow David to enter the battle. Consequently, David had to return south with his men, the former servants of David's previous commander, Saul. David did as Achish ordered in the morning, and the Philistines proceeded north to engage Saul near Mt. Gilboa.

This chapter is an encouraging revelation of how God takes care of His own when they are under extreme stress and not entirely obedient. David had come close to running out of ideas about how he could preserve his life (cf. 27:1). He had apparently received no special guidance from God in answer to prayer. The name of God does not appear in chapter 27 or in chapter 29, except in Achish's references to Him, suggesting that God's guidance was rare while David was in Philistine territory. David had even resorted to deception to protect himself (cf. 27:10-12; 29:8). Nonetheless, God continued to guard His anointed servant, even in a foreign land. He allowed David to convince Achish of his loyalty, which yielded a measure of protection for David. He also enlightened the other Philistine commanders

¹"McCarter, p. 426."

²Tsumura, p. 635. Cf. Goldman, p. 174.

³Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 200.

⁴Miscall, p. 174.

as to David's threat to themselves, which resulted in their sending him far from the field of battle.

"The very same Philistines who will finally dispose of Saul (ch. 31) are the ones who unwittingly rescue David."¹

In short, God providentially caused the reactions of people, as different as those reactions were, to protect David (cf. Rom. 8:28). Even when God's people do not sense it, God cares for them, as their shepherd (cf. Ps. 23; 37:23).

"David's sixteen months at Ziklag probably marked a low point in his spiritual walk with God. He displayed a lack of faith in going there, as though God could not protect him in his own land; he was not honest with Achish after he arrived there; and it was only because of God's intervening grace that he was spared from having to fight his own people. Significantly, too, it was during this time that his men nearly mutinied against him, not being sure that he was leading them aright. He had been doing so well until this time, but here he definitely slipped."²

David's wise leadership of the Israelites ch. 30

This chapter reveals many qualities that marked David as an outstanding leader. As Saul continued to decline, God perfected the characteristics of leadership in David that prepared him for the throne. The Amalekites' capture of Ziklag at first looked as if tragedy had struck, but later it proved to be a great blessing. In this respect, this event epitomized David's whole career (and that of Jesus Christ). As a result of this victory, the people of Judah came to regard David as the obvious successor to Saul's throne.

The chiasitic structure of the chapter focuses attention on the defeat of the Amalekites, the people that God had commissioned Israel's leaders, including Saul, to annihilate.

"A David reaches destroyed Ziklag and finds it plundered (30:1-3).

¹Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 199.

²Wood, *Israel's United ...*, p. 211.

- B David and his men are promised the Lord's help (30:4-8).
- C David defeats the Amalekites (30:9-20)
- B' David shares the Lord's plunder with his men (30:21-25).
- A' David returns to Ziklag and distributes the remaining plunder (30:26-31)."¹

David's crisis and his response 30:1-6

David took three days to return from Aphek (29:11) to Ziklag. The Amalekites, whom David had previously raided (27:8), took advantage of the Philistines' and David's absence to retaliate in the Negev and on Ziklag. They plundered both Philistine and Judahite territory (v. 16). God graciously led them to carry the Israelite women and children away captive, rather than killing them. When David and his men arrived back home, they discovered Ziklag empty of inhabitants and burned down. David joined his men in weeping over the tragedy that these enemies of God's kingdom had caused (cf. Matt. 23:37). David's supporters then turned on him, and almost stoned him, giving him trouble on two fronts simultaneously.

"Great faith must expect such severe exercises. Things are sometimes at the worst with the church and people of God just before they begin to mend."²

In his distress David, as usual, strengthened himself in the LORD by relying on Yahweh and inquiring of Him (vv. 6-8). From the Psalms we know that David often did this by looking back on God's past faithfulness, looking up in prayer, and looking forward with God's promises in view.

"David's genius was his spiritual resilience."³

"... Yahweh is never mentioned in 1 Sam. 27:1—28:2, with the only direct reference being from Achish in 29:6. By contrast, Yahweh is mentioned frequently in this chapter [vv. 6, 8, 23, 26]. ... This represents a fundamental shift in David's approach

¹Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 791.

²Henry, p. 323.

³Baldwin, p. 169.

since he arrived in Philistine territory, and presents him in a theologically positive manner."¹

"Both David and Saul are portrayed as persons in deep crises of leadership, and both are deeply at risk. What interests us is the difference of response. ... Saul seeks refuge in a medium [but David inquired of the LORD]."²

God's provision of guidance 30:7-10

David obtained an answer through the Urim and Thummim, which the high priest carried in the breastpiece of his ephod (cf. 23:2, 4, 9). God no longer responded to Saul's prayers (28:15), but He did answer David's (v. 8). David divided his troops into two groups as he had done when he organized his attack against Nabal (25:13). The many comparisons and contrasts between this chapter and chapter 25 point out the differences between foolish Nabal and wise David. The Besor Brook is probably the Wadi Ghazze, which flows west into the Mediterranean Sea a few miles south of Ziklag.³

David's kindness to the Egyptian servant 30:11-15

David and his men were undoubtedly very angry and ready to kill anyone who proved to have had a hand in kidnapping their family members. To his credit David did not kill this Egyptian, as he planned to kill Nabal earlier. Instead he treated him kindly, in contrast to the man's Amalekite master's treatment of him, and won his favor and cooperation. Contrast Nabal's disdain for David, whom Nabal regarded as a runaway servant (25:10-11). The Egyptian wanted a guarantee of safety from David, as had Saul (cf. 24:2). Receiving this, he agreed to lead David and his men to the Amalekites' camp.

The "Negev of the Cherethites" (v. 14) probably refers to the section of the Negev that the Philistines controlled (cf. Zeph. 2:5), since the name Cherethites connects with the name Cretans, and the Philistines are known to have come from Crete. The "Negev of Caleb" (v. 14) was probably that

¹Firth, p. 304.

²Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 201.

³Tsumura, p. 641.

section of the Negev that Caleb's descendants lived in, namely, the area to the south of Hebron (cf. 25:3; Josh. 15:19; Judg. 1:20).

David's successful victory over the Amalekites 30:16-20

The Amalekites were feasting on the plunder that they had taken from Ziklag, although the Egyptian servant had received nothing to eat or drink from them for three days and three nights (cf. v. 12).

David launched his attack in "the twilight" and continued fighting "until the evening of the next day" (v. 17).

"Probably David waited until dawn and then attacked, for if he had attacked at night it would have been too easy to kill his own family or for the Amalekites to escape unseen."¹

Since 400 of the Amalekites escaped (v. 17), as many as the total number of David's soldiers (v. 10), they obviously had a much larger army than David did. The camel was the animal of choice for escaping quickly at this time; it was the fastest means of transportation (cf. Judg. 7:12). David recovered everything substantial (cf. v. 16) that the Amalekites had taken plus booty from this enemy (cf. v. 26).

"David overcame a numerically superior force, as Gideon had done (Judg. 7:19-23), because of Yahweh's presence. Saul failed to destroy Amalek in spite of Yahweh's command (1 Sa. 15). With Yahweh's presence, David succeeded where Saul had failed."²

Sharing spoil with David's followers 30:21-25

The rest of this chapter describes the distribution of plunder from this battle. The amount of space the writer devoted to this revelation shows that he intended to stress it.

David returned to his 200 exhausted followers at the Besor Brook and greeted them (cf. 17:22; 25:5-6). David was a greeter, who saw the importance of initiating friendly contact with others. The New Testament frequently exhorts believers to greet one another.

¹Ibid., p. 642.

²Firth, p. 308.

Some of the soldiers who had participated in combat with the Amalekites did not want to share the booty with those who had guarded the baggage (cf. v. 24). Saul had had his critics too (cf. 10:27). David, however, took a different view of things. He saw that God had given them this victory; the spoil was not essentially what the combat soldiers had won but what the LORD had given His people—along with protection (cf. 1 Cor. 3:8; Matt. 20:12-15). Yahweh was the real deliverer of Israel (cf. 17:46-47). Again, this illustrates David's perception of God's relation to Israel and to himself, which was so different from Saul's view. His generous policy of dividing the spoils of war so the non-combatants would receive a portion (vv. 24-31) was in harmony with the Mosaic Law (Num. 31:27). This policy further prepared the way for the Judahites' acceptance of David as Saul's successor.

"Every post of service is not alike a post of honour, yet those that are in any way serviceable to the common interest, though in a meaner station, ought to share in the common advantages, as in the natural body every member has its use and therefore has its share in the nourishment."¹

Sharing spoil with the Judahites 30:26-31

David also distributed some of the war plunder to the elders of Judah.² He evidently did so because he viewed the booty as coming from the enemies of all Judah, even the enemies of the LORD (v. 26). He may have also done this to curry favor with the elders. They later anointed David king over the house of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4; 5:1-3). David's decision to give made his new kingdom possible.

"Many victorious kings have used surplus plunder to enrich themselves and to build grandiose palaces; David used these first spoils to show his gratitude to the citizens of those areas and towns in Judah where he and his men had wandered when being pursued by Saul."³

This chapter presents many qualities that mark strong, effective leadership. These include: empathy (v. 4), faith (vv. 6, 8, 23, 26), decisiveness (v.

¹Henry, p. 324.

²See Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 795, for the locations of the sites named in verses 27-30.

³David Payne, p. 153.

10), kindness (v. 12), persistence (v. 17), integrity (v. 23), fairness (v. 24), and generosity (vv. 21-31), to name a few. We can also see development in David's restraint, as compared to his dealings with Nabal (cf. ch. 25). David's effectiveness also contrasts with Saul's ineffectiveness as a leader. Chapters 19—30 reveal that David's behavior improved as a result of the adversity that he had to endure (cf. James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

"Saul, disobeying God's prophet, defeated the Amalekites but lost his kingdom (ch. 15); David, seeking God's will, defeats the Amalekites and embarks on his reign (ch. 30)."¹

One of the strongest emphases in this chapter is David's generosity. When God gives blessings, His people should view them as His gifts to us. We should share them with our fellow spiritual warriors and with our fellow spiritual citizens (cf. Heb. 13:16; Rom. 12:13; 1 Cor. 12:14-26; Gal. 6:10).

The death of Saul ch. 31

"Having dealt with David's story in ch. 30, the storyline now joins together the account of Saul, which was broken off at the end of ch. 28, and that of the Philistines, which was broken off at the end of ch. 29, at Mount Gilboa."²

The scene shifts from Ziklag, in the south of Canaan, and David, to Mt. Gilboa, in the north of Canaan, and Saul. Saul's battle with the Philistines in this chapter may have been simultaneous with David's battle against the Amalekites in the previous one. At the end of 1 Samuel, the writer again utilized the literary device of alternating between Saul and David, as he did at the beginning of the book with Samuel and Eli's sons, in order to highlight the contrasts between these key individuals. This chapter records the change of power from Saul to David that continues through 2 Samuel 1.

"Chapters 30 and 31 gain in poignancy and power if we regard their events as simultaneous. In the far south, David is anxious about his own and about spoil, while in the far north Saul and the Israelite army perish. ... While David smites (*hikkah*) ['slaughtered,' 30:17] the Amalekites, and they flee (*nus*)

¹Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 791.

²Tsumura, p. 648.

[30:17], the Philistines smite (*hikkah*) ['killed,' v. 2] Saul and his sons, and Israel flees (*nus*) [v. 7]."¹

The account of Saul's death here differs from the one that the Amalekite messenger gave David later, which the writer recorded in 2 Samuel 1. This one is quite clearly the factual one (cf. 1 Chron. 10:1-14 for a third account).²

The battle of Mt Gilboa 31:1-6

God had announced that Saul would deliver His people from the hand of the Philistines (9:16). However, Saul did this only to a limited extent, because he did not follow the LORD faithfully. The Philistines eventually got the better of Saul and his soldiers (cf. Josh. 1:7-9). This battle took place in 1011 B.C., the last year of Saul's reign. Three other important battles took place nearby in the Jezreel Valley in Israel's history: Deborah and Barak's defeat of Sisera (Judg. 4:15; 5:21), Gideon's victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7), and Pharaoh Neco's killing of King Josiah (2 Kings 23:29). The name of God does not appear in this chapter, perhaps suggesting that He had now given up Saul to the consequences of his apostasy (cf. Rom. 1).

Jonathan, a faithful son and subject of the king, followed his father into battle. The death of this godly man, because of his father's sins, seems unfair as well as tragic, but God permitted it. David would replace Saul on the throne. Another son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, also known as Eshbaal, must not have been present at this battle (cf. 2 Sam. 2:8, 10, 12; 3:8, 14-15; 4:5, 8, 12; 1 Chron. 8:33). Likewise Abner, Saul's general, somehow escaped. Three of Saul's sons died with him, fulfilling Samuel's prophecy of their imminent deaths (28:19).

David had been Saul's armor-bearer before he had to flee from Saul's presence (16:21). Saul, probably fearing that the Philistines would torture and abuse him,³ as they had Samson, asked his armor-bearer to kill him. But the young man refused to do so, as David had when he had the opportunity. Why this armor-bearer feared to kill Saul is unclear. Perhaps he feared the disgrace that would have hounded him, or even death, for killing the king. Or perhaps, like David, he feared God, and so would not kill the LORD's anointed. The insubordination of this armor-bearer, which had

¹Miscall, pp. 181-82.

²See Gordon, *I & II Samuel ...*, p. 202.

³McCarter, p. 443.

characterized Saul's conduct before Yahweh, led Saul to take his own life. Josephus regarded Saul's death an act of great courage on his part.¹ Whereas suicide in one sense takes courage, in another sense it is a cowardly act—in that it reflects a refusal to face the future. The Bible records three other suicides: Ahithophel's (2 Sam. 17:23), Zimri's (1 Kings 16:18), and Judas' (Matt. 27:5).

"Isn't it interesting, he's very concerned about his image with the enemy but shows little concern for his relationship with God whom he is about to meet?"²

Eli, too, died (though indirectly) as a result of a battle with the Philistines. Some of his sons also died (4:17). Eli had served as Israel's high priest unfaithfully for 40 years when he died (4:18), and Saul had served as her king for about 40 years when he died (13:1). Eli fell off his seat and died (4:18), but Saul fell on his sword and died.³ Both men were disappointments to God and His people.

Saul's armor-bearer also committed suicide in battle, perhaps because if he had outlived the one whom he should have protected with his life, he could have been executed for dereliction of duty. Jewish tradition identified Saul's armor-bearer as Doeg, the Edomite.⁴ If true, it was ironic that Doeg died by the same sword that he had used to massacre Israel's priests at Nob: his own sword (22:18; cf. Gal. 6:7).

The soldiers who went into battle with Saul also perished. The king not only died, but he took many of his own men down with him.

"First Samuel opens with the birth of a gifted baby, Samuel, and closes with the death of a guilty man, King Saul."⁵

"The chief spiritual value of this whole Book consists in the solemn lessons it teaches by the life and failure and death of this man [Saul]. The story proclaims forevermore that advantages and remarkable opportunities are not guarantees

¹Josephus, 6:14:4.

²Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 122.

³Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," pp. 798-99.

⁴Jamieson, et al., p. 228.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 286.

of success unless the heart be firm and steady in allegiance to principle and loyalty to God."¹

Saul's death ended David's fugitive experiences, which Leon Wood estimated lasted four or five years at the most.²

The aftermath of the battle 31:7-13

The other Israelite soldiers retreated when they heard that Saul and his sons had died. This left towns in the region open for Philistine seizure and occupation. Instead of driving the native inhabitants out of the land, Saul had made it possible for them to drive the Israelites out and to reestablish themselves in Galilee (cf. Josh. 1:2-9).

The Philistines cut off Saul's head, as David had earlier cut off the head of Goliath, the Philistine champion (17:51). They hung it as a trophy of war in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron. 10:10). Ironically, Saul, who was a head taller than the other Israelites, became a head shorter than he had been. The Philistines literally "cut him down to size." The Philistines also circulated Saul's weapons and sent them on a tour of their pagan temples before finally depositing them in the temple of Ashtaroath, their chief female deity. David had taken Goliath's head to Jerusalem, and had put his weapons in his own tent, at least temporarily (17:54). The giant's sword was in the tabernacle at Nob when David went there (21:9). This book began with scenes from God's temple, but it ends with scenes in the temples of Israel's pagan enemies. David's faith had brought Israel success, but Saul's disobedience had lost it.

"The University of Pennsylvania expedition at Bethshan (1921-1933) unearthed a temple which the excavators identified with the temple of Ashtaroath, in which Saul's armor was placed (1 Sam. 31:10)."³

The Philistines nailed Saul's decapitated corpse on the wall of their nearby town of Beth-shan (v. 10). In the ancient Near East the treatment of a corpse was very significant. If people, even enemies, honored a person, they treated his corpse with care and gave it an honorable burial, but if they did not respect him, they treated his dead body with contempt. The

¹Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 126.

²Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 250.

³Free, pp. 152-53.

Philistines showed great disrespect for Saul by nailing his dead body on the wall of Beth-shan. This town stood at the east end of the Jezreel Valley, near where the battle had taken place.¹ Contrast their respect for David in chapter 29.

However, the men of Jabesh-gilead rescued Saul's corpse from further humiliation, burned it—probably because the Philistines had abused it², and perhaps because it was a local practice³—and buried the remaining bones. Jabesh-gilead stood about 13 miles east-southeast of Beth-shan. Saul had earlier rescued Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites (ch. 11). Some of its inhabitants may have been Saul's blood relatives.⁴ The tamarisk tree under which the people buried Saul was very different from a royal tomb, but that kind of tree was a symbol of life, since it was an evergreen. The writer may have wanted us to remember that earlier Saul had played the fool under another tamarisk in Gibeah (cf. 22:6). Later, David honored Saul and Jonathan by digging up their bones and burying them more appropriately in their family tomb (2 Sam. 21:12-14). The seven-day fast also honored Saul but was much less than the honors granted other great leaders of Israel (cf. Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8). The writer evidently recorded all these details to show the ignominy in which Saul died because he departed from the LORD.

This is how the life of Israel's first king, the man after the Israelites' own heart, ended (cf. 1 Chron. 10:13-14; Hos. 13:11). He was full of promise at his anointing, having many natural qualities that could have contributed to a successful reign. He also possessed the Holy Spirit's enablement after his anointing. Unfortunately, he did not become a source of blessing to Israel and the world, nor did God bless him personally. Instead, he became a curse to Israel, the world, and himself. He did so because he failed to acknowledge Yahweh as the true king of Israel, and because he failed to view himself as Yahweh's servant. His life teaches us that the key to blessing or cursing is one's trust in, and obedience to, God.

"At the end ... much remains to praise, much to blame, and much to wonder at."⁵

¹See Finegan, pp. 167-68.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 220.

³Firth, p. 315.

⁴See my comments on 11:6-11.

⁵R. B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy*, p. 32.

Note the differences between Saul's death and Jesus Christ's. Jesus was consistently trusting and obedient to His Father's will. He laid down His life as a sacrifice for others rather than taking it Himself. He spent the night before His death in prayer to His Father, whereas Saul spent his last night with a medium. Jesus Christ blessed many through His death, even the whole human race, but Saul brought blessing to others through his death only because it cleared the way for someone better.

Chapters 21—31 contrast the rise of David and the fall of Saul. The reason for both was clearly the extent of their commitment to Yahweh. We can see their commitment in their responses to His revealed will.

Some writers have felt that God was not fair with Saul, that Saul really did not have a chance as king. But the text presents Saul as a well-qualified person who could have become a great king (chs. 9—11). He did not fail because God set him up for failure, but because he was unfaithful to God. Christians, too, need not fail. Our choices make the difference.

SAUL'S BAD CHOICES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES¹		
His choices	Their consequences	Texts
He assumed a priestly role and offered sacrifices before battle.	Samuel announced God's termination of his dynasty and His choice of a new king.	13:5-23
He made a foolish oath.	The people turned against him.	14:1-52
He disobeyed God's instructions by not completely destroying Agag.	Samuel announced God's utter rejection of him as king.	15:1-9
He personally tried to kill David.	Fear and an evil spirit overcame him.	18:10-16

¹Adapted from *The Nelson ...*, p. 486.

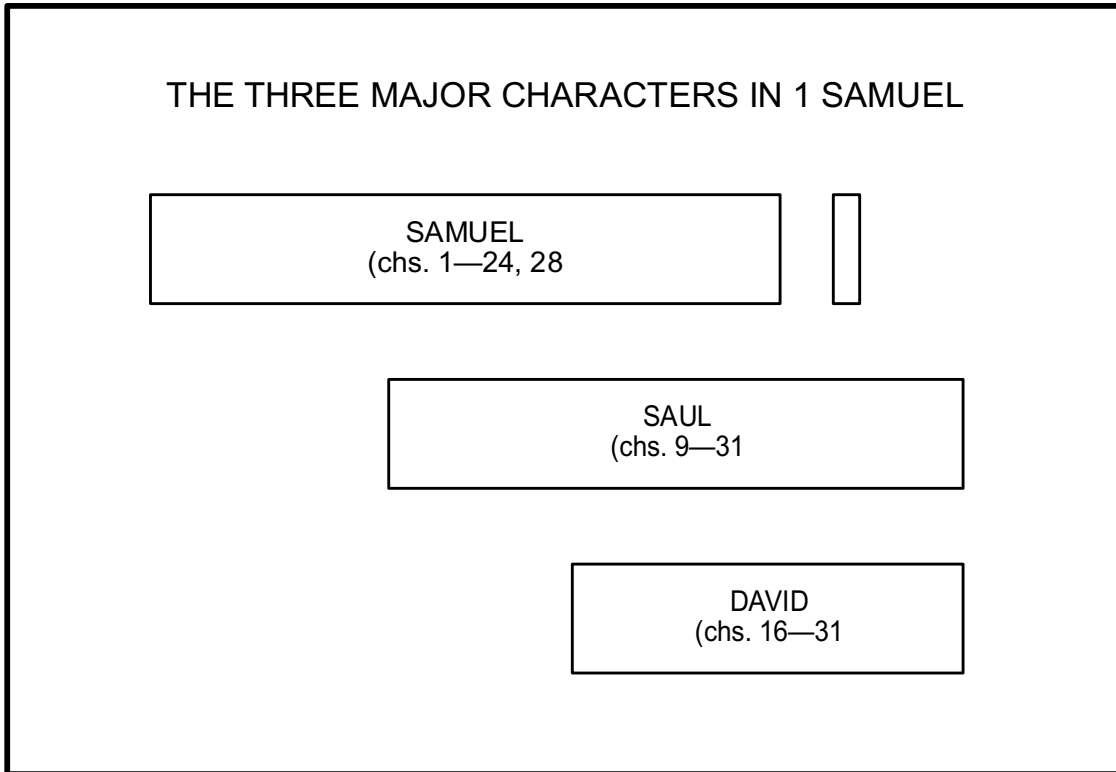
He ordered the murder of David.	He became paranoid.	19:1-7
He again tried to kill David.	An evil spirit tormented him.	19:8-10
He continued his murderous campaign against David.	He became jealous and fearful of David.	19:11-24
He tried to get Jonathan to assist in killing David.	He became violent toward Jonathan.	20:1-42
He ordered Doeg to kill the priests of Nob.	He slipped further into madness and depravity.	22:6-23
He visited a witch.	He became terrified of his future death.	28:7-25
He committed suicide.	He died in great shame.	31:4

The writer also developed the motif of the proper response to the LORD's anointed in this part of the book. David's respect for the priests, and his seeking of God's will through them, shows the proper attitude. Saul, on the other hand, slaughtered them, showing that he no longer cared about the worship of Yahweh, and sought guidance from the spiritual underworld. God spared people who acknowledged David as His anointed, and they became sources of fertility. Those who opposed David suffered God's curse and died.

This book opened with Samuel's birth, hope, and an answer to prayer. It closes with Saul's burial, despair, and an act of divine judgment. It is a book of transition, contrasting rule by God with rule by man. If *we* want to run things, they will turn out as they did for Saul. If we let God rule, they will turn out as they did for Samuel and David.

The record of Samuel illustrates how commitment to God can overcome a terrible environment. Saul illustrates the consequences of double-mindedness in a person: wanting to serve God some of the time and self some of the time. Saul may have been a believer in Yahweh who yielded to

the desires of his flesh.¹ David illustrates what happens when a believer seeks to honor God. He or she experiences failure as well as success, but the general course of his or her life is upward.



¹See Samuel Ridout, *King Saul—The Man After the Flesh*.

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