

# Notes on 1 Samuel

2 0 1 2 E d i t i o n

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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 A.D. 1517). 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 as the writer in the book. Statements in the Book of 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 his reign, and whose duties may have been connected with literary work."<sup>1</sup>

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. 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.<sup>2</sup> The Babylonian Talmud (ca. A.D. 500) attributed authorship of 1 Samuel 1—24 to the prophet Samuel, and the rest to

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

<sup>2</sup>For a refutation of this view, see Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 284-85.

Nathan and Gad.<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that Samuel wrote both books.<sup>4</sup> One conservative estimate of the final date of composition is about 960 B.C.<sup>5</sup> Another guess is near 920 or 900 B.C.<sup>6</sup>

### **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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Book of Samuel covers about 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 in the Book of Judges. 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).<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

<b>OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY</b>	
<b>Events</b>	<b>Biblical References</b>
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
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

<sup>3</sup>*Baba Bathra* 14b, 15a.

<sup>4</sup>See David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>5</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup>Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 709.

<sup>7</sup>See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>8</sup>See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>9</sup>Leon 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.

<sup>10</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, pp. 149-50.

<b>OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (CONT.)</b>	
<b>Events</b>	<b>Biblical References</b>
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.<sup>11</sup>

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 original readers, and to readers of all time, by revealing the causes and effects of various human responses to God's grace.<sup>12</sup> 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 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.<sup>13</sup> Some believe it was to show that God provides leadership for His people.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Howard, pp. 141, 146-47.

<sup>12</sup>See 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.

<sup>13</sup>E.g., Ludwig Kohler, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup>Stanley 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.

<sup>15</sup>E.g., Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:26.

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. 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 rest on an appreciation for God's initiative in reaching out to undeserving sinners in grace. We also see how disregard 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. They 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 our response to God's grace determines our destiny.

### **GENRE**

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

"No book of the Bible has been the object of such intense interest to literary analysts as has Samuel."<sup>16</sup>

### **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. Some of the characteristic compositional techniques include: the repetition of key words, irony, and repetition.<sup>17</sup> 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 the anticipation of blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 159-61, 165.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.

**OUTLINE**

- I. Eli and Samuel 1:1—4:1a
  - 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—4:1a
    - 1. Samuel's call 3:1-18
    - 2. Samuel's ministry 3:19—4:1a
- II. The history of the ark of the covenant 4:1b—7:1
  - 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 terminate God's judgment 6:1-9
    - 2. The return of the ark to Bethshemesh 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

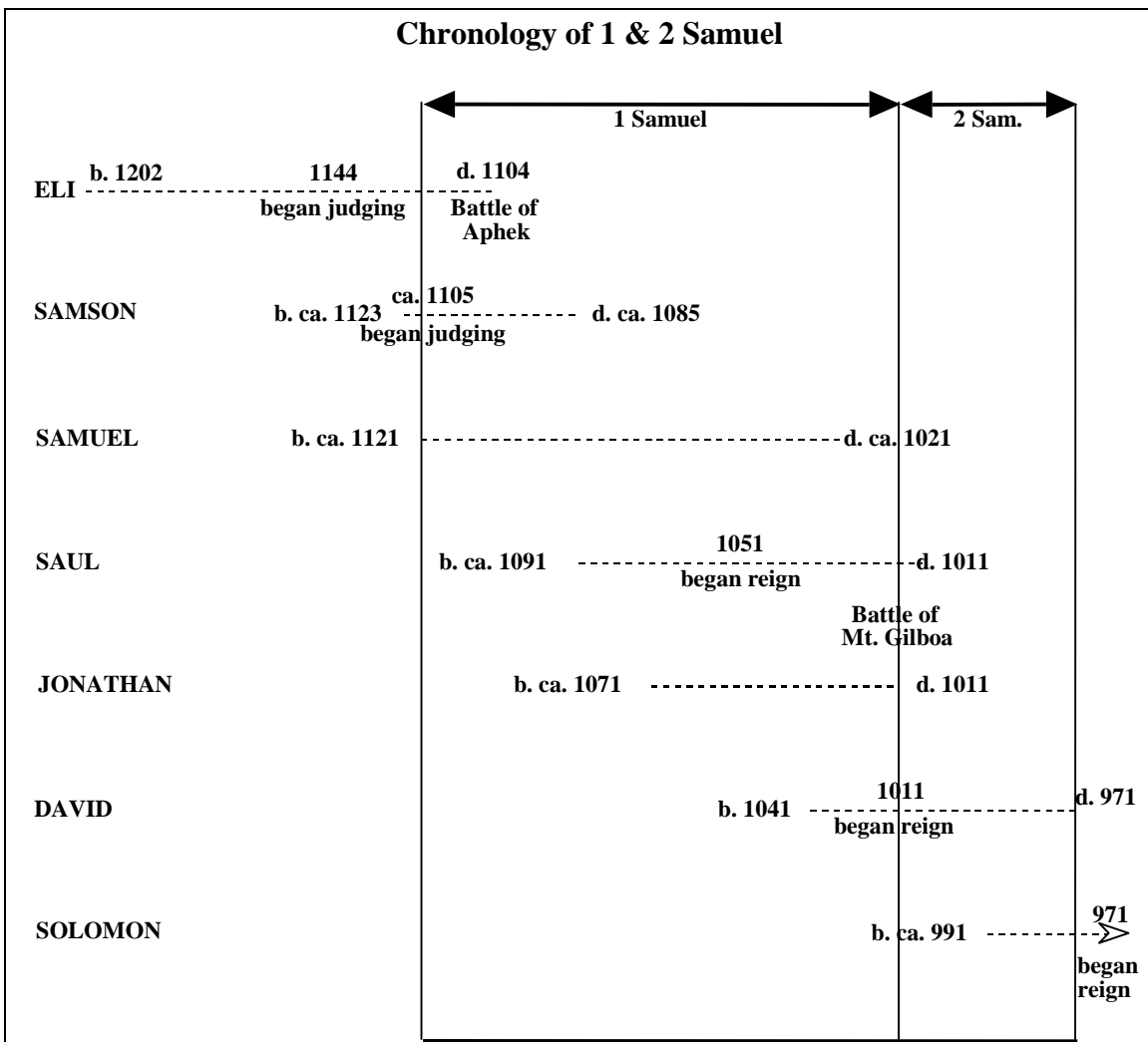
(Continued in notes on 2 Samuel)

# 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.).<sup>19</sup> First Samuel overlaps Judges chronologically.



<sup>19</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1981):247, dated Samson's death about 1085 B.C.

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

In the first subsection (1:1—2:10), we have the joyful story of Samuel's miraculous birth and his mother's gratitude to God for reversing her barrenness and making her fertile. 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. 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.

#### **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, witnesses to vulnerable faith, together bracket Israel's larger story of power."<sup>20</sup>

#### **The problem 1:1-2**

Samuel's parents lived near Ramathaim-zophim (lit. two heights, elsewhere called Ramah, e.g., v. 19, lit. height) in Ephraim in central Canaan. 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) rather than Elkanah (lit. God created) who emerges as the person of outstanding faith. Hannah's problem was that she was barren (v. 2).

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 written this to remind us of the unusual Nazirite status of both judges.

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<sup>20</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "I Samuel 1: A Sense of a Beginning," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102:1 (1990):48.

### Hannah's barrenness 1:3-8

Elkanah was a bigamist, a marital status forbidden by God (Gen. 2:24). However, Elkanah loved Hannah dearly and gave her special consideration since 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

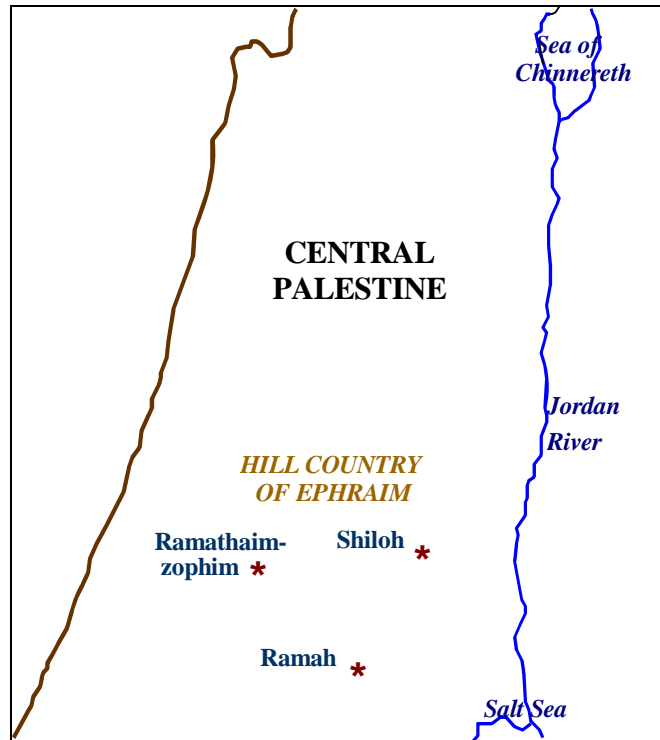
God's curse on her (v. 6; cf. Hagar's treatment of Sarai; Gen. 16:4). From the context we learn that Hannah was an unusually godly woman. Probably her barrenness was not a divine punishment for sin. It appears to have been a natural condition that God placed on her for His own purposes, some of which 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. However, he seems to have been somewhat insensitive to the depth of Hannah's suffering as a barren woman (v. 8).

The name "Lord of hosts" occurs first in the Old Testament in verse 3.<sup>21</sup> 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. The "hosts" are the armies of the sovereign God and consist of humans (17:45), angels (Josh. 5:14), and stars (Isa. 40:26). This name expresses the infinite resources and power at God's disposal as He fights for His people.

"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). . . .



<sup>21</sup>See Matitahu Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 36 (1965):49-58.

"Third, the scene ends with Elkanah's four-fold question, three times *lameh*, '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."<sup>22</sup>

### **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. 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 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 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 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.<sup>23</sup> 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).<sup>24</sup> Pouring out one's soul before God (v. 15) graphically describes earnest, burdened praying.<sup>25</sup> 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).

"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."<sup>26</sup>

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

<sup>22</sup>Brueggemann, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup>This is the only Old Testament passage that shows a priest blessing an individual worshipper.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 573.

<sup>25</sup>G. W. Ahlstrom, "1 Samuel 1,15," *Biblica* 60:2 (1979):254.

<sup>26</sup>Brueggemann, p. 37.

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 "the name of God." Hannah, whose name means "grace" or "graciousness," recognized that Samuel's birth was not just a coincidence. It was an answer to prayer and a supernatural gift from God.

"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]."<sup>27</sup>

### **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."<sup>28</sup>

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. 30:1-8).

Samuel may have been as old as three years before Hannah weaned him and brought him to the sanctuary (v. 23; cf. 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. 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 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

<sup>27</sup>Brueggemann, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

addressed and thanksgiving uttered. No wonder the narrative ends with yielding, grateful, trusting worship."<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup>

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

## **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)."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Brueggemann, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup>Youngblood, p. 575.

<sup>31</sup>Homer Heater Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>32</sup>Youngblood, p. 579.

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). 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 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 a reference to a king that God would raise up as His anointed representative to lead Israel (v. 10). This is 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."<sup>33</sup>

The motif of God making the barren fertile in response to their trust and obedience runs through the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel (cf. Samuel). So does the corollary truth that God will make the "powerful," who are not trusting and obedient, infertile and ultimately dead (cf. Saul). Likewise the motif of the Lord's anointed king is a major one in 1 and 2 Samuel (cf. David). 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.<sup>34</sup> 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 the fortunes of people in response to their response to His will.

### **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.

<sup>33</sup>Fred E. Young, "First and Second Samuel," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 276.

<sup>34</sup>Longman and Dillard, p. 159.

"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."<sup>35</sup>

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

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 writer documented these evaluations 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 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 worthless men (v. 12, i.e., wicked in God's sight; cf. 1:16).

"To this day, arrogant assertiveness and self-seeking are temptations to all those in positions of great power in society."<sup>36</sup>

"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)."<sup>37</sup>

### **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 despised the Lord's offerings (vv. 12, 17). Likewise in this one the writer described Samuel as "before the Lord" at 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).<sup>38</sup> Hannah dressed

<sup>35</sup>Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup>Payne, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup>Heater, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup>N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. II 18 and 2 Sam. VI 14," *Vetus Testamentum* 24:4 (October 1974):505-7.

Samuel as 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.).

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).

### **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 worship, and Eli's sons seem to have adopted this custom.<sup>39</sup> 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.

The women referred to were evidently volunteer helpers in the service of the sanctuary (cf. Exod. 38:8). The Hebrew word *tsaba'* also means "assembled," but here it probably means "served." 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 the tabernacle (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.

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

The rest of the chapter explains why God would put Eli's sons to death (v. 25). The specific criticism that the 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). "Kick at" (NASB, v. 29; cf. Deut. 32:15) means to "scorn" (NIV, Heb. *ba'at*). It is a serious matter to

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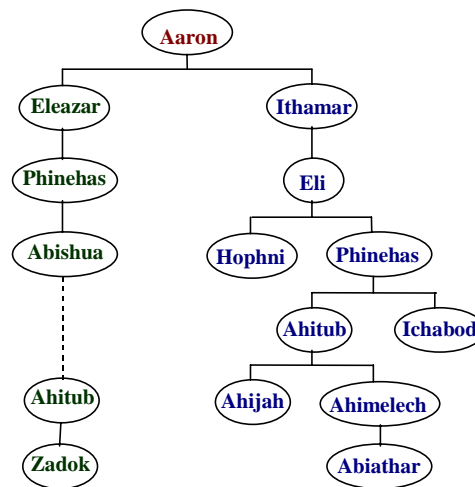
<sup>39</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 207.

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)?

Many students of this book have identified 2:30 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.

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).

#### THE ANCESTORS OF ABIATHAR AND ZADOK



The faithful priest God promised to raise up (v. 35) was initially Samuel (3:1, 20; 7:9; 9:2-13). Zadok, a descendant of Levi's son Eleazar, replaced Abiathar as high priest in Solomon's day (1 Kings 2:35).<sup>40</sup> The Lord's anointed (v. 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.<sup>41</sup> Verse 36 evidently continues to describe the fate of Eli's descendants after God deposed Abiathar.<sup>42</sup>

Notice the chiastic (crossing) structure of chapter 2 that focuses on Eli's blessing of Samuel's parents.

<sup>40</sup>Segal, p. 40; et al.

<sup>41</sup>See Ronald L. Rushing, "Phinehas' Covenant of Peace," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988.

<sup>42</sup>For another study of verses 27-36, see Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961):191-216.

- "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)
- C.' The sins of Eli's sons (2:22-25)
- B.' Samuel grows in the Lords' presence (2:26)
- A.' The oracles of the man of God, concluding with reference to the Lord's anointed (2:27-36)"<sup>43</sup>

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. 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 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.).<sup>44</sup> It is also another instance in which God revealed Himself to someone audibly in a dream.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Youngblood, p. 588.

<sup>44</sup>See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

<sup>45</sup>See Robert K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance*.

### **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). Consequently 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.<sup>46</sup> 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 the lamps on the sanctuary lampstand that continued to give light through the night (cf. Exod. 27:20-21; 30:8; Lev. 24:2-4; 2 Chron. 13:11). Samuel was probably sleeping in the courtyard of the sanctuary.<sup>47</sup> 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).

Verse 7 does not necessarily mean that Samuel did not then know the Lord at all personally, that he was an unbeliever. One writer took 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).<sup>48</sup> 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. 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 (cf. Gen. 22:11; Exod. 3:4; Acts 9:4).

In verses 11-14, God restated for Samuel what the 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 tingling 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 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 and Phinehas 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 (i.e., the curtained openings into the courtyard) of the Lord's house (v. 15; cf. 1:28b).<sup>49</sup> Evidently the curtained openings were closed at night.

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<sup>46</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5:10:4.

<sup>47</sup>See Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 157, n. 9.

<sup>48</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "The Salvation of Samuel," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:3 (May-June 1994):1, 3-4.

<sup>49</sup>See 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.

Eli realized that God's words to Samuel would have been very significant. He therefore insisted that the lad tell him what God had said. Samuel faithfully reported to Eli all that God had revealed to him (v. 18). He was a faithful prophet from the start. 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). 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 individual's ministry, and when "seer" occurs the emphasis is usually on his or her ability to perceive messages from the Lord.

Samuel qualified for this privilege 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 phrase "let none of his words fail [lit. fall to the ground]" 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.<sup>50</sup>

The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" became proverbial during the united monarchy and described all the land of Israel (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

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<sup>50</sup>For 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.

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, 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, 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."<sup>51</sup>

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)"<sup>52</sup>

Another writer believed that the chiastic 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)
- 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)"<sup>53</sup>

This chapter also shows that God rewards faithful obedience to His word with further ministry opportunities (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12). Samuel became the source 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, above himself. In many respects he foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>51</sup>Heater, pp. 129-30. Cf. Acts 3:24.

<sup>52</sup>Youngblood, p. 592.

<sup>53</sup>Donald Wiebe, "The Structure of 1 Sam. 3: Another View," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 30:12 (1986):256.

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 rule (i.e., Eli and his sons) are a part of the covenant community."<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup>

### **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 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

<sup>54</sup>John A. Martin, "Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):32.

<sup>55</sup>For a discussion of this subject, including a bibliography of books and articles dealing with it, see Youngblood, pp. 593-94.

<sup>56</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 208.

still accentuate Yahweh's supremacy as an unconquerable deity. The story explains how Yahweh finally became superior to his captors."<sup>57</sup>

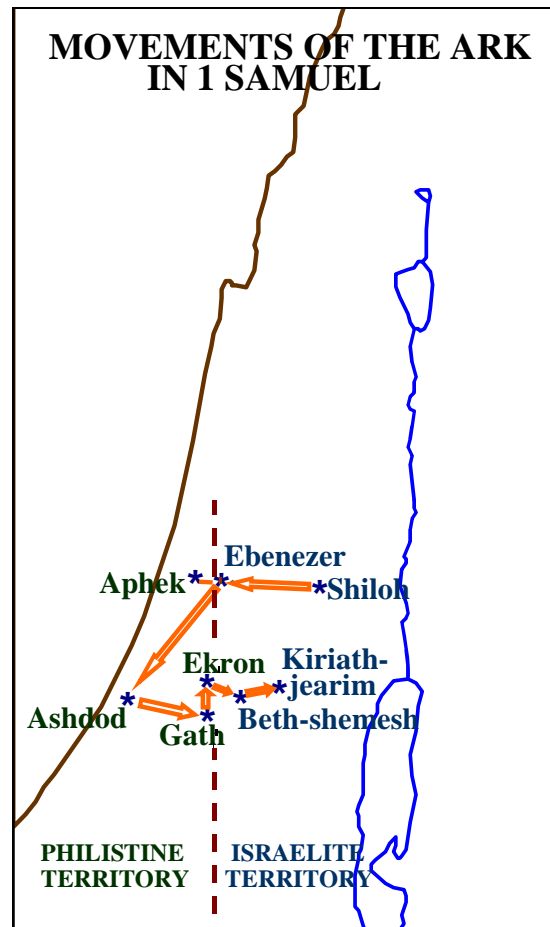
The major historical element of continuity in this section is the fate of Eli's sons (4:9-11). The theological theme of fertility continues to be the primary unifying factor in the narrative.

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

The Philistines, as we have already seen in Judges, were Israel's primary enemy to the west at this time. Samson, too, fought the Philistines (Judg. 13—16).<sup>58</sup> 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.).<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup>

In Israel's first encounter with the Philistines in 1 Samuel, the enemy slew 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 contained the tablets of the Decalogue and the mercy seat where the high priest atoned for the sins of the nation. It was for these reasons a symbol of God and His



<sup>57</sup>G. 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.

<sup>58</sup>For a good, brief history of the Philistines, see Edward Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*.

<sup>59</sup>For further study, see Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture*, especially pp. 13-16, 21-24, and 289-96.

<sup>60</sup>Moshe Kochavi and Aaron Demsky, "An Israelite Village from the Days of the Judges," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4:3 (1978):19-21.

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 rather than humility. They were treating the ark the same way they treated God; they believed the ark's presence among them in battle would ensure victory.

"We eventually all learn what Israel discovered in battle against the Philistines. Having the paraphernalia of God and having God are not the same."<sup>61</sup>

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 reading of the Bible. 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). 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."<sup>62</sup>

The Hebrew word *eleph*, translated thousand (v. 2), can also mean military unit. Military units were of varying sizes but considerably smaller than 1,000 soldiers.<sup>63</sup>

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.<sup>64</sup> This may have been the image of the Lord of hosts (armies) "who sits above the cherubim" that the writer had in mind here (v. 4).

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 fact that the Israelites suffered a devastating slaughter (Heb. *makkah*, v. 10), many times worse than their earlier recent defeat (v. 2), proved that victory did not come from

<sup>61</sup>Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup>Marten H. Woudstra, *The Ark of the Covenant from the Conquest to Kingship*, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup>For 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.

<sup>64</sup>W. F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 1:1 (1938):1-3.

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 some writers assume the Philistines razed it after they captured the ark.<sup>65</sup> The town probably did suffer destruction then (cf. Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:6).<sup>66</sup> However, 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 sanctuary structure 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)."<sup>67</sup>

<b>THE TWO TABERNACLES AND THE ARK</b>		
<b>Moses' Tabernacle at:</b>	<b>The Ark at:</b>	<b>David's Tabernacle at:</b>
<b>Gilgal</b> (Josh 5:10; 10:15, 43)	<b>Gilgal</b> (Josh. 6:12)	
<b>Shiloh</b> (Josh. 18:1, 9-10)	<b>Shiloh</b> (Josh. 18:10)	
<b>Bethel</b> (Judg. 20:18-28; 21:1-4)	<b>Bethel</b> (Judg. 20:27)	
<b>Shiloh</b> (1 Sam. 1:3)	<b>Shiloh</b> (1 Sam. 4:3)	
	<b>Ebenezer</b> (1 Sam. 4:4-5)	
	<b>Ashdod</b> (1 Sam. 5:1)	
	<b>Gath</b> (1 Sam. 5:8)	
	<b>Ekron</b> (1 Sam. 5:10)	
	<b>Bethshemesh</b> (1 Sam. 6:12-14)	
	<b>Kiriath-jearim</b> (1 Sam. 7:1)	
<b>Mizpah ?</b> (1 Sam. 7:9-10)		
<b>Gilgal ?</b> (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-10; 15:10-15)		
<b>Nob</b> (1 Sam. 21:1-9; 22:9-19)		
<b>Gibeon</b> (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29; 1 Kings 3:4; 2 Chron. 1:3)		
	<b>Perez-uzzah</b> (2 Sam. 6:2-11; 1 Chron. 13:5-14)	
		<b>Jerusalem</b> (1 Chron. 15:1)
	<b>Jerusalem</b> (2 Sam. 6:12-17; 1 Chron. 15:2—16:6, 37-38)	

<sup>65</sup>E.g., Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 71; and Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 143.

<sup>66</sup>See John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 165.

<sup>67</sup>Gordon, p. 96.

## **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.

There is a word play in the Hebrew text that helps us understand the significance of the departure of God's glory. The Hebrew word for "heavy" (v. 18) is *kabed*, and the word for "glory" (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 responsible for the departure of God's glory from Israel and from his line of priests.<sup>68</sup>

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.<sup>69</sup>

## **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" 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 [mercy seat], was the visible pledge of the covenant of grace which Jehovah had made with Israel."<sup>70</sup>

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: "Because you did not serve the LORD your God . . . you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD shall send against you . . . and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you."

Most of the Israelites evidently thought that since Israel had lost the ark she had lost God.<sup>71</sup> However, because the people had not lived in proper covenant relationship with

<sup>68</sup>See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 400-401.

<sup>69</sup>See the "Chronology of 1 and 2 Samuel" earlier in these notes.

<sup>70</sup>C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>71</sup>For 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.

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.

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.

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.

Dagon was the principle deity of the Philistines. 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. Dagon (cf. Heb. *dagan*, grain) was a grain god whom the Philistines worshipped as the source of bountiful harvests (fertility). Worship of him began about 2500 B.C. in Mesopotamia, especially in the Middle-Euphrates region.<sup>72</sup>

The writer clarified that the Philistines 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 allusion to Dagon's inferiority. He could not act on his own (cf. Isa. 46:7). 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 enemies to count accurately the number of their slain (cf. 29:4; Judg. 8:6).<sup>73</sup> 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).

<sup>72</sup>The New Bible Dictionary, 1962 ed., s.v. "Dagon," by Kenneth A. Kitchen.

<sup>73</sup>Antony F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative*, p. 86, n. 1.

The breaking of Dagon's head and hands on the threshold of his temple rendered the threshold especially sacred. From then on the 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.<sup>74</sup> This incident involving Dagon made the threshold to his sanctuary even more sacred. This is another ironical 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 hand [power] of the Lord.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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 (lit. buboes) 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).

The Hebrew word translated "broke out" occurs only here in the Old Testament (v. 9). The Septuagint translators interpreted it accurately as "groin." These tumors were apparently most prominent in the groin area, hence the English translation "hemorrhoids." 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 seems clear that the hand of Yahweh sent this particular affliction on them.

Ekron stood about 6 miles north of Gath.<sup>77</sup> 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 (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

<sup>74</sup>Gordon, p. 99.

<sup>75</sup>Patrick D. Miller Jr. and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel*, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup>See J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," *Vetus Testamentum* 21:2 (1971):244-51.

<sup>77</sup>See 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.

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. We cannot manipulate God. We must follow Him rather than expecting Him to follow us. Had the Israelites learned this lesson they probably would 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 terminate God's judgment 6:1-9**

The Philistines acknowledged Yahweh's superiority over Dagon, but they believed they could manipulate Him (v. 3). Guilt offerings were common in ancient Near Eastern religions.

"Ancient religious protocol mandated that the worshiper not approach his god(s) empty-handed (cf. Exod 23:15; Deut 16:16)."<sup>78</sup>

Evidently the reason the Philistines fashioned images of mice (v. 4) was that there was some connection between rodents and the swellings the Philistines suffered.<sup>79</sup> This connection has led many interpreters to conclude that perhaps the Philistines had experienced something such as bubonic plague, which fleas living on rodents transmit. Bubonic plague causes swollen buboes or tumors.<sup>80</sup> Josephus diagnosed the problem as dysentery, which may have been an accompanying symptom.<sup>81</sup> Probably the Philistines intended that the models would trigger sympathetic magic, that is, that they would accomplish what they wanted when they did a similar thing. 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

<sup>78</sup>Youngblood, p. 604.

<sup>79</sup>John B. Geyer, "Mice and Rites in 1 Samuel V-VI," *Vetus Testamentum* 31:3 (July 1981):293-304.

<sup>80</sup>See Nicole Duplaix, "Fleas: The Lethal Leapers," *National Geographic* 173:5 (May 1988):672-94, for more information on bubonic plague.

<sup>81</sup>Josephus, 6:1:1.

hearts as Pharaoh had done. Hardening the heart only brings divine retribution (cf. Josh. 7:19).

"Milch" 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.

### **2. The return of the ark to Bethshemesh 6:10-18**

Bethshemesh was the closest Israelite town to Ekron. It stood about 12 miles east-southeast of Ekron. To get there the cows walked east up the Sorek Valley, Samson's home area. Evidently the Israelites, who were reaping their wheat harvest (in June) when the ark appeared, remembered that only Levites were to handle the ark (Num. 4:15-20; v. 15). Bethshemesh 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 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**

Not all the people who later assembled to view the returned ark were as careful as those from Bethshemesh, however. 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<sup>82</sup>, though there is strong textual support for the large number. Several Hebrew manuscripts omit 50,000, and Josephus mentioned only 70 fatalities.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps 70 men died, as the NIV and several other modern translations state.

"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.).<sup>84</sup>

"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."<sup>85</sup>

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.

<sup>82</sup>See John Davis, *Biblical Numerology*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>83</sup>Josephus, 6:1:4.

<sup>84</sup>Gordon, p. 103.

<sup>85</sup>Payne, p. 35.

The Israelites came to a fresh appreciation of Yahweh's holiness because these men 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). 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 Bethshemesh. 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). 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 Abinadab and Eleazar were priests or Levites. Perhaps the Israelites kept the ark there for convenience sake. It evidently remained there for many years (cf. 2 Sam. 6:2). Wood calculated that it was there about seventy years.<sup>86</sup> Baale-judah (2 Sam. 6:2) may be a later name for Kiriath-jearim.<sup>87</sup>

"The certainty of God's presence is always a sign of hope, however dark the circumstances may be."<sup>88</sup>

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 talisman 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 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).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 23, n. 8, and p. 190. 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.

<sup>87</sup>Youngblood, p. 868.

<sup>88</sup>Payne, p. 37.

<sup>89</sup>Martin, p. 138.

### **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.

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

As a totally dedicated Nazarite who followed the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant as best he could, 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 that book 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."<sup>90</sup>

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.

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

Twenty years after the Philistines had returned the ark, Samuel led the people in national repentance.<sup>91</sup> Samson's ministry may have taken place during these 20 years.<sup>92</sup> 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 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).

<sup>90</sup>Baldwin, p. 33.

<sup>91</sup>Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, pp. 65-66; Wood, *The Prophets . . .*, p. 159, n. 12.

<sup>92</sup>Idem, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, pp. 303-4.

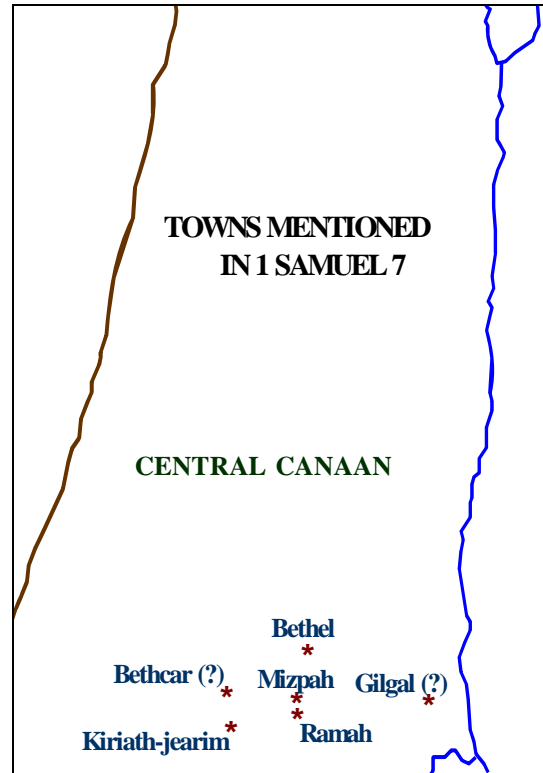
## **2. National repentance and deliverance 7:5-14**

Mizpah (lit. watchtower, indicating an elevated site) was about two miles northwest of Samuel's hometown, Ramah, on the central Benjamin plateau.<sup>93</sup> 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).<sup>94</sup> 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).

The Israelites sensed their continuing need for God's help and appealed to Samuel to continue to intercede for them (v. 8). 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 (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 a hopeless condition and to strengthen their faith in Him. Baal was supposedly the god of storms, but Yahweh humiliated him here.<sup>95</sup> The location of Bethcar is still uncertain, but most scholars believe it was near Lower Beth-horon, about 8 miles west of Mizpah toward the Philistine plain.



<sup>93</sup>On 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.

<sup>94</sup>On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103.

<sup>95</sup>See 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.

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). This Ebenezer is quite certainly not the same as the one the writer mentioned in 4:1 and 5:1. It was another memorial stone that marked God's action for His people (cf. Gen. 35:14; Josh. 4:9; 24:26).<sup>96</sup> It announced the reversal of previous indignities and was a symbol of reintegration.<sup>97</sup> 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).

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 than were the Israelites.<sup>98</sup> Often in the Old Testament "Amorites" (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 was the Gilgal in the Jordan Valley near Jericho, or whether it was another Gilgal located a few miles north of Bethel.<sup>99</sup> 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

<sup>96</sup>See Carl F. Graesser, "Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 35:2 (1972):34-63.

<sup>97</sup>Gordon, pp. 107-8.

<sup>98</sup>Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh, a Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.*, p. 418.

<sup>99</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 76, said it was the latter as did Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 95, but I have not been able to verify the existence of a Gilgal there.

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."<sup>100</sup>

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

### **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 . . ."<sup>101</sup>

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 in Samuel's judgeship they demanded one again.

#### **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 the Law (Exod. 23:6, 8; Deut. 16:19). Eli's sons had done the same thing. 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.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Payne, p. 39.

<sup>101</sup>Youngblood, p. 611.

<sup>102</sup>E.g., Wood, *The Prophets* . . . , p. 160.

### 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. It was the reason they 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). On the other, it verbalized a desire to be "like all the nations" (v. 5).<sup>103</sup> 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 that had marked the Israelites since the Exodus (cf. Num. 14:11). He acceded to their 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.<sup>104</sup>

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 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."<sup>105</sup>

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."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Idem, *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.

<sup>104</sup>See 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.

<sup>105</sup>Heater, p. 139.

<sup>106</sup>Scott L. Harris, "1 Samuel VIII 7-8," *Vetus Testamentum* 31:1 (January 1981):79-80.

Even though this translation minimizes what seems to some to be a contradiction between verses 7 and 8, it is inferior, I believe.

### **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 monarchy, but Samuel pointed out the *nature* of 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.<sup>107</sup> There is evidence that Israel's neighbor nations really did suffer under their kings exactly as Samuel warned.<sup>108</sup> Note the recurrence of the words "take" and "best" in these verses.

"By nature royalty is parasitic rather than giving, and kings are never satisfied with the worst."<sup>109</sup>

The people would also regret their request because their king would disappoint them (v. 18), but God would not remove the consequences of their choice. 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 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 proved to be a "false start" to the monarchy.<sup>110</sup>

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.

## **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. This pericope (9:1—10:16) sets forth his personal conduct.<sup>111</sup>

### **Saul's background 9:1-2**

Saul ("Asked [of God]," cf. 8:10) came from good Benjamite stock. His father was a man of property and influence. The same Hebrew expression, *gibbor hayil*, translated "valor," describes Boaz in Ruth 2:1 and King Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 11:28 (cf. 1 Sam. 16:18). Saul himself was physically impressive, 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.

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<sup>107</sup>G. Coleman Luck, "Israel's Demand for a King," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:477 (January-March 1963):61.

<sup>108</sup>See 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.

<sup>109</sup>Youngblood, p. 614.

<sup>110</sup>David Payne, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup>See 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."

### Saul's personal traits 9:3-14

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). Likewise his desire to give Samuel a present for his help was praiseworthy (v. 7; cf. 1 Kings 14:3; 2 Kings 8:8-9). Saul had some appreciation for social propriety. He 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).

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 (lit. house of bread, i.e., granary).<sup>112</sup>

### 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."<sup>113</sup>

God referred to Saul as a "prince" (Heb. *negid*, v. 16), 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 as God's vice-regent.

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 but all that was desirable in Israel would soon come into his possession (v. 20). Saul's humble response to Samuel 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."<sup>114</sup>

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.<sup>115</sup> Giving the special leg of meat to Saul was a sign of special honor (vv. 23-24). 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).

<sup>112</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 78, n. 12.

<sup>113</sup>G. Coleman Luck, "The First Meeting of Saul and Samuel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):259.

<sup>114</sup>David Payne, p. 45.

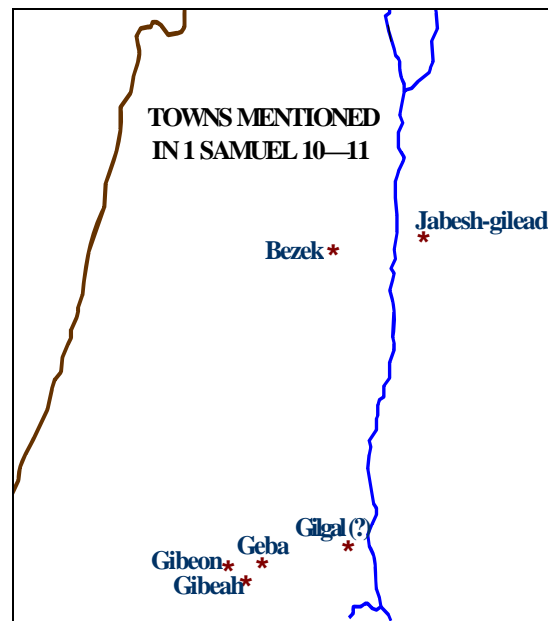
<sup>115</sup>Youngblood, pp. 622-23.

### 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.<sup>116</sup> 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 was a sign of affection and respect since now Saul was God's special representative on the earth. Samuel reminded Saul that the 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).<sup>117</sup> 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). The "hill of God" (lit. Gibeath-haelohim, v. 5) was probably Gibeon.<sup>118</sup>

Since God chose and equipped Saul to rule His people, it seems most likely that he was a genuine believer in Yahweh, though Saul gave evidence of not having a strong commitment to Him. 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

<sup>116</sup>Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 152-66.

<sup>117</sup>On the subject of the location of Rachel's tomb, see Matitiah Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 33 (1962):107-18.

<sup>118</sup>See Aaron Demsky, "Geba, Gibeah, and Gibeon—An Historico-Geographic Riddle," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 212 (December 1973):27.

a person believes God's promise, 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.<sup>119</sup> In Hebrew psychology the heart was the seat of the intellect, emotions, and will.

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.<sup>120</sup> Others have not.<sup>121</sup> 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. 19:18-19).<sup>122</sup>

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.<sup>123</sup> 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."<sup>124</sup>

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 hometown, Gibeah (lit. hill). Saul's uncle may have been Ner, the father of Abner (14:50-51), or some other uncle.<sup>125</sup>

"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.

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<sup>119</sup>E.g., Zane C. Hodges, "The Salvation of Saul," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:4 (July-August 1994):1, 3.

<sup>120</sup>E.g., Bright, p. 166.

<sup>121</sup>E.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.

<sup>122</sup>For further discussion, see *Ibid.*, pp. 164-66.

<sup>123</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 104-5.

<sup>124</sup>See 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.

<sup>125</sup>See D. R. Ap-Thomas, "Saul's 'Uncle'," *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961):241-45.

"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."<sup>126</sup>

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).<sup>127</sup>

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 we have noted, the tabernacle may have been there as well. Samuel took the opportunity to remind Israel that Yahweh was Israel's real deliverer so that 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).<sup>128</sup>

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 God permitted (Prov. 16:33). Was Saul hiding because he was humble or because he was afraid to assume the mantle of leadership? 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."<sup>129</sup>

"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."<sup>130</sup>

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

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<sup>126</sup>Heater, p. 126.

<sup>127</sup>Youngblood, p. 623.

<sup>128</sup>See Bruce C. Birch, "The Choosing of Saul at Mizpah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37:4 (1975):447-54.

<sup>129</sup>Baldwin, p. 90.

<sup>130</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 81.

to be His instrument. 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."<sup>131</sup>

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). 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."<sup>132</sup>

Yet God gave them 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 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 consequently united behind him because of his 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.

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<sup>131</sup>Youngblood, p. 631.

<sup>132</sup>G. Coleman Luck, "The First Glimpse of the First King of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (January-March 1966):51.

### **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 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." 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 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."<sup>133</sup>

Nahash's willingness to let his enemies appeal for help shows that he had no fear that threatening 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 natural perspective only. Contrast the perspective of Caleb and Joshua earlier.

Why was Saul at home farming now that 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.<sup>134</sup> 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 came 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).

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<sup>133</sup>Youngblood, p. 637.

<sup>134</sup>Marvin Chaney, "Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy," *Semeia* 37 (1986):61.

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 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."<sup>135</sup>

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."<sup>136</sup>

The response of the Israelites constituted the greatest show of military strength since Joshua's day (assuming *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 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" (cf. 14:36).

Saul wisely divided his troops into three companies. He attacked the besieging Ammonites early in the morning. The morning watch was the last of three night watches, 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; Judg. 7:19). The only other place in the Old Testament where this phrase "at the morning watch" occurs in Hebrew is Exodus 14:24. Then God slew the Egyptian

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<sup>135</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):140, n. 13.

<sup>136</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 112.

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.

The Ammonites did not expect the other Israelites to show so much support for the Jabesh-gileadites. Saul thoroughly surprised and defeated them.<sup>137</sup>

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

This victory helped the Israelites perceive 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.<sup>138</sup> 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.<sup>139</sup> A Gilgal north of Bethel would have been closer 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. 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 the prophet, offered a sacrifice prematurely, and received the prophet's rebuke (13:7-14). The third meeting was when God rejected Saul as 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).

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<sup>137</sup>For 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.

<sup>138</sup>Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, pp. 66-68; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 135; and Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, pp. 37, 383-428.

<sup>139</sup>See my comments on 7:16.

"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)."<sup>140</sup>

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).

### **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.

Chapter 12 is another most important theological passage 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.

"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."<sup>141</sup>

"This chapter . . . formally marks the end of the period of the judges . . ."<sup>142</sup>

### **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 he was

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<sup>140</sup>Youngblood, p. 642.

<sup>141</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 115.

<sup>142</sup>Gordon, p. 125.

responsible for it. Also, it is likely that Samuel took the people's request for a king as a personal rejection of himself.<sup>143</sup> 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 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. 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 then.

"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)."<sup>144</sup>

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

Neither had God given the people occasion to demand a king. 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.

### **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 His voice through the Mosaic Law and the prophets, and not rebelling against His commands (v. 14). The major message of the Books of 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, 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.

### **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

<sup>143</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 70.

<sup>144</sup>David Payne, pp. 57-58.

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 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).

"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)."<sup>145</sup>

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, but He repeated them here.

In chapters 8—12, the record emphasizes 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. God gave blessing to His people as long as their representative submitted to His authority.

### **C. KINGSHIP REMOVED FROM SAUL CHS. 13—15**

This section 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 for 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

<sup>145</sup>Gordon, p. 130. His quotation is from P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*.

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 leant hard on Samuel and he would have found reassurance. In the event, this was exactly what Saul could not bring himself to do."<sup>146</sup>

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.

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

The writer introduced the history of Saul's reign by referring to the king's age and possibly the length of his reign. Verse one contains a textual corruption in the Hebrew text.<sup>147</sup> There the verse reads, "Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign, and he reigned . . . two years over Israel." My ellipses indicate omissions (lacunas) in the Hebrew text.

The first problem is Saul's age when he began to reign. No other text of Scripture gives us his age at this time. The NASB translators have supplied "40" and the NIV and NET translators "30." The AV translators wrote, "Saul [was . . . years old]," leaving the number undefined.

Saul reigned about 40 years (Acts 13:21). If he was about 40 years old when he began to reign, he would 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. My reasons follow below.

The second problem is, what was the second number in 13:1 that is absent in the Hebrew text? The NASB has "32," the NIV "42," and the AV "2." If the last part of verse 1 gives us the length of Saul's reign, as is customary in similar summaries of kings' reigns (cf. 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42; 2 Kings 8:17, 26; et al.), the missing number probably should be 42.

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<sup>146</sup>Baldwin, p. 102.

<sup>147</sup>On the many problems with the Hebrew text of Samuel, see Martin, pp. 209-222.

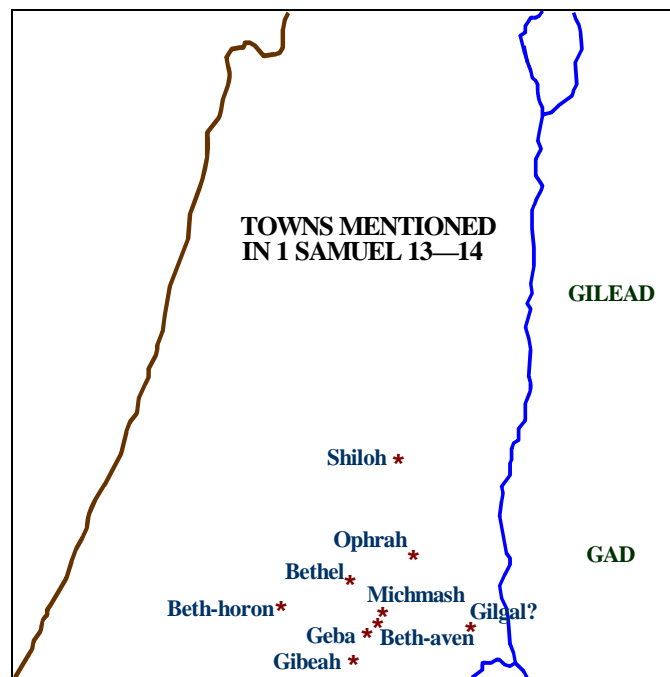
In this case, 40 in Acts 13:21 must be a round number. If the last part of verse 1 gives the year of Saul's reign in which the events of chapter 13 happened, the number probably should be 2.<sup>148</sup> I think probably the total length of Saul's reign is in view in verse 1. I prefer the NIV's 42 years here.

When did the events of this chapter happen if the last number in verse 1 indicates the length of Saul's reign? In 10:8, Samuel commanded Saul to go to Gilgal and to wait seven days for him 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.<sup>149</sup>

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. 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.<sup>150</sup>

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.<sup>151</sup>

Gibeah 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, to make this



<sup>148</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>149</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 193; Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, pp. 123.

<sup>150</sup>See Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):475-533.

<sup>151</sup>See again the "Chronology of 1 and 2 Samuel" at the beginning of these notes.

population center more secure. Jonathan's initial victory at Geba provoked the Philistines, who massed their forces across the steep valley 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.<sup>152</sup> However, the location of the Gilgal in view is problematic. In doing so, he was following orders that Samuel had given him earlier (10:8). Apparently Saul was to meet Samuel to offer sacrifices of worship before he 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.

"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."<sup>153</sup>

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). 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 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.<sup>154</sup> 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.

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

<sup>152</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 127-28.

<sup>153</sup>Youngblood, p. 654.

<sup>154</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 139; Youngblood, p. 657.

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

As a result of Saul's disobedience he began to struggle, whereas 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.<sup>155</sup> 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.

### **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 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.

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, 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

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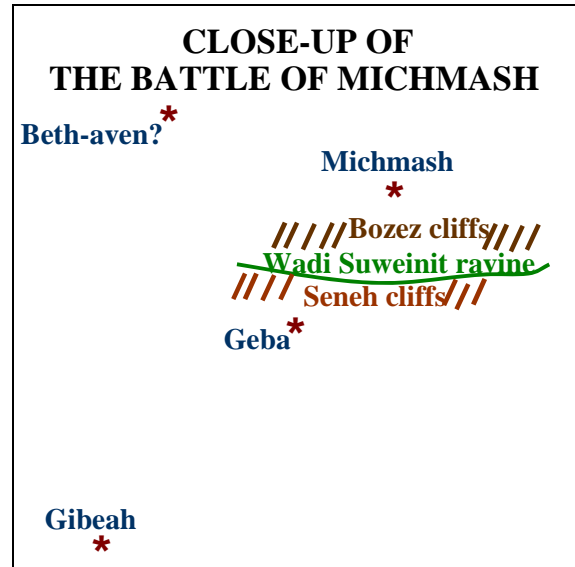
<sup>155</sup>Dothan, p. 20.

will bloodily fulfill the prophecy of 2:31-33, wreaking Yhwh's will on the Elides."<sup>156</sup>

Bozez (v. 4, lit. shining) was the south-facing cliff near the Philistine camp at Michmash, perhaps so named because it reflected the sun that shone on it from the south. Seneh (lit. thorny) 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.

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).



"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 . . .)." <sup>157</sup>

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 . . ." <sup>158</sup>

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

<sup>156</sup>David 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.

<sup>157</sup>Youngblood, p. 661.

<sup>158</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 138.

When Saul should have been acting, he was waiting, and when he should have been waiting, he was acting (vv. 18-19). He may have viewed the ark as a talisman that he planned to use to secure God's help. Or he may have used the Urim and Thummim.<sup>159</sup> 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 mercenaries who were fighting for the Philistines even changed their allegiance and took sides with Jonathan. 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. 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)."<sup>160</sup>

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 (vv. 29-30). The Hebrew word translated "troubled" (v. 29, *'akar*) is the same one from which "Achan" and "Achor" come (Josh. 7:25-26). Saul, not Jonathan, had troubled Israel, as Achan had, by his foolish command (v. 24).

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. 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.<sup>161</sup> There are many

<sup>159</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 214.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Gordon, p. 140.

examples of spiritually sensitive Israelites building altars to God (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'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. 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. Careful attention to the text shows that 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 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 two 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 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. 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).

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 to God.

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

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.

The information concerning Saul's family members that 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.

God would later bring valiant warriors to David as He had previously brought 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).

#### **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."<sup>162</sup>

Chapter 15 records one of the battles 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 the Sinai Peninsula. This battle evidently happened about 25 years after Saul began reigning, which was 23 years after God rejected Saul's dynasty

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

following Saul's disobedience at Gilgal (13:1-15).<sup>163</sup> 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).

Most scholars are sure Saul attacked the Amalekites who lived in the southern Judah Negev, though some feel he attacked an enclave of them in western Samaria.<sup>164</sup> 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 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 hosts (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 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.<sup>165</sup> 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 "utterly 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 (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)."<sup>166</sup>

The Amalekites (v. 6) were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12), whereas 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 between the Israelites and the Kenites.<sup>167</sup>

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

<sup>163</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 138.

<sup>164</sup>E.g., Diane Edelman, "Saul's Battle Against Amaleq (1 Sam. 15)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986):74-81.

<sup>165</sup>See Gordon, pp. 143, 147-48.

<sup>166</sup>Youngblood, 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?*

<sup>167</sup>See 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.

another purpose. Clearly Saul set his will against the orders of his Commander; he was "not willing" to destroy everything that breathed (v. 9). His obedience was selective and partial.

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 cases it refers to an important message of judgment that God sent Israel's king through a prophet. God regretted that He had made Saul king (v. 11) because of Saul's actions, not because God felt He had made a mistake in calling Saul. Saul's failure to follow God faithfully also broke Samuel's heart. The disobedience of leaders always grieves the hearts of God's 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. 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 and blamed the people instead (v. 15).

"Samuel now realized that Saul was not a leader, but the tool and slave of the people."<sup>168</sup>

Samuel had earlier delivered a message of doom to Eli in the morning (3:15-18). Now he delivered one to Saul on 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."<sup>169</sup>

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 viewed himself as the ultimate authority in Israel, a view 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.

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<sup>168</sup>Young, p. 285.

<sup>169</sup>David Payne, pp. 77-78.

Matt. 28:19-20), which involved the total extermination of the Amalekites. The Hebrew word translated "sinners" means habitually wicked people (cf. Ps. 1:1, 5), 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])."<sup>170</sup>

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.<sup>171</sup> 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. 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, twice (cf. v. 30).

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 speech (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" because it involves sacrificing ourselves to Him. The spared animals Saul offered to God were voluntary sacrifices.

"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."<sup>172</sup>

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

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<sup>170</sup>Youngblood, p. 674.

<sup>171</sup>See Archer, p. 421.

<sup>172</sup>Youngblood, p. 677.

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 wicked (iniquity) and puts the insubordinate person in God's place. This is a form of idolatry. God would now begin to terminate Saul's rule as Israel's king (v. 23; cf. Exod. 34:7). Previously God had told him 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."<sup>173</sup>

Saul's confession was superficial. The Hebrew word translated "transgressed" (*abarti*) means "overlooked." Saul only admitted that he had overlooked some small and relatively unimportant part of what God had commanded (v. 24). 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."<sup>174</sup>

When Saul seized Samuel's robe, he was making an earnest appeal. The phrase "to grasp the hem" was a common idiomatic expression in Semitic languages that pictured a gesture of supplication.<sup>175</sup> Later, David would cut off the hem of Saul's robe in a cave while the king slept (24:4). Since the hem of a garment identified the social status of the person who wore it,<sup>176</sup> 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).

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<sup>173</sup>Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading*, p. 98.

<sup>174</sup>Chafin, p. 130.

<sup>175</sup>See 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.

<sup>176</sup>See Jacob Milgrom, "Of Hems and Tassels," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9:3 (May-June 1983):61-65.

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. 25:15). What did Samuel mean? I believe he meant that God is not fickle.<sup>177</sup> God does sometimes relent (change His mind) in response to the prayers of His people or when they repent (cf. Jer. 18:7-10; 1 John 1:9).<sup>178</sup> However, when He determines to do something, He follows through (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)."<sup>179</sup>

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 the glory. Samuel reminded the king that Yahweh was the "Glory of Israel." 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 will 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."<sup>180</sup>

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

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<sup>177</sup>See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 250.

<sup>178</sup>For 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.

<sup>179</sup>Gordon, p. 146.

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 142.

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 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."<sup>181</sup>

Perhaps Samuel consented to honor Saul by worshipping with him (vv. 30-31) because Saul was still the king. 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 did not sin in returning with Saul.<sup>182</sup> Note Saul's continuing obsession with external appearances.

Samuel proceeded to obey God, as Saul should have, by slaying Agag (vv. 32-33). 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).<sup>183</sup> Saul's attitude toward Yahweh and its resultant judgment grieved the prophet who felt, as God, sorrow over the king's fate (15:35; 16:1). God has feelings about our 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 choosing Saul. This is an anthropathism. God felt about Saul the way we feel when someone whom we have favored greatly disappoints us greatly. Note that God regretted that He had made Saul king, not that He had made Saul one of His children. Saul did not lose 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).<sup>184</sup>

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.

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 communicating God's Word by his faithful commitment to God. Saul, the 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

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<sup>181</sup>Baldwin, p. 35.

<sup>182</sup>E.g., Peter N. Greenhow, "Did Samuel Sin?" *Grace Journal* 11:2 (1970):34-40.

<sup>183</sup>See David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*, p. 147.

<sup>184</sup>See Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47:4 (October 1985):597.

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."<sup>185</sup>

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 fourth sections, because Saul refused to obey God and to acknowledge His victory, Saul replaced the external enemies of Israel as the object of God 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.

#### **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."<sup>186</sup>

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. 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 Saul and David were on friendly terms, but in chapters 18—26 they were on unfriendly terms.<sup>187</sup>

"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."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Martin, p. 35.

<sup>186</sup>Heater, p. 117.

<sup>187</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 216.

<sup>188</sup>Gordon, p. 150. Compare Joseph's career.

<b>CHRONOLOGY OF DAVID'S LIFE<sup>189</sup></b>			
<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Reference</b>
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
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
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

### **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

<sup>189</sup>Based on Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 244.

New Testament.<sup>190</sup> This large amount of material reflects his great importance for Bible readers.

### **1. God's selection of David for kingship ch. 16**

"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 . . ."191

#### **David's anointing 16:1-13**

This time God's choice was not a king for the people according to their desires, but a king for Himself (v. 1) who would put Yahweh 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 will of God. 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 judged Saul acceptable because of those characteristics (v. 6). Verse 7 clarifies how God evaluates people, namely, on the basis of their hearts (affections), 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 bind Himself to what is traditional. It is unusual that Jesse did not have David present for Samuel's inspection since he, too, was one of his sons. Jesse had eight sons (17:12; cf. 1 Chron. 2:13-15; 27:18). This 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 of his parents forsaking him). Was David a neglected or even an abused child whom his father viewed more as hired help than as a son?

"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."<sup>192</sup>

"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]."<sup>193</sup>

<sup>190</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny*, p. 4.

<sup>191</sup>Youngblood, p. 682.

<sup>192</sup>Swindoll, p. 20.

<sup>193</sup>S. 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.

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 (probably meaning "beloved of the Lord") was physically attractive (v. 12; cf. Isa. 53:2). Nevertheless, God did not choose him for that reason, but because of God's sovereign election 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 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."<sup>194</sup>

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 to Elijah.<sup>195</sup> In time, 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 on him, remained with him from then on, and empowered him for service (cf. Matt. 3:16-17).<sup>196</sup>

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, therefore, was the climax and capstone of his career.

### **David's introduction to the royal court 16:14-23**

"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."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup>Swindoll, p. 6.

<sup>195</sup>Young, p. 286.

<sup>196</sup>On the significance of anointing, see my comments on 10:1.

<sup>197</sup>Youngblood, p. 682.

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).

"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."<sup>198</sup>

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), a demon who afflicted him periodically (cf. 1 Kings 22:20-23), or a demon who indwelt him from then on.<sup>199</sup> In any case it was a discipline for departing from God. When people depart from God, their troubles really begin.

"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."<sup>200</sup>

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.<sup>201</sup> It is tempting to suggest that Saul's mental problems may have resulted from his spiritual rebellion, which is common, but the text does not state that connection outright. Apparently some people already regarded David as a mighty man of valor and a warrior (v. 18) because he had single-handedly defeated lions and bears (17:34-35). Most important, the Lord was with David.<sup>202</sup> 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. The king appointed an 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.

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<sup>198</sup>David 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.

<sup>199</sup>See John Davis and John Whitcomb, *A History of Israel*, p. 224; and Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 149.

<sup>200</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 180.

<sup>201</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 216.

<sup>202</sup>Walters, pp. 570-71, 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).

"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 responsible for the young man's first steps towards the throne."<sup>203</sup>

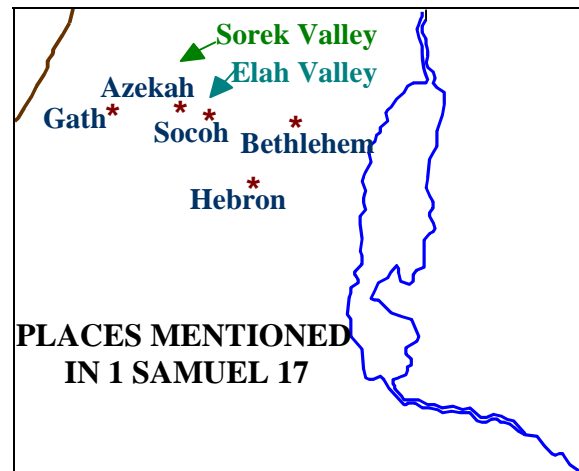
## **2. The reason for God's selection of David ch. 17**

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. 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.<sup>204</sup>

### **The Philistine challenge 17:1-11**

The Elah (Oak) 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 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.



"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."<sup>205</sup>

<sup>203</sup>David Payne, p. 85.

<sup>204</sup>For a brief discussion of the problem of the shorter Septuagint version of chapters 17 and 18, see The NET Bible note on 1 Sam. 17:1.

<sup>205</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 151.

Goliath was apparently 9 feet 9 inches tall. Another view is that he was 6 feet 9 inches tall.<sup>206</sup> 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). 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.

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).<sup>207</sup> However, the Israelites 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).<sup>208</sup> 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).

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<sup>206</sup>See the note on verse 4 in the NET Bible, and 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; and Hays, "The Height of Goliath: A Response to Clyde Billington," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):509-16.

<sup>207</sup>Harry 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.

<sup>208</sup>See McCarter, p. 304; and Shemaryahu Talmon, *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies*, pp. 65-66.

### 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 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 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."<sup>209</sup>

"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 instead of himself]."<sup>210</sup>

David continued to inquire about the prize for slaying Goliath, probably to make sure he understood what he would risk his life to obtain.

### 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. The Hebrew word *na'ar* translated "youth" (v. 33) usually describes an older teenager (cf. 3:1).

"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."<sup>211</sup>

David responded that if that was the criterion Saul wanted to use, he had already defeated two formidable beasts (v. 34). 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

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<sup>209</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 181.

<sup>210</sup>Gordon, p. 156.

<sup>211</sup>Homer Heater Jr., "Young David and the Practice of Wisdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 53.

of Israel's God.<sup>212</sup> 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.<sup>213</sup> David preferred the simple weapon that he could handle best (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."<sup>214</sup>

Some students of this passage have suggested that David chose five stones because Goliath had four brothers, 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).<sup>215</sup> Pictures of slings and stones from this time show the stones typically being from two to three inches in diameter.<sup>216</sup> 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.<sup>217</sup>

### **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). Goliath assumed that he would win because his physical power and armaments were superior. As often happens, pride preceded a fall (Prov. 16:18).

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).

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<sup>212</sup>See T. A. Boogaart, "History and Drama in the Story of David and Goliath," *Reformed Review* 38 (1985):209.

<sup>213</sup>Gordon, p. 157.

<sup>214</sup>Chafin, p. 145.

<sup>215</sup>*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1957 ed., s.v. "Armor, Arms."

<sup>216</sup>See Ovid R. Sellers, "Sling Stones in Biblical Times," *Biblical Archaeologist* 2:4 (1939):41-42, 44.

<sup>217</sup>Norvelle Wallace Sharpe, "David, Elhanan, and the Literary Digest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 86 (July 1929):319-26, rebutted such an attempt.

"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."<sup>218</sup>

### **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. 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.<sup>219</sup> 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. 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.

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, which was still a Jebusite city, immediately, or if he took it there later when David captured Jerusalem and made it his capital. Goliath's sword 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. Another explanation of Saul's strange ignorance is that the events of chapter 17 may have happened chronologically before those of chapter 16.

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<sup>218</sup>Swindoll, p. 46.

<sup>219</sup>Baldwin, p. 128; Ariella Deem, "'And the Stone Sank Into His Forehead': A Note on 1 Samuel xvii 49," *Vetus Testamentum* 28:3 (1978):350.

". . . 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."<sup>220</sup>

Another possibility is that Saul's words could have been an idiom for, "What is his background?" 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."<sup>221</sup>

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 Christianity 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 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).

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<sup>220</sup>Longman and Dillard, p. 23.

<sup>221</sup>Gordon, p. 153.

### 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, as he should have, since David had committed himself to glorifying God and fulfilling His will even at the expense of his 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.<sup>222</sup> 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).

Saul responded to Jonathan's affection for David, and presumably 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).

"This is a virtual abdication by Jonathan, the crown prince."<sup>223</sup>

The crown prince of Israel 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.<sup>224</sup> His response to David's anointing was appropriate, and it contrasts sharply with Saul's response, which follows.

". . . 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 . . ."<sup>225</sup>

"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."<sup>226</sup>

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.

<sup>222</sup>E.g., Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*, pp. 20, 26-28, 31-39.

<sup>223</sup>Gordon, p. 159.

<sup>224</sup>See the chronological chart at the beginning of these notes.

<sup>225</sup>Youngblood, p. 707. Cf. Gunn, p. 80.

<sup>226</sup>Laney, p. 61.

"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?"<sup>227</sup>

David's commitment to God resulted in his prospering (the fertility motif). David acted wisely, the literal meaning of the Hebrew word translated "prospered" (vv. 5, 14, 15), also 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. Apparently Saul suspected that with such popularity David might attempt to overthrow his government. However, it was personal jealousy that took 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. 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.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup>Baldwin, p. 129.

<sup>228</sup>For 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*.

"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.'<sup>229</sup> 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 struck out against the most trusted and trustworthy servant in his camp—David."<sup>230</sup>

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 *eleph* 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. 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.<sup>231</sup> 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. David, on the other hand, 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).

Michal, like her brother Jonathan, had come to love David (v. 20). 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.<sup>232</sup> But Saul was willing to take 100

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<sup>229</sup>H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, p. 5.

<sup>230</sup>Swindoll, p. 60.

<sup>231</sup>See Zechariah Kallai, "Judah and Israel—A Study in Israelite Historiography," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28:4 (1978):251-61.

<sup>232</sup>See Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):244.

uncircumcised Philistine foreskins instead. He probably thought that David would respond to the challenge and perhaps die in the 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.

God protected David, however, 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 Indian wars in the United States. This time Saul gave David his daughter.<sup>233</sup> 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-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)."<sup>234</sup>

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).

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.

### **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 "went public" with his attacks against David feeling driven, like the Pharaoh of the plagues, to more desperate measures. This created a conflict of

<sup>233</sup>For 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.

<sup>234</sup>Gordon, p. 162.

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 chiasmic 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 had to "flee and escape." This phrase occurs three times in this chapter (vv. 10, 12, 18), and it contrasts with David being 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 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 his men (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, 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 Palestine. Evidently Michal intended the presence of this image beside (Heb. *'el*) the bed to convince Saul's servants that David was seriously ill. Some interpreters believe the *teraphim* image was quite large and was in the bed.<sup>235</sup>

"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 at the head to show."<sup>236</sup>

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. Perhaps *teraphim* had some connection with childbearing (fertility; cf. Gen. 31:19, where barren Rachel kept *teraphim*).<sup>237</sup> 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.

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.

Saul's daughter, as well as his son, was 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.

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<sup>235</sup>See the note on verse 16 in the NET Bible.

<sup>236</sup>Youngblood, p. 716.

<sup>237</sup>On 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.

## **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 was evidently a compound within Ramah where Samuel headed a school of prophets. The Hebrew word literally means "habitations."<sup>238</sup> God here rescued David, not by any human intermediary but directly by the overpowering influence of His Spirit. 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 his personal dignity.<sup>239</sup> Such a person was not fit to be king.

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."<sup>240</sup> 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. This passage does not support the theory that the prophets became ecstatic when they prophesied. 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.<sup>241</sup> 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?" This derogatory saying 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.

<sup>238</sup>For 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.

<sup>239</sup>Robert P. Gordon, "Saul's Meningitis According to Targum 1 Samuel XIX 24," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:1 (January 1987):39.

<sup>240</sup>Baldwin, p. 134.

<sup>241</sup>See Wood, *The Prophets . . .*, pp. 40-56, 92-93.

". . . To question the genuineness of Saul's prophetic behavior was to question his legitimacy as king of Israel . . ." <sup>242</sup>

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.

### **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. Jonathan 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 new moon introduced the new month that the Israelites celebrated with a sacrificial meal. It was both a religious and a civil holiday (Num. 10:10; 28:11-15; cf. 2 Kings 4:23). 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.

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<sup>242</sup>Youngblood, p. 717.

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 trial wore on, he learned to trust God more completely, as we shall see. His trials purified his character (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 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 loyal love (Heb. *hesed*, vv. 14, 15), 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. "Lovingkindness" (Heb. *hesed*, 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 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 (v. 19). Evidently it was near 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, 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).<sup>243</sup>

"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."<sup>244</sup>

### **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 required an explanation, which Saul looked to David's friend to provide. Saul hated David so much he could not bring himself to use his name (vv. 27, 31). "The son of . . ." was a mild insult (cf. 10:11).<sup>245</sup> 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 NET 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 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.

<sup>243</sup>For 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.

<sup>244</sup>David Payne, p. 106.

<sup>245</sup>Youngblood, p. 723.

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.

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."<sup>246</sup>

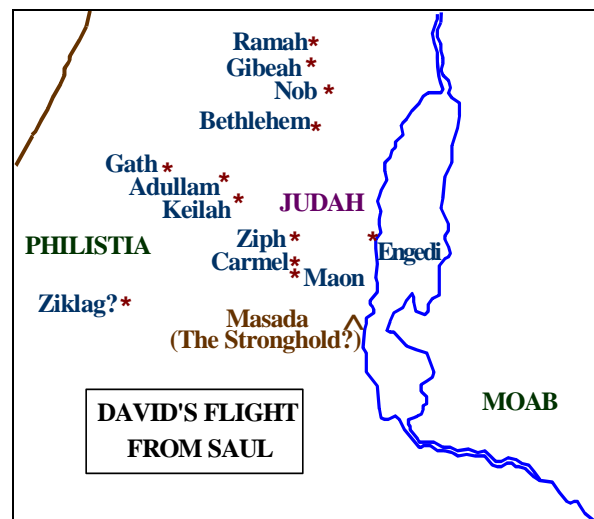
Several of the Psalms have their backgrounds in these chapters (Ps. 18; 34; 52; 54; 56; 57; 63; 124; 138; 142; and possibly others).

### **1. David's initial movements chs. 21—22**

"The two chapters comprise a literary unit of three sections arranged in chiasitic 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."<sup>247</sup>

#### **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 served as high priest. Priestly activity, and evidently the tabernacle, were now there (cf. 17:54). It is significant that David's first place of refuge was among God's chosen representatives on earth. 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? Bear in mind that David was Saul's general, and as such he usually traveled with escorting soldiers.



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. 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. He intended to rendezvous with them shortly, and had come to Nob by himself to obtain provisions, protection, and prayer (cf. 22:10).

<sup>246</sup>Tucker, p. 159.

<sup>247</sup>Youngblood, p. 727.

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 of showbread in the tabernacle. Each Sabbath the priests replaced this bread with fresh loaves. 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 (Matt. 12:1-4). The reason was that human life takes precedence over ceremonial law with God.<sup>248</sup> David was probably not at the point of starvation. Certainly the Lord's disciples were not (Matt. 12). Nevertheless human need should always be a higher priority than the observance of a ritual used to worship God. We 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, an Edomite who had risen high in Saul's government (v. 7), prepares the reader for his informing Saul about what happened at Nob (22:9-19). Perhaps Doeg was "detained before the Lord" because he had come to the tabernacle to present an offering or to conduct some other business there.

Having previously requested provisions of 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 the priest's ephod, perhaps because it was a historic relic. David eagerly accepted it from Ahimelech since there was no sword like it. It is interesting that David, and later Solomon, used the same expression to describe the Lord (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. 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 as the American president might have felt if a high-ranking Russian general defected and sought asylum in

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<sup>248</sup>See F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, p. 33.

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, concluding that David was mad and could be of no help to him against Saul (cf. 29:3, 6, 9; Ps. 34 title). It so happened that ancient Near Easterners regarded the insane as harbingers of evil and so avoided them. They felt it was bad luck to kill a madman.<sup>249</sup>

". . . insanity was often believed in the ancient world to be an affliction of the gods, and it was customary to treat madmen as taboo if not holy, people who should not be harmed in any way."<sup>250</sup>

In both Nob and Gath David resorted to deception to protect himself, and in each place 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. 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) stood a mile or two south of the Elah Valley, where David had slain Goliath, and about 10 miles east-southeast of Gath. 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.

"If Saul would attack his own family (20:33), there was no telling what he might do to David's."<sup>251</sup>

David now became the leader of a group of people who, for various reasons, had become discontented with Saul's government. One cannot read verse 2 without reflecting on how needy people later sought and now seek refuge in David's greatest son, Jesus Christ. This growing movement of support behind David led eventually to his crowning as king of all Israel.

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<sup>249</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 219.

<sup>250</sup>David Payne, p. 113.

<sup>251</sup>Gordon, *I & II Samuel* . . . , p. 172.

### 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. 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 Judah, but its exact location is unknown.<sup>252</sup>

### 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 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.

Saul was aware that some in his army, apparently even some of his tribal kinsmen from Benjamin, had deserted to David (v. 7). He 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).

Ahimelech appealed to Saul on David's behalf much as 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). Moreover they probably realized that Saul's order was irrational. Doeg was an Edomite, a foreigner who 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). 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.

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<sup>252</sup>On 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.

"Through the hand of a foreigner, Saul perpetrates upon Israelites, priests of the Lord, what he himself did not perpetrate upon foreigners, the Amalekites."<sup>253</sup>

God preserved one of Eli's descendants even though 85 other priests died. This man 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). 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 die: 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. Therefore God cut off his life. Saul became increasingly paranoid, isolated from others, hateful toward his supporters as well as his enemies, and guilty of shedding innocent blood.

Conversely, when people submit to God's authority over them, they really begin to live (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 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.

"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,

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<sup>253</sup>Miscall, p. 136.

even while on the run from Saul, is shown saving a city from Philistine attack."<sup>254</sup>

### **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 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 (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. 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 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 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 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.

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<sup>254</sup>Gordon, *I & II Samuel* . . . , p. 175.

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. 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).

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. More people were siding with David and were turning 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, but David had to flee again because the inhabitants of Ziph also threatened to betray him.

#### **Jonathan's encouragement of David 23:15-18**

The town of Ziph 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.

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" (cf. 30:6). What he said to David rested on God's promises and plans for David that both Jonathan and Saul now knew (cf. 20:2, 31). 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 (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 our 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," "make more sure," "investigate," "see," "look," "learn;" 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).

### **David in the wilderness of Maon 23:24-29**

Maon stood about five miles south of Ziph in the wilderness of Judah. 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.

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."<sup>255</sup>

Saul, who had disregarded God's Law, became a deadly threat to David (23:19-28). However, David, who regarded God's Law, became a source of life to Saul (23:29—24:22) and to others in Israel (ch. 25).

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.

### **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 his robe hem. 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."<sup>256</sup>

### **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, which archaeologists have not yet identified. There Saul discovered a sheepfold that evidently encircled the mouth of one of the caves in those limestone hills. The king entered the cave to relieve himself, 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.

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

<sup>255</sup>Youngblood, p. 745.

<sup>256</sup>Baldwin, p. 146. Cf. 15:28; 20:14-17; 24:4.

anointed, King Saul. David's advisers seem to have been resorting to pious language to urge David to follow their counsel (cf. 23:7). We must always evaluate the advice of friends in the light of God's Word even when they claim divine authority. Their counsel 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.<sup>257</sup> 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.<sup>258</sup>

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.

"Perhaps no greater example of wisdom practice is found than in David's response to Saul."<sup>259</sup>

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 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!' . . .

<sup>257</sup>See Milgrom, pp. 61-65.

<sup>258</sup>D. J. Wiseman, "Alalakh," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, p. 128.

<sup>259</sup>Heater, "Young David . . .," p. 54. Cf. Prov. 24:21.

"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."<sup>260</sup>

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).<sup>261</sup> He was Saul's son-in-law and successor (son) 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. 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* to the nation when he reached the end of his career (ch. 12).

#### **David's promise not to cut off Saul's descendants and name 24:16-22**

David's words and actions convicted Saul of his actions (v. 17), and the king wept tears of remorse (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," probably one of the refuges near Engedi (perhaps the site of Masada; v. 22; cf. 23:29).

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<sup>260</sup>Swindoll, pp. 88, 89.

<sup>261</sup>J. M. Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.," *Iraq* 18 (1956):68-110.

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 determine 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 rewarded David for his trust and obedience by giving him a peaceful conscience immediately, and safety 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."<sup>262</sup>

This central chapter also has a chiastic 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).
- A'. Saul treats David as though he were dead (v. 44)."<sup>263</sup>

### 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 was the last of the judges. David would probably have continued Samuel's ministry and become Israel's first king

<sup>262</sup>Youngblood, p. 752.

<sup>263</sup>John Stek, *The Former Prophets: A Syllabus*, p. 65A. Quoted by Youngblood, p. 752.

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."<sup>264</sup>

This chapter opens with one disappointment for David, the death of his mentor, and it closes with another, the departure of his mate (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 wilderness of Paran, to which David fled next, lay just southeast of Maon (v. 2).

### David's request of Nabal 25:2-8

Both 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 may be an allusion to 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.<sup>265</sup>

"Nabal" 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 could not be clearer. He was foolish; she 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.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>264</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 238. Cf. Jer. 15:1.

<sup>265</sup>Robert P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24—26," *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980):42-43.

<sup>266</sup>Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978):231.

"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."<sup>267</sup>

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).<sup>268</sup> 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."<sup>269</sup>

### **Nabal's foolish response to David 25:9-13**

Nabal was a political loyalist 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 about to abandon him, the very thing he falsely accused David of doing to Saul (v. 10; cf. 22:7-8).<sup>270</sup> 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). One of the characteristics of a fool is that he or she does not listen to other people (v. 17). 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).

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<sup>267</sup>Heater, "Young David . . .," p. 56.

<sup>268</sup>Baldwin, p. 147. Cf. v. 8.

<sup>269</sup>D. J. Wiseman, "Is it peace?"—Covenant and Diplomacy," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:3 (1982):318.

<sup>270</sup>Levenson, p. 225.

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]).<sup>271</sup>

"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."<sup>272</sup>

### **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.

### **Abigail's appeal to David 25:23-31**

Abigail's approach to David was a model of tact and courage. 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.

First, Abigail took all the blame for her husband's foolish actions. In this she reminds us of Jesus Christ who also rode into the teeth 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 servant 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.

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 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, a blessing promised in the Mosaic Law for those who obeyed God (cf. Deut. 4:10; 8:1; 16:20; et al).

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<sup>271</sup>Gunn, p. 96.

<sup>272</sup>Youngblood, p. 753.

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.<sup>273</sup> This figurative description of David as kept by God, rather than thrown out 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 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."<sup>274</sup>

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 Sam. 14:1-20.<sup>275</sup>

Abigail was careful "neither to exculpate Nabal 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 overtly defending him, she covertly dissociates herself from him."<sup>276</sup>

### **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 from celebrating. He was totally oblivious to his mortal danger. He was feasting rather than

<sup>273</sup>G. M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 33.

<sup>274</sup>Heater, "Young David . . .," p. 56.

<sup>275</sup>Cf. D. M. Gunn, "Traditional composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 26:2 (1976):221-22.

<sup>276</sup>Levenson, p. 230.

fasting. He was behaving like a king, the ultimate authority, rather than as 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.

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 *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, literally, that he would not leave anyone who urinated against the wall (i.e., any male) in Nabal's household alive (v. 22). The writer pictured Nabal in the most uncomplimentary terms.

Nabal's heart died within him 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. Nabal further appears to have gone catatonic; when he realized what had happened, the shock immobilized him. 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.

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 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 (mistresses). Yet God forbade this of Israel's kings (Deut. 17:17).

David did not restrain himself in his relations with women, and this caused him major problems later in his life. The same words "sent" and "took her" appear both here (v. 40) and in the account of David's affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4). We see here the seed problem that bore bitter fruit in David's adultery.

Should Abigail have agreed to become David's wife? It appears that she had a choice (v. 42). I do not believe she should have agreed to marry David, who was already married to someone else (Gen. 2:24), if she was truly free to decide. 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.

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. 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 chiasmatic.

- "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)."<sup>277</sup>

### **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). 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).

### **Abishai's offer to kill Saul 26:6-12**

Ahimelech the Hittite may have been a foreign mercenary (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). 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.

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 had

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<sup>277</sup>Youngblood, p. 767.

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 a ravine 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 as 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 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).<sup>278</sup> The common conception in the ancient Near East was that gods ruled areas. 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).<sup>279</sup> 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

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<sup>278</sup>On 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 Chisholm, "Does God Deceive?" pp. 11-12, 19-21.

<sup>279</sup>See Youngblood, *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 84; and Daniel Isaac Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*.

caught easily.<sup>280</sup> 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. Contrast Paul's testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7. 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

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 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). The text does not record another meeting of David and Saul before Saul died.

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 greatest example of one who trusted the Father to vindicate Him (cf. Luke 23:46). Our vindication does not always come in this lifetime, as David's did. Sometimes it comes after death, as Jesus' 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 the way it opened, in which the writer contrasted Samuel and Eli's sons.

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<sup>280</sup>Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 771.

### 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 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, 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.

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.

"Without David, Saul lacked military leadership sufficient to eliminate the Philistine threat; without Saul, David lacked a power base from which to operate."<sup>281</sup>

"Secondly, Achish realized that as soon as David did attack his own people, he would lose for ever the possibility of changing sides."<sup>282</sup>

Consequently Achish was willing for David and his men to live in Philistia, apparently as mercenaries (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.<sup>283</sup> 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* to Achish. Anyone who was the 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).

<sup>281</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 219.

<sup>282</sup>David Payne, p. 140.

<sup>283</sup>Merrill, "1 Samuel," p. 222.

Ziklag evidently stood on the southwestern edge of Philistia about 27 miles south-southwest of Gerar, but its exact site is not certain.<sup>284</sup> 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. 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. 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).

"Like Nabal [in 25:10], Achish seriously underestimates David by regarding him as a servant or slave."<sup>285</sup>

### **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).

<sup>284</sup>J. D. Ray, "Two Etymologies: Ziklag and Phicol," *Vetus Testamentum* (July 1986):355-58.

<sup>285</sup>Miscall, p. 165. Cf. Gunn, *The Fate . . .*, p. 107.

### **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)."<sup>286</sup>

### **The threat of Philistine attack 28:3-7**

Samuel's death and the mention of Saul's commendable removal of mediums and spiritists prepare for what follows (cf. Lev. 20:6; Deut. 18:10-11). Mediums are people who communicate with the dead, and spiritists are those who communicate with evil spirits. The terms always go together in the Old Testament, indicating the close relationship that exists between these activities. 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.

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.

"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)."<sup>287</sup>

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 attention to the word of God, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to hear the word of God (cf. Jer. 7:13-16).

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 it now. Perhaps this verse means that even when Saul did

<sup>286</sup>Gordon, *I & II Samuel* . . . , p. 192.

<sup>287</sup>Gunn, *The Fate* . . . , p. 108.

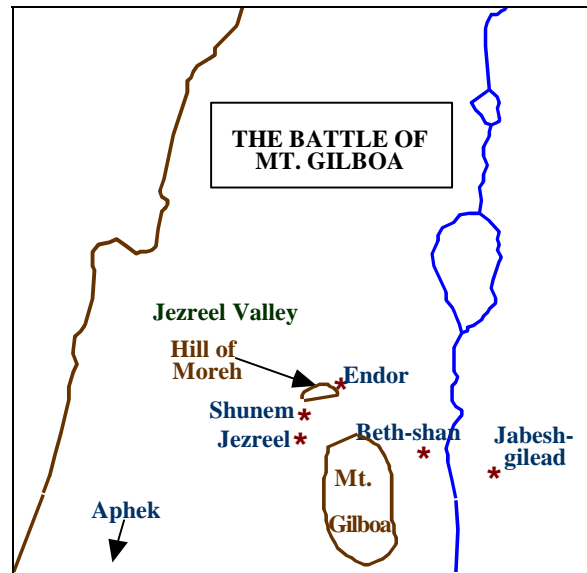
have access to it God did not answer him. One writer suggested that Saul may have made a new Urim and Thummim, and that they are in view here.<sup>288</sup>

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.'"<sup>289</sup>

### 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 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.



I think it is most likely that God allowed Samuel, or perhaps 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. Some interpreters have concluded that a demon who impersonated Samuel came up. However, what this being proceeded to say in verses 16-19 argues against this view. It was a message from God. 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).<sup>290</sup> Evidently she expected contact with a demon posing as Samuel, but, to her amazement, God really permitted Samuel, or a vision of him, to appear. This seems to have been a divine revelation to Saul, the last one God gave him.<sup>291</sup>

"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

<sup>288</sup>Wood, *Israel's United* . . . , p. 167

<sup>289</sup>John W. Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, pp. 359-60.

<sup>290</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 194-95; and Archer, *Encyclopedia of* . . . , pp. 180-81.

<sup>291</sup>See Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 265-69.

this was an extraordinary event for her, and a frightening one because she was not in control."<sup>292</sup>

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 "lying spirits" (1 Kings 22:22). This passage does not say that the witch brought up Samuel from the dead. God revealed Samuel to Saul.

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 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 apparition, coming up out of the earth (i.e., the netherworld). 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 out of 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 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.

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<sup>292</sup>Baldwin, p. 159.

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 we 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 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."<sup>293</sup>

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 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. This proved to be Saul's "last supper."<sup>294</sup> 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.

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 because he proved to be an insubordinate and

<sup>293</sup>W. A. M. Beuken, "1 Samuel 28: The Prophet as 'Hammer of Witches,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (1978):8.

<sup>294</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 196.

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 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 fortunes, David attained the height of his popularity thus far. This chapter seems to antedate the previous one slightly. The writer appears to have incorporated it in his narrative here to highlight the contrasts between Saul and David in chapters 27—31.

#### **The Philistine commanders' fear of David 29:1-5**

The lords or 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). David and his 600 mercenaries were bringing up the rear in the Philistine procession. 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. 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 other Philistine kings could hardly believe how naive Achish was being. They saw that David would probably turn against them in the upcoming battle to regain acceptance with his commander, Saul. They proceeded to use the same phrase Achish had used to defend David, "Is this not David?" 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 enjoyed solidarity with Saul in the minds of all the people, which the song they quoted assumed.

#### **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 to him. 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, "What have I done?" 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." David probably wanted Achish to think that he was referring to Achish as "my lord," 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 Pilate's threefold vindication of Jesus (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; cf. Luke 23:22).<sup>295</sup> David had been as 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).<sup>296</sup> 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 scarce 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 convinced Achish of David's loyalty, which yielded a measure of protection for David. He also convinced the other Philistine commanders of 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."<sup>297</sup>

In short, God providentially caused the reactions of people, as different as those reactions were, to protect David (cf. Rom. 8:28). Even when we do not sense it, God cares for us, as a shepherd (cf. Ps. 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."<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup>Brueggemann, p. 200.

<sup>296</sup>Miscall, p. 174.

<sup>297</sup>Brueggemann, *First and . . .*, p. 199.

<sup>298</sup>Wood, *Israel's United . . .*, p. 211.

### 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 resembled 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 chiasmic 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).
- 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)."<sup>299</sup>

### David's crisis and his response 30:1-6

David took three days to return from Apek (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). 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 the 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. 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."<sup>300</sup>

"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]."<sup>301</sup>

### God's provision of guidance 30:7-10

David obtained an answer through the Urim and Thummim, which the high priest carried in the breast pocket 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

<sup>299</sup>Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 791.

<sup>300</sup>Baldwin, p. 169.

<sup>301</sup>Brueggemann, *First and . . .*, p. 201.

groups as he had 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 el Arish, which flows west into the Mediterranean Sea a few miles south of Ziklag. This stream marked the southwestern border of the land that God had promised to Abraham's descendants.

### **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.

### **David's successful victory over the Amalekites 30:16-20**

The Amalekites were feasting on the plunder that they had taken, although the Egyptian servant had received nothing to eat or drink when he fell ill (cf. v. 12). David launched his attack early in the morning the next day and continued fighting until night fell. Since 400 of the Amalekites escaped, 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 vehicle of choice 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).

### **Sharing spoil with David's followers 30:21-25**

The rest of the 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. 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.

### Sharing spoil with the Judahites 30:26-31

David also distributed some of the war plunder to the elders of Judah.<sup>302</sup> 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 propensity 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."<sup>303</sup>

This chapter presents many qualities that mark strong, effective leadership. These include empathy (v. 4), faith (vv. 6, 8, 23, 26), decisiveness (v. 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.

"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)."<sup>304</sup>

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

The scene shifts back to Mt. Gilboa in the North 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.

"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*) ['fought,' 30:17] the Amalekites, and they flee (*nus*) [30:17], the Philistines smite (*hikkah*) ['killed,' v. 2] Saul and his sons, and Israel flees (*nus*) [vv. 1, 7]."<sup>305</sup>

<sup>302</sup>See Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 795, for the locations of the sites named in verses 27-30.

<sup>303</sup>David Payne, p. 153.

<sup>304</sup>Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," p. 791.

<sup>305</sup>Miscall, pp. 181-82.

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).<sup>306</sup>

### **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 frustrated God's purpose by not following the Lord faithfully. Consequently the Philistines 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: 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 in the battle (cf. 2 Sam. 2:8, 10, 12; 3:8, 14-15; 4:5, 8, 12; 1 Chron. 8:33).

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,<sup>307</sup> asked his armor-bearer to kill him, but the young man refused to do so, as David had when he had 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 slaying the king. Or perhaps, like David, he feared God and so would not kill the Lord's anointed. This insubordination, which had characterized Saul's conduct before Yahweh, led Saul to take his own life. 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?"<sup>308</sup>

Eli, too, died 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.<sup>309</sup> Both men were disappointments to God and His people.

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<sup>306</sup>See Gordon, *I & II Samuel* . . . , p. 202.

<sup>307</sup>McCarter, p. 443.

<sup>308</sup>Swindoll, p. 122.

<sup>309</sup>Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," pp. 798-99.

Saul's armor-bearer also committed suicide in battle, probably because if he had outlived the one whom he should have protected with his life, he could have been executed for dereliction of duty. 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.

### **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. 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 in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron. 10:10). They also circulated Saul's weapons and sent them on a tour of Philistine pagan temples before finally depositing them in the temple of Ashtaroah, 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 Philistines fastened Saul's decapitated corpse on the wall of their nearby town of Beth-shan. 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 Philistines showed great disrespect for Saul by hanging 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. 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 it, and perhaps to prevent disease,<sup>310</sup> and buried the remaining bones. Jabesh-gilead lay 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.<sup>311</sup> 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.

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<sup>310</sup>Baldwin, p. 171.

<sup>311</sup>See my comments on 11:6-11.

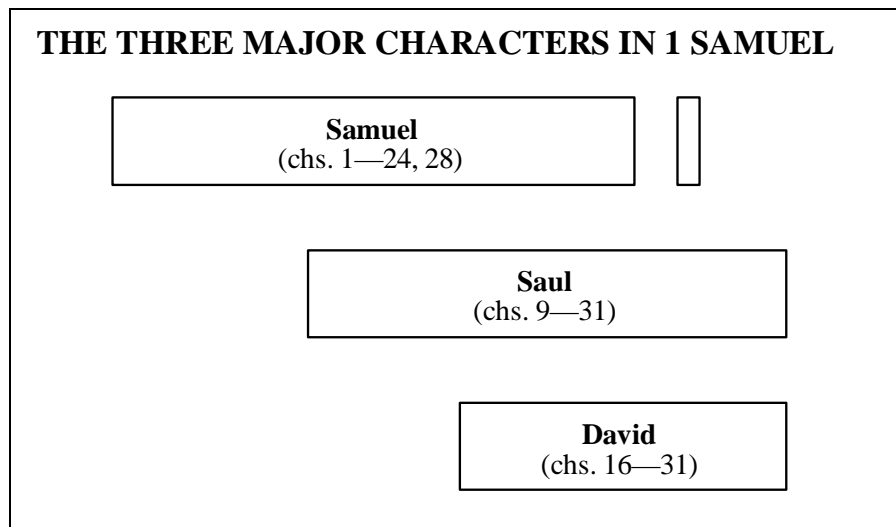
This is how the life of Israel's first king, the man after the Israelites' own heart, ended (cf. 1 Chron. 10:13-14; Hos. 13:11). He was full of promise at his anointing, having many natural qualities that could have contributed to a successful reign. He also possessed the Holy Spirit's enablement after 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."<sup>312</sup>

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.

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.



<sup>312</sup>R. B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy*, p. 32.

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