

FIRST SAMUEL

First and Second Samuel were written as one book. They appear as such in the Hebrew manuscripts. We owe the division of the one volume into two to the Septuagint. According to J. Sidlow Baxter in *Explore the Book*: “The present division into 1 and 2 Samuel has been decried by some scholars; yet undoubtedly it has much merit. Second Samuel is distinctively the book of David’s forty years’ reign; and it is well that such an epochal reign should be marked off, and given a book to itself. As for the First Book of Samuel, it equally clearly marks off a definite period, running from the birth of Samuel, the last of Judges, to the death of Saul, the first of the kings. It covers a period of about one hundred and fifteen years. For sheer interest, 1 Samuel is unsurpassed. Not only does it recount eventful history interwoven with the biographies of three colorful personalities – Samuel, Saul, David; and it is around these three that the chapters are grouped thus – chapters i. to vii. – Samuel. Chapters viii. to xv. – Saul. Chapters xvi. to xxxi. – David. Of course, the three accounts overlap. Samuel lives well on into the reign of Saul, and also sees David rise to prominence; while Saul continues his reign until David is thirty years old. Yet it is none the less true that 1 Samuel is grouped as we have just indicated. In the first seven chapters Samuel is the prominent figure. In the next eight chapters all focuses on Saul, and Samuel is in the background. In the remaining chapters, although Saul is still reigning, there is no mistaking that the main attention is now on David.”

Author and Time of Writing:

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Who was the compiler of the Book of Samuel is absolutely unknown, and we are left also to gather our conclusions as to the date and character of its composition from incidental facts and allusions scattered through the history. One such conclusion forced upon us is that the Book is made up of a number of detached narratives, each of which is complete in itself, and carries the history down into its remoter consequences. Of these narratives we have five or six grouped together in 2 Samuel 21-24, without any attempt at arrangement. The execution of Saul’s seven sons or grandsons, the list of victories over the Philistines, David’s psalm of thanksgiving, his last words, the names of his heroes, and the numbering of the people seem placed thus at the end because the compiler had no means of knowing what was their proper place in the history. The ‘last words’ might fitly form the conclusion of the whole, but the other narratives are entirely out of place, and conceal from the reader how little we know of David’s conduct after he had returned to Jerusalem, penitent and saddened by the death of his beloved but unfilial son.”

Whoever compiled the material for First and Second Samuel must have had some material to work with. From First Chronicles we gather that Samuel kept some records of events, as did the prophets Nathan and Gad. There also existed official records called “the annals of King David.”¹

Theme and Content:

About the theme and content of I and II Samuel, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “Three characters dominate the books of Samuel; the prophet Samuel; Saul, who became Israel’s first king; and above all David, the greatest and best loved of all who reigned in Jerusalem. The very sequence points to one of the main themes of the book, which is the transition from theocracy to monarchy. Under the theocracy, God by his Spirit designated human leaders as and when they were needed, whereas after the establishment of a dynastic monarchy a successor to the throne was already designated from among the king’s sons. To Israel, this development seemed altogether desirable: a king would regulate Israel’s life according to some agreed policy in place of the piecemeal action of individual tribes, and having organized

1. See I Chron. 29:29,30; 27:24.

the machinery of state of individual tribes, and trained a standing army he would enable Israel to defeat the aggressive neighbors who plundered their crops and threatened to occupy Israel's land. In the face of strong popular demand for a king opposition finally gave way, and the account of Israel's circumstances at the time, together with the interaction of conflicting opinions and the successes and failures of the three leaders, make up the subject matter of the books of Samuel."

It is difficult, merely on the basis of material provided by the Scriptures, for us to get a clear picture of Israel's spiritual and political condition at the time *The Book of First Samuel* opens. *The Pulpit Commentary* gives an excellent and helpful general introduction to *The Book of First Samuel*, from which we glean the following: "Never did time seem more hopeless than when Samuel arose. The Philistines, strengthened not merely by a constant influx of immigrants, but by the importation of arms from Greece, were fast reducing Israel to the condition of a subject race. It might contend on equal terms with Moab and Ammon, but the same superiority of weapons which had given Greece the victory at Marathon and Plataea made the Philistines more than a match for the rude levies of Israel. Samson with a bone might slay of the enemy heaps upon heaps, but the nation which had helmets and shields, and coats of mail, and swords and spears, must in the long run prevail. ... And so the loss of the sea coast, or the neglect to conquer and secure it in the days of Judah's strength (... Judges 1:18, 19), nearly lost Israel her independence, and made her forfeit her noble calling. Content with those rolling downs on which they found abundant pasture for their cattle, the princes of Judah forgot, or had never learned, that the empire of the sea carries with it the mastery of the land. But just when it seemed that Israel must be crushed out from among the nations Samuel arose."

There had been a gleam of comfort under his predecessor Eli. Of the early life of this remarkable man we know nothing. He was the head of the inferior house of Ithamar, the younger of Aaron's sons; but as the chiefs of both the priestly houses held a high place in the commonwealth of Israel, it may not, after all, be so extraordinary that we should find him at the commencement of the Books of Samuel, possessed not only of the supreme civil power, but also of the high priesthood. ... What is really remarkable is that Eli should be Israel's civil ruler. If he were strong enough to take this, no one would dispute with him the priesthood. And here Scripture is absolutely silent.

The whole tone, nevertheless, of the history sets Israel before us as enjoying under Eli a period of greater ease and prosperity than had been its lot under Samson. The hill land of Israel was so easy of defense, and the people so valiant, that under an able leader it repeatedly held its ground against the mail clad Philistines, and in Eli's days they had lost the supremacy which made even Judah, during Samson's judgeship, obey their commands. It was only after a long period of slow decay, of which Eli's worthless sons were the cause, that Israel lost its independence and had to submit to vassalage. It is an indication of the greatness of the reverse, that the minds of the people were so embittered against him that they have struck his name and the names of his race out of the genealogies, and have put the worst construction upon the prophecies to which the broken spirited old man submitted with such touching humility. To this cause perhaps is also due the suppression of all account of his earlier doings. What we have is taken probably from 'the Acts of Samuel;' for there is a curious humor and play upon words running through all Eli's sayings such as none but a contemporary would record. Samuel, we may be sure, had a loving regard for Eli, but the people remembered him only in connection with the Philistine invasion and the cruelties which accompanied it, and of which the memory filled them with an intense horror. It was a calamity too great to be fully narrated in history, but the Psalmist speaks of it as the climax of Israel's degradation (... Psalm 78:59-64), when God 'greatly abhorred' them; and the mention of it by Jeremiah (Ch. 26.) roused all Jerusalem to fury.

It was thus from its deepest fall that Samuel raised the nation to a new life, and from its shattered ruins built it up into an orderly and progressive kingdom. The foundation of all his reforms was the restoration of the moral and religious life of the people. Without this nothing was possible. But in spite of all its faults, Israel was still sound at heart, simple minded and primitive; backward indeed in culture, but free from those debasing and effeminate vices which too often make sensuality the companion of refinement. It was no sickly, sentimental people among whom Samuel preached; and when his words had brought

conviction to them, with strong heart they followed him; and so he won for them an alleviation of the Philistine yoke, and prepared the way for its final destruction. In a year when the elements were greatly disturbed — for there was lightning during wheat harvest — a violent thunderstorm enabled the Israelites, rushing down the steep hill of Mizpah, to break the terrified ranks of the Philistines, and God by the great deliverance wrought that day set his seal to the prophet's work.

But as long as a man's work depends upon his personal energy, it has no enduring existence. ... Samuel was too wise to trust mere personal influence. If Israel were to be saved, it must be by institutions which would daily exercise their pressure, and push the people upward to a higher level. He seems to have studied the past history of his nation carefully, and to have clearly seen where its weakness lay. And so he earnestly set himself to the task of giving it mental culture and orderly government; external security from danger, and internal progressive development. The means he employed for the nation's internal growth was the founding of schools, and here the honor of the initiative belongs to him, as well as of the wise development of his institutions. ... But as regards the kingdom, he was the regulator rather than the initiator of the movement. Still, his wise mind saw the ripeness of the times for it, and to him is due its greatness and success.

Thus, in prophecy and in the kingdom, Samuel first gave Israel education, and then constitutional monarchy. Samuel was the first founder of schools, and as the great and primary object of his life had been the internal reformation of the Jewish people, we can well understand how his personal work had led onwards to this attempt to redeem his countrymen from ignorance. In those long years which he spent in perpetual wanderings up and down the land, he must have constantly found that a chief obstacle to his work was the low mental state of the people. He had been brought up himself amidst whatever learning the nation had imported with it from Egypt; but Shiloh's sun had set. Was learning to perish with it? Nowhere in Israel were men to be found fit to bear office or administer justice. The decisive failure of one so highly gifted by nature as Saul, and who started with so much in his favor, and under Samuel's guidance, but who seems to have had no ideas beyond fighting, proves that Samuel was right in his hesitation about creating a king. The fitting man was nowhere to be found. Schools were the primary necessity. Through them the whole mental state of the people would be raised, and men would be trained to serve God in Church and State. From these schools came forth a David. Without them the brave warrior, but fierce despot, Saul was all that was possible.

At the Naioth, or Students' Lodgings, (for that is what the word means,) near Ramah, his own patrimonial inheritance, Samuel gathered the young men who were to lift up Israel from its debasement. He taught them reading, writing, and music; he also impressed their minds with solemn religious services, and apparently made history and psalmody their two chief studies. These schools were termed Schools of the Prophets not only because Samuel was a prophet, and the teachers bore the same honored name, but because the young men were trained expressly for the service of Jehovah. ... Any religious uninspired service, especially if musical, was called prophecy. David's trained singers prophesied with harps and other instruments (... I Chronicles 25:1-3). But all of them, inspired and uninspired, went forth to do work for Jehovah; not as priests, not necessarily as teachers, or as musicians, though they were Israel's bards. The institution was essentially free, was open to all comers, and when educated, the prophet might return to his farm, or to some avocation of town life. But he was first of all an educated man, and, secondly, he had been taught the nature of Jehovah, how he was to be worshipped, and that was the life which every member of a covenant nation ought to lead. Thus Samuel's schools not only raised Israel to a higher mental level, but they also were the great means for maintaining the worship of Jehovah and teaching the people true and spiritual notions of the nature of God. As such we find future prophets earnest in maintaining them. ... This then was one part of the labors of Samuel. He laid the foundation and fostered the rapid growth of a grand system of national education. At Ramah he trained men to be Israel's teachers; but he did not confine himself to this. Most of the great ornaments of David's court were his disciples, and it is probable that large numbers of the wealthy and more promising youth of the kingdom went to his schools simply to learn something of those wonderful arts of reading and writing, which opened so new a world to the youth of a race always

distinguished for its intellectual aptitudes. And through them Samuel raised the whole people mentally and morally. ... And it was Samuel who laid the broad foundations of that culture which, carried on first by prophets and then by scribes, made the Jews capable of writing the Bible, of translating the Old Testament into Greek, of teaching its principles in most of the cities of Greece, and finally of going forth as missionaries, carrying with them the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The other great labor of Samuel was concerned with the establishment of the kingdom, as an external necessity for Israel's orderly development. And here again we find a man advance in age; for his great aim and purpose was to found a limited, or, as we might even call it, a constitutional monarchy. To a certain extent he was an unwilling agent; for he saw that the times were not ripe. A limited monarchy is only possible among an educated people, and Samuel's Book of the Kingdom (... I Samuel 10:25) could have had but little influence upon a Saul, who could neither read nor write. Perhaps anarchy is inevitably renewed by despotism, and certainly Saul became too like what Samuel feared the king would be. It was only after he had trained David that there was a Jewish Alfred ready to sit upon the throne; and when we read so emphatically that he was a king after God's own heart, we must bear in mind that, with all his private faults, David never attempted to set himself above God's law, or even to pervert it to his own use. He strictly confined himself within the limits of a theocratic king, and his crimes were personal, and as such repented of, and the punishment humbly borne.

But the term theocracy is ambiguous, or at least has two sides according to the nature of its administration. As administered by the high priest it was a failure. The appeal to Jehovah by Urim and Thummim was seldom made, and then only under exceptional circumstances, and there was no orderly method of carrying out its commands. Those commands themselves were of the most general kind, confined apparently to a simple affirmative or negative. It was thus irregular, fitful, in abeyance in all calm and peaceful epochs, and when called into exercise was liable to terrible abuse, which it even seemed to sanction. When Israel set itself to exterminate the tribe of Benjamin, the people may have supposed that they had a sort of religious approval of their extreme measures in the fact that the oracle had encouraged them to make the third attack (... Judges 20:28). Really the ferocity was their own, and the priest who had given an affirmative answer to their question may and ought to have been horrified at the cruelty which followed upon the victory, and which he was absolutely powerless to prevent. A theocracy has been tried again in the Papacy, with much the same result, of being actually one of the worst possible forms of government; and, like the theocracy of the time of the Judges, it must necessarily be a snare to the conscience, as claiming or appearing to give religious sanction to deeds that offend the moral sense. The theocracy which Samuel endeavored to establish was that of kingly power in the hands of a layman, but acting in obedience to the written law of God, or to his will as declared from time to time by the living voice of prophecy. It was a monarchy limited by the priest and the prophet, the former taking his stand upon the Mosaic law, the latter with a more free and active force giving a direct command in God's name, appealing to the king's moral sense, and usually representing also the popular feeling. To the old theocracy there had practically been no check, and, what was almost as bad, no person responsible for carrying out its commands. But it seems soon to have fallen into abeyance, and the judges were men raised up irregularly under the pressure of some extreme peril. Usually they did well, chiefly in expelling invaders from the land, but the priest with the ephod took little or no share in their exploits. Under so irregular a form of government there was small chance for the orderly development of the powers that lay dormant within Israel, and which were to make it a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Samuel's object was to found a monarchy active and powerful for the constant maintenance of order, but controlled by such checks as would prevent it from becoming a despotism. And here we have the key to his struggle with Saul. Samuel had a hearty detestation of mere arbitrary power, as we know from his own words to the elders (... 1 Samuel 8:11- 18); but Saul with his bodyguard of 3000 men had both the will and the means of making himself absolute. Perhaps all minds of great military ability have a natural tendency to arbitrariness. Unqualified obedience is a soldier's duty, and a general knows that in discipline lies his strength. It is otherwise with a king. He is the best ruler who trains his people to habits of self-reliance, and to do what is right not because he orders it, but because they choose

it. A nation drilled to obedience, a Church made orthodox by having its creed forced upon it, loses thereby all moral strength, because, as in national and religious life, it is only by the exercise of a moral choice that human nature can advance upward. Samuel was laboring for Israel's growth in all that was good, and the only king of whom he could approve was one under whom Israel would be free to work out its own destiny; and such a king would be no tyrant, but one who would rule in submission to the same law as that which governed the people. The two particulars in which Saul set his own will above the command of Samuel may have been matters of no great primary importance. But the one happened soon after Saul's appointment, and thus showed a very early tendency on his part to make his own judgment supreme; the other was an express order, backed by Israel's past history; and both were given by the man who had called Saul to the throne. But the real point at issue was that Saul was moving so quickly towards despotism, that when a second trial of him was made, he had advanced a long way towards it. Never was a despot more thorough than Saul when he stained his hands with the blood of the priests at Nob, and of their innocent wives and children, on the mere supposition of their complicity with David's escape. Possibly, if we knew the particulars, the slaughter of the Gibeonites was a crime of the same deep dye. It is at least significant that the cause of the famine was said to be 'Saul and his bloody house.' People in those days were not so tenderhearted as to be troubled much about putting a few men of a subject race to death, unless the deed had been done barbarously. The manner of it must have shocked them, or it would not have remained imprinted so deeply upon the conscience of the nation. In David, trained by Samuel from his youth, we have a noble example of a theocratic king. That notable fact which I have already pointed out, was that David, in spite of his terrible personal crimes, never set himself above the law. This was due, we may feel sure, to Samuel's early teaching. He had in Joab the very man to be the willing tool of a despot. He would have delighted in playing a Doeg's part. David valued his faithfulness, appreciated his bravery and skill, nay, even used him for his crimes. But he shrank from his lawlessness. God was always in David's eyes greater than himself. His law, often violated in hours of lust, was nevertheless to be bowed before as supreme. And so as regards his subjects, there seems to have been no intentional oppression of them. The idea of law was ever a ruling one in David's mind, and thus he approached Samuel's ideal of 'the anointed one,' though his fierce passions brought upon him personally deep and terrible stains. It was thus Samuel's lot to sketch out two of the main lines of thought which converge in Christ. The idea of the prophet and the idea of the king gain under him their shape and proportion. This is especially true as regards the latter. The king is ever in Samuel's eyes 'the Messiah,' Jehovah's anointed one. Again and again the word occurs with marked prominence. And it was the pregnant germ of a great future with the Jew. He never lost the idea, but carried it onward and forward, with David's portrait for its center, as of one in whom the Messiah's lineaments were marked in outline, feebly indeed and imperfectly, but with the certainty that a Messiah would come who would fill up with glorious beauty that faint, blurred sketch.

Such then is a brief summary of Samuel's work, and it justifies us in claiming especial importance for this portion of Jewish history, independently of the interest connected with the development of two such extraordinary characters as Saul and David, and with the many remarkable persons grouped around them, such as Eli and Jonathan, and the brave soldiers who formed the court of the two kings."

Outline:

For the outline of First Samuel we borrow the one from Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, as given in the volume 1 AND 2 SAMUEL by Joyce G. Baldwin.

I. THE END OF AN ERA: SAMUEL, THE LAST JUDGE OF ISRAEL. (1 SAMUEL 1:1 – 12:25)

- a. The birth and boyhood of Samuel (1:1 – 4:1a)
 - i. *A woman's prayer is answered (1:1-28)*
 - ii. *Hannah exult in the Lord (2:1-10)*
 - iii. *Samuel encounters corruption at Shiloh (2:11-36)*

- iv. *The Lord calls Samuel (3:1-4:1a)*
- b. Disaster, repentance and deliverance (4:1b – 7:17)
 - i. *Defeat and loss of the ark of the covenant (4:1b-22)*
 - ii. *The Philistines fall foul of the ark (5:1-12)*
 - iii. *The return of the ark (6:1- 7:2)*
 - iv. *Repentance and recommitment at Mizpah (7:3-17)*
- c. The question of the kingship (8:1 – 12:25)
 - i. *The request for a king (8:1-22)*
 - ii. *Saul's secret anointing (9:1-10:16)*
 - iii. *Saul elected and proclaimed king (10:17-27)*
 - iv. *Saul confirmed as king (11:1-15)*
 - v. *Samuel hands over to Saul (12:1-25)*

2. SAUL: THE FIRST KING (1 SAMUEL 13:1 – 31:13)

- a. Key incidents in the reign of Saul (13:1 – 15:35)
 - i. *Jonathan attacks the Philistine garrison (13:1-23)*
 - ii. *Jonathan's second initiative (14:1-23)*
 - iii. *Saul's rash oath (14:24-46)*
 - iv. *A survey of Saul's reign (14:47-52)*
 - v. *Samuel's final confrontation with Saul (15:1-35)*
- b. David comes into prominence (16:1 – 19:17)
 - i. *David's secret anointing (16:1-13)*
 - ii. *Saul needs a musician (16:14-23)*
 - iii. *Saul needs a warrior to fight Goliath (17:1-18:5)*
 - iv. *Saul's jealousy and fear of David (18:6-30)*
 - v. *Jonathan and Michal save David's life (19:1-17)*
- c. David the outlaw (19:18 – 26:25)
 - i. *David takes refuge with Samuel (19:18-24)*
 - ii. *David and Jonathan make a pact (20:1-42)*
 - iii. *Abimelech the priest helps David (21:1-9)*
 - iv. *David in danger in Gath (21:10-15)*
 - v. *David at Adullam and in Moab (22:1-5)*
 - vi. *The price of protecting David (22:6-23)*
 - vii. *Saul hunts David (23:1-29)*
 - viii. *David spares Saul (24:1-25:1a)*
 - ix. *David wins Abigail (25:1b-44)*
 - x. *David spares Saul a second time (26:1-25)*
- d. David resorts to the Philistines (27:1 – 31:13)
 - i. *With Achish, king of Gath (27:1-28:2)*
 - ii. *Saul consults a medium (28:3-25)*
 - iii. *David's providential rejection from the Philistine army (29:1-11)*
 - iv. *David and the Amalekites (30:1-31)*
 - v. *Saul's last battle (31:1-13)*

Israel in the time of David



I. THE END OF AN ERA: SAMUEL, THE LAST JUDGE OF ISRAEL. (I SAMUEL 1:1 – 12:25)

a. The birth and boyhood of Samuel (1:1 – 4:1a)

In introducing this section in her book *1 and 2 Samuel*, Joyce G. Baldwin writes: "In the Hebrew text 1 Samuel 1 immediately follows Judges 21, the book of Ruth being among the 'Writings,' the third division of the Hebrew scriptures. The Christian canon, by inserting the book of Ruth into the place where it belongs in the history, 'when the judges ruled' (Ruth 1:1), drew attention to the long-term theological importance of David as the forerunner of the one born 'King of the Jews' in Bethlehem. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess was among David's ancestry through Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer (Heb. *gô'çl*), and the genealogy (Ruth 4:18-22) is another link with the Gospels (Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:31-32). The last chapters of the book of Judges, with their refrain, 'there was no king in Israel' (Judg. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), prepare the way for new developments in Israel's leadership. The 'judges' had been military as well as judicial leaders, effective in an emergency (though Samson did not fulfill his early promise), but limited by their geographical boundaries and by the nature of their office, for they did not appoint their successor. At times of uncertainty due to external pressure from aggressors, Israel felt the need of a leader who would unite the tribes, have an effective standing army, and be a match for those who led their enemies to victory. It is hardly surprising that there were differences of opinion in Israel as to the propriety of asking for a king when the Lord was their King, and Samuel bore the brunt of the conflict in his capacity as judge, priest and prophet, after the style of Moses."

i. A woman's prayer is answered (1:1-28)

- 1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.*
- 2 He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.*
- 3 Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord.*
- 4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters.*
- 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.*
- 6 And because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.*
- 7 This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.*
- 8 Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"*
- 9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple.*
- 10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.*
- 11 And she made a vow, saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."*
- 12 As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.*
- 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk*
- 14 and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."*

15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.

16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

18 She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.

20 So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

21 When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow,

22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always."

23 "Do what seems best to you," Elkanah her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the Lord make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

25 When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli,

26 and she said to him, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.

27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.

28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

The birth of Samuel, about whose role in Israel's history *The Pulpit Commentary* wrote so eloquently in the introduction above, begins with the account of a mother's role. The story, however, opens with the introduction of Elkanah, a Levite who had two wives. He is mentioned in the genealogy of I Chronicles as belonging to the tribe of Levi. We read: "Here are the men who served, together with their sons: From the Kohathites: Heman, the musician, the son of Joel, the son of Samuel, the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham..."¹

Elkanah is called "a Zuphite," from Ramathaim in the hill country of Ephraim. That statement seems simple, but it has generated some debate among Bible scholars. The Hebrew text reads "Ramathaim-Zophim." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "The prophet's birthplace was *Ramathaim-Zophim*, no doubt the Ramah which was Samuel's own head-quarters (... 1 Samuel 7:17; 15:34; 16:13; 19:18-23; 25:1); the place where he dwelt, wrought, died, and was buried, and the Arimathea of the Gospels. The Septuagint generally gives the name in full, but this is the only place where it is so written in the Hebrew. Ramah signifies a *height*, and the dual Ramathaim the *double height*, the town being situated on a hill ending in two peaks. But which it was of the many Ramahs, or hill towns, in the Holy Land, is hotly contested; probably it was the Ramah in Benjamin, about two hours' journey northwest of Jerusalem. Its second name, Zophim, is taken from Zuph, Samuel's remote ancestor, with whom the genealogy here begins. Zuph had apparently emigrated from Ephraim, one of the three tribes (Ephraim, Manasseh, Dan) to which the Kohathites were attached, and was a person of sufficient power and energy to give his name to the whole district; called the land of Zuph in ... 1 Samuel 9:5. His descendants, the Zophim, had Ramah as their centre, and Elkanah, as their head, would be a man of wealth and influence. Though actually belonging to the tribe of Benjamin,

1. I Chron. 6:33,34

Ramah is said to be upon Mount Ephraim, because this limestone range extended to and kept its name almost up to Jerusalem (see ... Judges 4:5, and ... 2 Chronicles 13:4; 15:8, compared with 13:19). Elkanah too is called an Ephrathite, *i.e.* an Ephraimite, no doubt because before Zuph emigrated the family had belonged to Ephraim, it being apparently the practice to reckon Levites as pertaining to the tribes to which they were attached (... Judges 17:7). The Hebrews Ephrathite is rightly rendered Ephraimite in ... Judges 12:5, and should be so translated here, and in ... 1 Kings 11:26. In ... Ruth 1:2; ... 1 Samuel 17:12 it means Bethlehemite, that town being also called Ephrathah, *the fruitful*; Ephraim has the same meaning, but being a dual, no adjective can be formed from it.”

Much can be said about Elkanah’s polygamy. It is obvious that bigamy or polygamy was not God’s intent when He created man as male and female.¹ Lamech introduced bigamy into the history of mankind and his moral testimony leaves much to be desired.² Bigamy or polygamy became common in Israel after it had been practiced by its founding fathers Abraham and Jacob. The law even made allowance for it as we read: “If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father’s strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.”³

Hanna was probably Elkanah’s first wife, since she is mentioned first, and he may have married Peninnah only after Hanna proved to be barren. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states here: “The skilful way in which the two wives are introduced (Hannah, Peninnah, Peninnah, Hannah) prepares the reader to expect that the barren wife will become the mother of a son. Hannah, whose name meant ‘grace,’ was being tested, like famous women before her (Gen. 11:30; 25:21; 29:51; Judg. 13:2).”

Elkanah was in the habit of traveling to Shiloh once a year, probably to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The law of Moses initially required all males to appear before the Lord three times a year,⁴ but that requirement seems to have been reduced to one later on.

This is the first time in Scripture that God is mentioned as *Yahweh Tsabaa`owt*, “the Lord of hosts.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “This title of the Deity, ‘LORD (in capitals, *i.e.* Jehovah) of Hosts,’ is a remarkable one. Fully it would be ‘Jehovah God of Hosts,’ and the omission of the word God shows that the phrase was one of long standing shortened down by constant use. And yet, though found 260 times in the Bible, this is the first place where it occurs. ‘Lord of Hosts’ (Lord not in capitals, and meaning *master ruler*) occurs only once, in ... Isaiah 10:16. ‘God of Hosts,’ Elohim-Sabaoth, though rare, occurs four times in ... Psalm 80:4, 7, 14, 19. The word Sabaoth, hosts, does not mean *armies*, inasmuch as it refers to numbers, and not to order and arrangement. It is usually employed of the heavenly bodies (... Genesis 2:1; ... Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3), which seem countless in multitude as they are spread over the vast expanse of an Oriental sky (... Genesis 15:5); and as their worship was one of the oldest and most natural forms of idolatry (... Deuteronomy 4:19; ... Job 31:26-28), so this title is a protest against it, and claims for the one God dominion over the world of stars as well as in this lower sphere. Its origin then is to be sought at some time when there was a struggle between the worship of the sun and stars and the pure monotheism of the Hebrews. Occasionally the angels are called ‘the host of heaven’ (... 1 Kings 22:19; ... Psalm 103:21; 148:2), whenever the allusion is to their number, but when the idea is that of orderly arrangement they are called God’s armies (... Genesis 32:2).”

V.3 does more than merely give us the historical background of the time in which Samuel was born. We learn from it that the religious center of the time was at Shiloh and we are introduced to Eli and his

1. Gen. 1:27

2. Gen. 4:19-24

3. Deut. 21:15-17

4. See Ex. 23:14-17.

two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was both high priest and judge and his two sons served as priests in the tabernacle. We learn later about them that they were corrupt. Although Eli is held at least partially responsible for this corruption, the general consensus of Bible scholars is that he was a man who had qualities that kept the nation together.

The Pulpit Commentary, for instance, states about him: “In Eli we find a ruler possessed of statesmanlike qualities. The country under him is prosperous; the Philistines, no longer dominant as in Samson’s time, have so felt his power that when they gain a victory the Israelites are astonished at it (... 1 Samuel 4:3). Moreover, he is not only judge, he is also high priest; but instead of belonging to the family of Phinehas, the dominant house in the time of the Judges, he belongs to that of Ithamar. When, to solve the problem, we turn to the genealogies in the Chronicles, we find Eli’s house omitted, though, even after the massacres at Shiloh and Nob, his grandson Ahimelech was still powerful (... 1 Chronicles 24:3), and one of his descendants returned from Babylon as jointly high priest with a descendant of Phinehas (... Ezra 8:2). How long a space of time elapsed between the rude heroism of Samson’s days and Eli’s orderly government in Church and State we do not know, but the difference in the condition of things is vast. Nor do we know the steps by which Eli rose to power, but he must have been a man of no common ability. Warrior as well as statesman, he had delivered the people from the danger of becoming enslaved to the Philistines. In his own family alone he failed. His sons, allowed to riot in licentiousness, ruined the stately edifice of the father’s fortunes, and the Philistines, taking advantage of the general discontent caused by their vices, succeeded in once again putting the yoke on Israel’s neck.”

About Eli’s two sons, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “Both names are Egyptian. Hophni means tadpole, and Phinehas - the negro.”

Shiloh became the center of worship during the conquest of Canaan in the days of Joshua, as we read: “The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there.”¹ And the tabernacle remained there in the time of the judges.²

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the sacrifice Elkanah offered and about the following family celebration: “His sacrifice was a thank offering, for it was only of the thank offering that the worshipers partook (Lev 7:11-18). Part of the animal was offered in sacrifice to God, and the remainder was consumed by the worshipers in a simple communion service. Unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion. Most commentaries accuse Elkanah of favoritism toward Hannah. This misconception arose in the translation of the Geneva Bible of 1560, which reads, a worthy portion, based on the Targum translation of the difficult Hebrew word (*‘apayim*) (‘two-faced’?) as choice. The LXX reads (*‘epes-ki*), ‘but,’ suggesting that Elkanah gave Hannah but one portion, although he loved her. The favoritism of Elkanah consisted not in his showing discrimination at the dinner table but in his loving Hannah more than he loved Peninnah.”

The suggestion, therefore, is that while Peninnah received several portions due to the fact that she had several children, Hannah only received one, being childless. This presented an opportunity for Peninnah to provoke and irritate her rival, adding insult to injury. We assume that this rivalry was not only limited to the time spent at Shiloh, but that, at home in Ramah, the same kind of jealousy poisoned domestic peace. It was worse at Shiloh because the celebration ought to have been a time of joyous fellowship in the presence of the Lord. Scenes of the jealousy that ruled Jacob’s household are brought to mind.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia comments on barrenness: “In Israel and among oriental peoples generally barrenness was a woman’s and a family’s greatest misfortune. The highest sanctions of religion and patriotism blessed the fruitful woman, because children were necessary for the perpetuation of the tribe and its religion. It is significant that the mothers of the Hebrew race, Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, were by nature sterile, and therefore God’s special intervention shows His particular favor to Israel. Fruitfulness was God’s special blessing to His people (Ex 23:26; Deut 7:14; Ps 113:9). A

1. Josh. 18:1

2. Judg. 18:31

complete family is an emblem of beauty (Song 4:2; 6:6). Metaphorically, Israel, in her days of adversity, when her children were exiled, was barren, but in her restoration she shall rejoice in many children (Isa 54:1; Gal 4:27). The utter despair and terror of the destruction of Jerusalem could go no farther than that the barren should be called blessed (Luke 23:29).” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* adds: “The reproach attached to barrenness, especially among the Hebrews, was doubtless due to the constant expectation of the Messiah and the hope cherished by every woman that she might be the mother of the promised Seed. In order to avoid the disgrace of barrenness, women gave their handmaidens to their husbands, regarding the children born under such circumstances as their own (Gen 16:2; 30:3).”

The important point in the text is the mention that Hannah’s barrenness was due to the fact that “the LORD had closed her womb.” Peninnah may have said so much to Hannah, but the fact that the sacred text makes mention of it means that God had in fact done this to Hannah in order to bring her to the point of complete surrender. Elkanah’s question “why are you weeping” may not be an indication of male insensitivity toward a typical female problem, but more an effort to assure his favorite wife of his personal affection for her. Some commentators believe that the words “Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” are a Hebrew idiom.

At the time reported in this story, Hannah got up after the celebration and went to the tabernacle to pray. The usual Hebrew word for tabernacle is *mishkan*, but the word used in our text is *heykal*, which literally means palace or temple. Since the temple was not built until the days of King Solomon, the place Hannah went to can only have been the tabernacle built by Moses.

The presence of the Lord was a physical reality, according to the promise God had given to Moses: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”¹ So Hannah knew herself to be in the presence of the Lord, whom she calls here *Yahweh Ts’baa’owt*, “LORD of hosts.” Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about this: “For her the power of the Lord of hosts was not confined to military exploits; she believed he knew all about her and could give her a son. For her part, she would acknowledge that any son born to her was in answer to prayer, and therefore she gave him back to God, who gave him. The outworking of the vow shows that she intended this quite literally (v. 24).”

Hannah’s prayer was more than a natural desire to have a child; it was a spiritual matter. Hannah did not merely ask for the blessings of motherhood, but for an opportunity to glorify God. As the wife of a member of the clan of Levi, her son would eventually become a servant of the Lord from age twenty-five to fifty.² Hannah asked for the privilege to dedicate him to the Lord for all of his life.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Hannah’s prayer: “Her humility appears in her thrice calling herself Jehovah’s handmaid; her earnestness in the threefold repetition of the entreaty that Jehovah would look on her, and remember her, and not forget her. With her prayer she also makes a twofold vow in case her request is granted. The son given her is, first, to serve not for a stipulated number of years, as was the law with the Levites (... Numbers 4:3), but for life; and, secondly, he is to be a Nazarite. We gather from ... Numbers 6:2 that Moses found this singular institution in existence, and only regulated it, and admitted it into the circle of established and legalized ordinances. Essentially it was a consecration to God, a holy priesthood, but not a sacrificing priesthood nor one by right of birth, as the Aaronic, but personal, and either for a limited period, or for life. During the continuance of the vow, a Nazarite might (1) partake of no produce of the vine, signifying thereby abstinence from self-indulgence and carnal pleasure. He might (2) take no part in mourning for the dead, even though they were his nearest relatives, because his holier duties raised him above the ordinary joys and sorrows, the cares and occupations of every day life. Lastly, no razor might come upon his head, the free growing hair being at once the distinctive mark by which all men would recognize his sacred calling, and also a sign that he was not bound by the usual customs of life. By Hannah’s

1. Ex. 25:22

2. Num. 8:24,25

first vow Samuel was devoted to service in the sanctuary, by the second to a holy consecrated life. This institution remained in existence unto our Lord's days; for John the Baptist was also consecrated to God as a Nazarite by his mother, though not as Samuel, also given to minister in the temple."

In the Mosaic law the husband of a woman who made a vow had the right to veto it. If he did not specifically do so, the vow was considered to be valid and binding.¹

What brought Hannah to this beautiful act of surrender was due, at least in part, to the domestic tensions that reached its yearly height at the celebration at Shiloh. We could say that Peninnah's attitude was not according to the will of God. God is a God of peace, not of discord and malicious taunt. Hannah's reaction to this potentially explosive family feud was to bring it to the Lord in prayer. In doing this she set an example to many, if not to all of us, in the way she handled the situation. We ought to bring all friction in human relationships before the Lord. The blessing Hannah's prayer brought about, not only in her personal life, but for the whole nation of Israel, is a shining example of how to deal with all our problems.

Hannah's prayer also shows us God's purpose for giving parents children. If parents have children they are not their own; they have them on loan and dedicating them to the Lord is their first responsibility as parents.

Hannah probably said her prayer in sight of Eli, kneeling in the inner court of the tabernacle in the section that was open to the public. We conclude from Eli's first reaction that most prayers were said out loud. Since Hannah did not produce any sound, although her lips were moving, the old priest concluded that she must be drunk. Evidently wine was served at the celebration. But if Passover was the occasion, the amount served ought not to have been such that it would lead to intoxication. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "The suspicion of the aged priest seems to indicate that the vice of intemperance was neither uncommon nor confined to one sex in those times of disorder. This mistaken impression was immediately removed; and in the words, 'God grant,' or rather, 'will grant,' was followed by an invocation which, as Hannah regarded it in the light of a prophecy pointing to the accomplishment of her earnest desire, dispelled her sadness, and filled her with confident hope. The character and services of the expected child were sufficiently important to make his birth a fit subject for prophecy."

Having explained to Eli that she was not drunk but deeply troubled, she receives his blessing, which becomes the blessing of the Lord in that her prayer was answered. Hannah went back to the celebration she had interrupted and participated in the joy of it. She must have taken Eli's assuring words as a confirmation by the Lord and in faith she clung to God's promise.

V.19 indicates that this incident occurred the last day of the feast, probably the end of the week-long celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In the following months Hannah became pregnant. The text reads literally: "Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her." The Hebrew word translated "remember" is *zakar*, meaning "to mark." We find the word the first time in the verse: "But God *remembered* Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded."² And in: "I will *remember* my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."³ Obviously the word has not the same meaning in the way we use it. The omniscient God cannot forget, and remembering in the way we recall incidents is not the way He functions. God's remembrance is placed in the framework of His covenant, His promises to mankind. As such He made His promise true to Hannah.

1. Num. 30:10-16

2. Gen. 8:1

3. Gen. 9:15,16

When Hannah's son is born, she calls him Samuel. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about the name: "The word 'Samuel' signifies 'name of God,' or 'his name is El' (God). Other interpretations of the name that have been offered are almost certainly mistaken. The play upon the name in 1 Sam 1:20 is not intended of course to be an explanation of its meaning, but is similar to the play upon the name Moses in Ex 2:10 and frequently elsewhere in similar instances. Thus, by the addition of a few letters shemu'el becomes sha'ul me'el, 'asked of God,' and recalls to the mother of Samuel the circumstances of the divine gift to her of a son." *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "After solemn worship early the next morning Elkanah returned to his home at Ramah, and God answered Hannah's prayer, and gave her the wished for son. She calls him Samuel, lit. Shemuel (... Numbers 34:20; ... 1 Chronicles 7:2), which was an ordinary Hebrew name, and means 'heard of God,' not 'asked of God,' as in the margin of the A.V. It seems to have been the mother's right to give names to her children (... Luke 1:60), and Hannah saw in Samuel, whom she had asked of God, a living proof that she had been heard by him. The name, therefore, is of fuller significance than the reason given for it. Ishmael has virtually the same meaning, signifying 'God heareth.'" "

The next year Elkanah and his family, with the exception of Hannah, made their journey to Shiloh. Hannah stayed home to take care of her baby, stating that she would go again after her son was weaned, which was probably after three years. At that time she intended to make the toddler stay in Shiloh to begin his service to the Lord. We read that Elkanah went up "to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: "Perhaps Elkanah joined Hannah in making vows to the Lord. The LXX reads, vows, and adds that on this occasion he paid 'all the tithes of his land' (cf. Deut 12:26-27). Following Josephus, it has been suggested that the Hebrew copyist omitted what the LXX had recorded because of the improbability of a Levite's paying tithes. However, Josephus does describe Elkanah as a Levite, and according to Num 18:26 ff. and Neh 10:38, the Levites did pay tithes."

The Hebrew text of v.24 reads literally: "And she took him up with her, when she had weaned him, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young." The Hebrew word translated "bottle" is *nebel*, which is a wineskin. In the phrase "the child was young" the word "child," and "young" are the same word *na`ar*. So literally the phrase reads "the child was a child."

Bible scholars disagree about the three bullocks. Some believe that two of the bulls were given as a present to Eli and one was sacrificed. Others suggests that all three were offered, one for the vow of the child, one for the annual burnt offering, and one for the annual thank offering. *The Septuagint* reads "a three-year-old bull," which is the reading *The New International Version* has adopted.

According to Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, the Septuagint and one other Hebrew manuscript have a longer reading: "And the boy was with them. And they came before the Lord, and his father killed the sacrifice as he did year by year before the Lord, and she brought the boy ..." Baldwin adds: "The inference is that between the two occurrences of the word 'child' some words were lost from the early Hebrew exemplar."

The important point is that young Samuel could not enter into the Lord's service without the bringing of a sacrifice. Even though he was conceived and born by faith in God's promise, God could not accept him without someone dying in his place as a substitute. The only way Samuel could become the man of God he grew up to be was that Christ died for him and that he served God as being crucified with Christ.

When Hannah tells Eli who this young child was, she not only indicates that God heard her prayers and honored her faith, but also that He confirmed the blessing Eli had given to her four years earlier. Eli had reason to praise the Lord also.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about Hannah's statement to Eli: "Hannah's single-minded testimony cannot have failed to impress Eli as he recalled the occasion when she had stood near him, lost in prayer. Her point is emphasized by a wordplay on the root *ḏā'al*; four times it occurs, 'the Lord has granted me my *petition* which I *petitioned* him. Therefore I *petitioned* [the verb also means 'lent'] him to the Lord ... he is *petitioned* to the Lord.' The contrast between Hannah's selfless devotion and the self-

indulgence of the priest at Shiloh (I Sam. 2:12) highlights the cost to her of leaving Samuel there, though this is not mentioned directly. People like her were salt and light in the community. Ironically, there is here a subtle undermining of Eli's authority; 'it will be Samuel, not master Eli, who will hear the voice of God distinctly addressing him in the sanctuary.'"

About the concluding sentence of this chapter, "And he worshiped the Lord there," Baldwin writes: "Whether Eli or Samuel is the intended subject it is impossible to say; the RV mg. draws attention to several ancient authorities with the reading 'they' (hence RSV). One LXX manuscript omits this statement in I Samuel 1:28; but includes an equivalent in I Samuel 2:11. [One manuscript] has 'and she left him there and worshipped the Lord,' which satisfies the expectation that Hannah would be mentioned either in I Samuel 1:28 or in I Samuel 2:11."

ii. Hannah exults in the Lord (2:1-10)

1 Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

2 "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

3 "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

4 "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

6 "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

7 The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. "For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; upon them he has set the world.

9 He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness." It is not by strength that one prevails;

10 those who oppose the Lord will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

Some Bible scholars believe that Hannah could not have sung this hymn of praise spontaneously on the spur of the moment. Some take it to be an existing hymn; others think that a later editor inserted a psalm at this place in the record of Samuel's life. There is no reason to believe that the Holy Spirit could not have inspired Hannah at that time and given her words to say or chant which praised God and fitted the occasion. If we doubt the genuineness of Hannah's song of praise, we must include all others who have sung similar hymns, both in Old and New Testament. Poetry and prophecy are inspired by the Spirit of Christ. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."¹

Barnes' Notes states: "The song of Hannah is a prophetic Psalm. It is poetry and it is prophecy. It takes its place by the side of the songs of Miriam, Deborah, and the Virgin Mary, as well as those of Moses, David, Hezekiah, and other Psalmists and prophets whose inspired odes have been preserved in the Bible. The special feature which these songs have in common is, that springing from, and in their first conception relating to, incidents in the lives of the individuals who composed them, they branch out into magnificent descriptions of the Kingdom and glory of Christ, and the triumphs of the Church, of which those incidents were providentially designed to be the types. The perception of this is essential to the understanding of

1. Rev. 19:10

Hannah's song." A comparison with the hymns of praise of Miriam, Deborah, Zechariah and Mary would be an interesting and worthy study.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Hannah's hymn: "Like the Magnificat, Hannah's hymn of thanksgiving begins with the temporal mercies accorded to herself, but rises immediately into the realms of prophecy, foretelling Christ's kingdom and the triumphs of the Church. From this prophetic element, common more or less to all the hymns of the Bible, most of them have been used in Christian worship, and still merit a place in it, though we in the liturgy of the Church of England now use only two, taken both from the New Testament. In ver. 1, in four strophes of equal length, Hannah declares how, first, her *heart*, the centre with the Hebrews, not merely of the physical, but also of the moral and intellectual life, rejoices in Jehovah; while the exaltation of her *horn*, the symbol of strength and vigor, signifies that this inward joy is accompanied, or even occasioned, by the changed circumstances of her outward lot. Her *mouth*, therefore, is opened wide over her enemies, yet not for cursing and in bitterness, but for joyful praise of the God who has answered her prayers. It is *his salvation*, the being delivered by him, that makes her thus burst forth into thanksgiving. It is a proof too of her faith and spirituality that she thus refers all to Jehovah."

Our text states that Hannah prayed this song. This prayer, although offered at the same place, is quite different from the one she prayed four years earlier, when Eli thought she was inebriated. We may assume that when Hannah prayed earlier, the Holy Spirit inspired her just as much as He did here. As on the day of Pentecost, some bystanders could have commented that she "had too much wine."¹

Hannah's first prayer was motivated by "great anguish and grief"; here her horn is lifted high in the LORD. The Hebrew word "horn" is *qeren*, which can signify any kind of projecting, such as the horn of an animal, an elephant tusk, a mountain peak or a ray of light. Figuratively, it stands for power. In v.10 where the same word is used, it denotes the authority of the Messiah. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* explains about the figurative meaning of the horn: "Two principal applications of this metaphor will be found – strength and honor. Horns being the chief source of attack and defense with the animals to which God has given them, they are employed in Scripture as emblems of the power of God (Ps 18:2), of Christ (Luke 1:69; Rev 5:6), of Ephraim (Deut 33:17), of the wicked (Ps 22:21; 75:10), and of the righteous, of kingdoms (Dan 7:7-8,24; 8:3,5-6,20), and of anti-Christian powers (Rev 13:1; 17:3,7)."

Speaking about the horn, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "The allusion thereto by Zacharias, the father of the Baptist, in his hymn, Luke 1:69, where he calls Christ a 'horn of salvation,' and the beautiful imitation of it by the blessed Virgin throughout in her hymn, Luke 1:46-55, furnishing the finest commentary thereon, clearly prove that Hannah in her rejoicing had respect to something higher than Peninnah her rival, or to the triumphs of Samuel, or even of David himself; the expressions are too magnificent and sublime to be confined to such objects."

Hannah's reference to her enemies undoubtedly included Peninnah, but since the word is in the plural we may assume that there is a wider application. Hannah must have received some insight that her struggle was not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers of which Peninnah had become an instrument.

Hannah's joy and exultation in the Lord acquires greater significance if we remember that the occasion was the presentation to the Lord of her three-year-old son. Not many mothers or parents who leave behind a child, whom they will not see for one whole year, consider the event to be a source of pure joy. When on the mission field, we had to send our children away to boarding school for several months at the time. We experienced that as heartrending agony. Not so Hannah! Her eye of faith saw behind the event and she was able to share in the joy of her Master while bringing this sacrifice. Hannah was so filled with the realization of God's holiness that nothing else mattered. The presence of the Lord lifted her up above the circumstances of her life. She had been barren and by faith had become pregnant. She gave back to the Lord the son He had given her and now she was, so to speak, barren again. But the miracle of the birth of her son

1. Acts 2:13

and the realization that this was the Lord's doing, made it marvelous in her eyes. For her this was the day the Lord has made; she rejoiced and was glad in it.¹

God's greatness is not only evident in the fact that He allowed a barren woman to get pregnant, but also in that He created in her a willing heart that put back on the altar what God had given her. Without the work of the Holy Spirit Hannah would never have been able to do this. In her praise to God she recognized this.

Hannah called God her "rock." The Hebrew word for "rock" here is *tsuwr*. It is the rock that Moses struck and that produced water for the Israelites in the desert.² This rock was the source of Hannah's joy and strength.

Although Peninnah may have been the primary focus for Hannah when mentioning pride and arrogance, the verses that follow reach well beyond a single female competitor. The balance speaks of judgment as well of equalizing. God had judged between Hannah and Peninnah. The latter thought that she was superior because she had children and Hannah had not. The birth of Samuel balanced the relationship and restored equality within Elkanah's family. At this point Hannah only had Samuel, but she was sure that the Lord would give her more children, which He did. She did not have seven sons, but three sons and two daughters as we learn from v.21. Seven is a symbolic figure in this context.

But Hannah's words pertain to more than the jealous relationship with her partner. Hannah sees what happened to her as an image of God's righteous dealing with all of creation. Some of her words refer prophetically to the Messiah, mentioning death and resurrection, victory, power and exultation. Hannah realized in her pregnancy and in giving birth to a son that there was a principle of life that was victorious over death, which expressed itself in her experience. In the birth of every child, God declares His own glory. David would sing: "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."³ Every birth and demonstration of life is a declaration by God to Satan. In Mary's song of praise, she would mention the same principle: "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."⁴

Hannah sees herself raised to the dignity of royalty, seated with princes. She may have remembered Sarai, Abraham's barren wife, whose name was changed to Sarah, meaning princess. Her prophecy reflects what Paul states about us, who have put our trust in Jesus Christ: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."⁵ And: "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."⁶ Like Hannah, our barren lives have been changed by an act of God, and we have been placed in the ranks of royalty.

In the last three verses of her hymn, Hannah reaches the pinnacle of prophetic poetry. She recognizes God as the Creator and Savior, who sustains all things by his powerful word⁷ and who at the same time protects and establishes the lives of those who put their lives in His hand. About the phrase "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's" Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "The general sense of these lines is clear – the Lord has established the 'pillars' of the social and moral ordering of society. The exact meaning of 'pillars' (*mç^ouqç*) is not clear, because the noun occurs only here and in I

1. Ps. 118:23,24

2. Ex. 17:6

3. Ps. 8:2

4. Luke 1:51,52

5. Eph. 2:6

6. Rom. 5:17

7. Heb. 1:3

Samuel 14:5, where it is translated 'crag' in the RSV. The verbal root has two meanings, i. 'to constrain,' 'bring someone into straits'; ii. 'to pour out,' 'melt,' hence 'molten pillar,' a rather tenuous translation. 'Foundations' (NEB, NIV) is probably the nearest English word." I would rather think that what Hannah is saying here is that God provides both physical and moral or spiritual protection to those who partake of His righteousness and that the life of those who refuse such protection is in danger of eternal separation from God.

Human strength is no match for the power of the Almighty. Hannah's statement, "It is not by strength that one prevails," would centuries later be restated by Zechariah at the rebuilding of the temple that was destroyed during the Babylonian captivity: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."¹ Hannah had never been able to silence Peninnah in her provocations; the Lord had done this for her in the birth of Samuel.

Hannah's final declaration pertains to the hope of Israel, the coming king. In the words "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed," she gives the Holy Spirit free reins to say what He wants to say. In the time of judges in which Hannah was still living, the Scriptures state: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."² Hannah could not know that her son would be the one who would anoint David, "a man after his own heart,"³ who would be the ancestor and model of the One who was to come as Savior of the world. He was God's *mashiyach*, the anointed one, the Messiah.

iii. Samuel encounters corruption at Shiloh (2:11-36)

11 Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest.

12 Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.

13 Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand.

14 He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh.

15 But even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

16 If the man said to him, "Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would then answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

17 This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

18 But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod.

19 Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

20 Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, "May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord." Then they would go home.

21 And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

22 Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

23 So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours."

1. Zech. 4:6

2. Judg. 21:25

3. I Sam. 13:14

24 No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord's people.

25 If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death.

26 And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men.

27 Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your father's house when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?

28 I chose your father out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your father's house all the offerings made with fire by the Israelites.

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

30 "Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever.' But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

31 The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line

32 and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, in your family line there will never be an old man.

33 Every one of you that I do not cut off from my altar will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

34 "'And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you — they will both die on the same day.

35 I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always.

36 Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a crust of bread and plead, "Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat."'"

Although no age is given here to Samuel, we assume that the phrase “the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest” describes more than the toddler Hannah left behind at the tabernacle. The Hebrew word translated “minister” is *sharath*, which has the meaning of becoming someone’s attendant. We find it in the verse: “Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his *attendant*. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.”¹

Vv.12-17 describe the terrible conditions under which Samuel grew up. “Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.” Hannah and Elkanah must have known about the corrupt conditions that existed at Shiloh. This must have added considerably to the burden of separation from their little son. Hannah’s prayer at home for Samuel miraculously protected him from being affected by this corruption. She had put her little boy under God’s protection and the Lord did a perfect job in keeping him clean.

The behavior of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, defies description. The Hebrew text describes them even more vividly than our modern versions. We read: “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.” They lived and worked in the presence of the Lord, whose shekinah glory they knew to be there, yet they acted as if God did not exist or had no way of knowing what they were doing. They were in charge of the sacrifices brought in the tabernacle, but they used the people’s religion to fatten their own wallet. Added to this they fornicated with the women serving at the tabernacle.

Leaving aside for a moment the disgusting behavior of these men, we must admit that the section gives us a rare insight into what religious service was meant to be. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*,

1. Gen. 39:4

comments here: “This rare description of worship in Canaan before the monarchy reveals some acquaintance with Levitical rules. Worshippers knew that the fat of the sacrifice was to be burnt as an offering to the Lord (v. 16; cf. Lev. 17:6; Num. 18:17). Presumably they also knew that certain parts of the animal were allocated to the priests to provide them with food (Lev. 7:28-36; Deut. 18:3). Dissatisfied with what should have been adequate provisions, these men intimidated worshippers into allowing them to take a random selection of joints of meat, whether they were entitled to them or not. Protest was useless, and non-compliance was met by force (cf. v.9c). In ethnic religions, ritual has to be performed exactly according to the custom in order to be efficacious; in worship of the living God, who forgives sin and is merciful, people took liberties and *treated the offering of the Lord with contempt*. This was inexcusable.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the sacrifices: “The legal due of the priest was the right shoulder and the wave breast; but before he took them they were to be consecrated to God by the burning of the fat upon the altar (... Leviticus 3:5; 7:31, 34). It is worth observing that the people seem well acquainted with the words of the Law, and are indignant because the priests, its proper guardians, do not abide literally by them. This contempt of the Law distressed their religious susceptibilities, while the cupidity of Eli’s sons offended their moral nature. And so *men abhorred the offering of Jehovah*. Lit. it is the *minchah*, the unbloody sacrifice, or meat offering, but it is put here for every kind of sacrificial offering.”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes correctly: “These men were the principal cause of all the ungodliness of Israel. Their most execrable conduct, described from 1 Sam 2:13-17, caused the people to abhor the Lord’s offering. An impious priesthood is the grand cause of the transgressions and ruin of any nation.”

In stating young Samuel’s training for the service of the Lord, mention is made of his clothing, probably for the purpose of highlighting the fact that Hannah would yearly bring him a coat she had made herself. The Hebrew, however, uses two different words *‘ephowd* and *me`iyil*. The ephod could be considered to be a uniform, while the garment Hannah brought seems to have been a topcoat. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “Samuel’s dress, an ephod of white linen, was probably that worn by the Levites in their ordinary ministrations; for the ephod of the priests was richer both in material and color (... Exodus 28:6-8). As being thus the simplest ministerial garment, it was apparently worn also by laymen when taking part in any religious service, as by David when he danced before the ark (... 2 Samuel 6:14). The coat, *meil*, was worn by priests (... Leviticus 8:7), by kings and their sons (... 1 Samuel 18:4), by prophets (*ibid.* 28:14), and even by women (... 2 Samuel 13:18). It was an under garment of wool, woven throughout without seam, with holes for the head and arms, and reaching nearly to the ground: when used by women it had sleeves (*ibid.*). Under it they had a tunic or shirt fitting so closely that a man simply so clad was considered naked (... 1 Samuel 19:24), and over it priests and Levites wore the ephod, and so also David on the occasion mentioned above (... 1 Chronicles 15:27). The *meil* seems, moreover, to have often been a handsome dress, as that of the priests was of purple blue, with embroidery of pomegranates in three colors, and golden bells (... Exodus 28:31-34); and when made of delicate materials for the use of the rich, it and the tunic are the soft luxurious clothing spoken of in ... Matthew 11:8. As the *meil* was the ordinary dress of all classes of people, it was made for Samuel at home, and can have no special meaning; but the ephod shows that he was brought up in the daffy practice of holy duties. This annual present, however, of clothing made by the mother’s hands proves that the dedication of her son to God was not allowed to interfere with home affections, and both parents and child must have looked forward with joy to happy meetings at each recurrence of the family visit to the sanctuary.”

The text continues with a description of Hannah and Elkanah’s yearly visit at which they would come and see their son as well as have the celebration of the feast. Peninnah is no longer mentioned in this context, although we may assume that she was present.

At least at one occasion Eli pronounced a blessing upon the family. The Hebrew text reads literally: “And Eli blessed Elkanah, and his wife, and said, The Lord give you seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord.” The word “loan” may strike us as strange in this context. The Hebrew word is *she’elah* which has the primary meaning of “a petition.” It is the same word that is used in the verse “Eli answered,

‘Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you *what you have asked* of him.’”¹ We would not consider that which we sacrifice to the Lord as a loan that He would eventually give back to us. Yet, we have Jesus’ promise that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”² And God repaid Hannah and Elkanah generously for the sacrifice they had made.

“Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.” These words say more than that Samuel grew up in the place where the tabernacle stood and which contained the Ark of the Covenant about which God had said: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”³ It means that Samuel understood what the sons of Eli failed to recognize: that God was present. As a young boy, Samuel learned to practice the presence of the Lord. That kept him protected in the midst of an atmosphere of spiritual corruption that was unheard of before. God can and will protect our children if we surrender them to Him.

Eli did not endorse his sons’ behavior, but his lack of parental and priestly authority in removing them from their position made him an accomplice. His rebuke was feeble and his age had probably sapped his energy to the point where he felt himself unable to do what he ought to have done. His rebuke “No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord’s people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?” deserves a closer look.

The Hebrew text reads literally: “No my sons; for [it is] no good report that I hear: you make to transgress the Lord’s people. If one man sins against another the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord who shall entreat for him?” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Eli’s words are very obscure, but ‘Ye make Jehovah’s people to transgress’ is upon the whole the best rendering of the clause. Both the Septuagint and Syriac have a different reading: ‘Ye make Jehovah’s people cease to worship him.’ In the next verse there is no sufficient reason for supposing that Elohim, God, here means *a judge*. Elohim was the head of the theocracy, the ruler of Israel in all things, and he would set to rights these delinquencies of ‘one man against another’ by the ordinary exercise of his judicial functions. So far all is easy, and we must translate, ‘If one man sin against another, God shall judge him.’ But in the last clause there is one of those plays upon words to which the Hebrew language, with its numerous conjugations, so readily lends itself (see on ... 1 Samuel 1:28); and it is rarely possible to transfer to another language the force of passages in which the sense depends upon the terms in the original having a double meaning. The verb rendered *shall judge* in the first clause is used again by Eli in the second, but in a different conjugation, in which its usual meaning is to *pray*. According to the lexicon, therefore, we must translate: ‘If a man sin against Jehovah, who shall pray for him?’ But surely it was just the occasion in which the only remedy left was intercessory prayer. Bearing then in remembrance the use made by Eli of the verb in the first clause, we must translate: ‘Who shall act as judge for him?’ ‘Who shall interpose as arbitrator between him and Jehovah to settle the quarrel?’ The verb itself, moreover, is a rare and old-fashioned one, and apparently means to *settle a dispute*. So it is used of Phinehas, who by his righteous zeal put an end to the rebellion against God’s laws; and accordingly in ... Psalm 106:30, where our version renders ‘executed judgment,’ the Vulgate has ... *appeased* Jehovah’s anger. The sense then is, in case of wrong done between man and man, God as the supreme Arbitrator settles the dispute; but where the two parties are God and man, what third power is there which can interfere? The quarrel must go on to the bitter end, and God, who is your opponent, will also punish you. The same idea is found in ... Job 9:33. Naturally to so mild a remonstrance, and founded upon so low a view of the Divine nature, the sons of Eli paid but slight attention, and by thus hardening themselves in sin they made their punishment inevitable, ‘because it pleased Jehovah to slay them.’ Man can

1. I Sam. 1:17

2. Matt. 19:29

3. Ex. 25:22

bring upon himself neither good nor evil except by the working of God's will, and the punishment of sin is as thoroughly a part of God's will as the rewarding of righteousness. An intense conviction of the personality of God was the very foundation of the religious life of the Israelites, and lies at the root of the words of Eli here and of those of Job; and it was this which made them ascribe to God that hardening of the wicked in sin which is the sure means of their punishment. We ascribe it to the working of natural laws, which after all is but saying the same thing in a round about way; for the laws of nature, in things moral as well as in the physical world, are the laws of God."

In stark contrast to the behavior of Eli's sons and the corruption of the religious service, we read about young Samuel that he grew up in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men. Luke uses the same words to describe the twelve-year-old Jesus: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."¹ Hophni and Phinehas were grown men; both were married and had a family. They probably had had the best education available at that time. Samuel was a child, not even a teenager, yet he was far ahead of these two in that he knew himself to be in the presence of the Lord. Like young Jesus, he knew he was in his Father's house.²

No further explanation is given about the person who brings Eli a message from God. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about his message: "The unnamed *man of God* was the first to pronounce to Eli the destiny of his whole family in the light of the depravity of his sons. The prophetic oracle begins with a reference to the Lord's original calling of Eli's ancestor in Egypt. Though Eli was called an Ephraimite in I Samuel 1:1, because he lived in Ephraimite territory (cf. I Chr. 6:66), his Levitical descent is now implied in that his 'father' was chosen to serve as priest. I Kings 2:27 implies that Abiathar, who was a priest in David's time, was related to Eli (cf. I Sam. 22:20 and I Sam. 14:3), and 2 Samuel 8:17 shows the connection with Zadok, who descended from Aaron (I Chr. 24:1-4). In the light of the provision made for the remuneration of the priests, there was no excuse for the greed which led to extortion of the choicest parts of every offering. Eli is involved in the sin: *Why then* [do you (plural)] *look with greedy eye?* The RSV has followed the LXX ... whereas the AV and RV, following the MT, have 'kick at' (cf. Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked,' Deut. 32:15), a telling metaphor, but both translations run into difficulty at the end of the clause. Eli is accused of honoring his sons before God, because he permitted the abuses to continue."

The Hebrew text of v.29 reads literally: "Wherefore kick you at my sacrifice and at my offering which I have commanded in my habitation ..." The verb used in Hebrew is *ba'at*, the primary meaning of which is "to trample down," or "to despise." The only other place where this verb is used is in "Jeshurun grew fat and *kicked*; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior."³ The words "sacrifice" and "offering" in this verse are the words that are used in Leviticus, respectively for burnt offering and peace offering. The peace offering was the one of which the person who brought the sacrifice could eat himself. The burnt offering was not meant for human consumption, it was to be completely burned up on the altar. The use of this word in this context may indicate that Eli's sons also helped themselves to meat of this part of the sacrifice, which would be a serious sacrilege.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the punishment upon Eli's family predicted in the following verses: "It is true that this promise was made to Aaron and his house generally, and was verified by the permanent possession of the priestly dignity by his descendants during the subsistence of the Jewish dispensation. The bestowment of that honor upon Phinehas and his descendants (Num 25:12) was in token of the divine approval of his holy zeal on a memorable occasion, and the continuance of the privilege in that older branch of the Aaronic family depended on the condition, plainly understood, of their unbroken fidelity in their office. That they had been guilty of some heinous offence,

1. Luke 2:52

2. See Luke 2:49.

3. Deut. 32:15

which involved a forfeiture of their sacerdotal status, is evident, though no mention of it occurs in Scripture, from the fact that the priesthood was transferred to the younger branch of Aaron's house; and how it was declared that, in consequence of the flagrant dereliction of duty on the part of Eli, it should be withdrawn from the line of Ithamar (Lev 10:1-2,12), and reverted to that of Eleazar." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: "Verse 31 refers to the massacre of the priests at Nob; verses 32,33 to the deposition and consequent poverty of Abiathar; verse 35 to the rise of Zadok to the high priesthood. Ezekiel, in his vision of the new Temple, saw the sons of Zadok as the true priests."

Eli is told that his two sons will die on the same day, which is to be a token for him that God meant what He said. The event is described in detail in chapter four. To Eli's credit it must be said that he was more affected by the mention of the capture of the ark than by the news about his son's death. We read: "When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy."¹

In the midst of this pronouncement of judgment there is a glorious ray of hope in the mention of the priest God Himself will anoint to become "priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."² We will find the promise of the Messiah running as a thread of gold throughout the book of First Samuel as it does through the whole Old Testament.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on v.35: "The Lord will supply himself with a *faithful priest ... and will build him a sure house*. The words 'faithful' and 'sure' represent the same Hebrew adjective, *ne'çmân* and create a balance which matches the principle which has just been established. The double meaning of this word, the root of which gives us the familiar 'Amen,' underlines the connection between faithfulness (to the covenant, understood) and security (cf. Isa. 7:9b for the negative expression of the same point). The faithful priest will not merely keep the law, but will discern the mind of the Lord and do it; so Christians are to be 'sons of your Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 5:45) and those who have 'the mind of Christ' (I Cor. 2:16). There is a second reference to the anointed one, 'my messiah' (cf. v.10), the king whom the priest will serve. A contemporary is indicated; the word 'messiah' has been coined, but it does not yet have the status of a title. If David was in mind, the priest was likely to be Zadok (I Kgs. 2:35)."

iv. The Lord calls Samuel (3:1-4:1a)

3:1 *The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.*

2 *One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place.*

3 *The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.*

4 *Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."*

5 *And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.*

6 *Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."*

7 *Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*

8 *The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy.*

9 *So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

1. I Sam. 4:18

2. Ps. 110:4

10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

11 And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.

12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end.

13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.

14 Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

15 Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,

16 but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am."

17 "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you."

18 So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

19 The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. 21 The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

4:1 And Samuel's word came to all Israel.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states that: "According to Josephus, Samuel had just completed his twelfth year when the Lord spoke to him. It was also at the age of twelve that the child Jesus went up to Jerusalem with his parents (Luke 2:42)." We are told that "in those days the word of the Lord was rare." The Hebrew word used is *yaqar*, which actually means "precious," consequently expensive. In this context it means that it was rare, and as with items that are in short supply as food, the price goes up. The addition: "there were not many visions" supports this. God rarely spoke to people anymore because no one was ready to listen.

Most commentators interpret the phrase in v.3, "The lamp of God had not yet gone out" in a literal sense, indicating that God called Samuel very early in the morning when it was still dark. The Hebrew word, translated "lamp," is *niry*, which literally means "to glisten," indicating a lamp, or light. It is used for the seven lamps of the menorah that stood in the holy place. "Then make its seven *lamps* and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it."¹ But those lamps were never meant to go out. The word is also used figuratively, as in the case when David got in trouble during a battle and had to be rescued. We read: Abishai son of Zeruah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, 'Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the *lamp* of Israel will not be extinguished.'² It would therefore be an acceptable interpretation to say that although the Word of the LORD had become scarce, the light of His revelation had not yet completely been extinguished.

Vv.4-6 report that, while both Eli and Samuel were asleep somewhere in the tabernacle, God called Samuel. Three times Samuel mistakes the voice for the voice of Eli and he runs to the place where the old man is sleeping to ask him what he wants. Twice Eli tells him to go back to bed because he had not called. The reason given that Samuel did not recognize the voice of the Lord is "Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." The Hebrew text reads literally: "Now Samuel did not yet know Yahweh, neither was the word of Yahweh yet revealed to him." This explanation fits in with

1. Ex. 25:37

2. II Sam. 21:17

the opening statement of the chapter that the word of the LORD was rare in those days. No one had ever heard the LORD speak personally. If Samuel had been fully awake he might have recognized that the voice that called was not Eli's, but that does not mean that he would have thought the voice to be a supernatural communication.

Eli may have thought that Samuel heard a voice in his dream. It was only when the boy persisted and came three times with the same question that the old man realized it was the voice of the LORD. He tells Samuel to respond if called again: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." The Hebrew reads literally: "Speak LORD, for your servant hears."

When God calls Samuel the fourth time, we read: "The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!'" This time Samuel becomes aware of a presence, which he had not recognized before. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments about the presence of the Lord at this time: "It is something more than a voice; there was an objective presence; and so in ver. 15 it is called, not *hazon*, a sight seen when in a state of ecstasy, but *mar'ah*, something seen when wide awake, and in the full, calm possession of every faculty."

The experience of the presence of the Lord by itself would have been enough to cause fear and trepidation in the heart of every person, let alone a twelve-year-old boy. The content of the message given to him went far beyond anything we would communicate to a child. One wonders if young Samuel was able to fully grasp the gravity of the message communicated to him. If Israel's condition was such that a young boy was the only person God could talk to, it was indeed a time of decline and corruption unparalleled in the history of the nation. Samuel not only survived the experience without emotional or spiritual damage, it made him into the spiritual giant he shows himself to be in this book.

The Lord says to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this phrase: "This implies the announcement of some event so frightful and unlooked for that the news shall, as it were, slap both ears at once, and make them smart with pain. And such an event was the capture of the ark, and the barbarous destruction of the priests and sanctuary at Shiloh. The phrase is again used of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (... 2 Kings 21:12; ... Jeremiah 19:3), a calamity which Jeremiah compares to the fall of Shiloh (... Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9), inasmuch as both of these events involved the ruin of the central seat of the Jewish religion, and were both accompanied by revolting cruelties."

The ark represented the reality of God's presence on earth. But to the Israelites it had become the insignia of their national pride. Instead of being the object before which they trembled, because of the glory of God's presence, it had become something they could manipulate. The fact that they took the ark to the battlefield indicates this. The words of Phinehas' wife as she died in childbirth are significant. We read: "She named the boy Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel'-because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.'"¹ It was not the glory of the Lord but the glory of Israel that had departed. The idea that the ark of the Lord could be captured and taken home to Philistine country was inconceivable; yet that is what happened. And that made the ears of every Israelite tingle.

The message communicated to young Samuel was obviously meant for Eli. The verdict sounds irrevocable. God even mentions an oath that confirms the finality. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Judgment being God's strange work, He long delays it, and in the exercise of long-suffering patience affords ample time for repentance. But when the period of grace expires, the judicial infliction commences, and will be carried on until the vial of divine wrath is emptied." Yet, the fact that God foretold what would happen is a demonstration of grace. It meant that Eli and his sons still had an opportunity to confess and repent. Jonah understood that God's announcements of judgment were acts of grace. When he realized that God was not going to destroy Nineveh because the people repented, he prayed to the Lord and said: "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to

1. I Sam. 4:21,22

flee to Tarshish.”¹ But Eli would not respond to God’s warning with conviction and repentance, neither would his sons. The sins of Eli and his sons would qualify as “blasphemy against the Spirit,” which will not be forgiven.²

For Samuel the message was his introduction to the life of a prophet. It was probably the most fearful call to the ministry anyone ever received in Scripture. From this moment on his life would be dominated by the fear of the Lord. The fact that he would have to tell Eli did not alleviate any of the tension, but in retrospect it may have been the easiest part of the experience.

The message deserves a closer look. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “*I will perform*. Literally, ‘I will raise up,’ *i.e.* I will excite and stir up into active energy all the denunciations of the man of God (... 1 Samuel 2:27), which hitherto have been as it were asleep and at rest. *All things which*. Better, quite literally, *all that I have spoken. When I begin, I will also make an end*. In the Hebrew two infinitives used as gerunds, ‘beginning and ending,’ *i.e.* from beginning to end. The Hebrew language constantly thus uses infinitives with great force; as, for instance, in ... Jeremiah 7:9: ‘What! stealing, murdering, committing adultery,’ etc. *For I have told him*, etc. These words may be translated, with the Septuagint and Vulgate, ‘For I have told him that I would judge his house,’ referring back to the message of the man of God; or, with the Syriac, ‘And I will show him that I do judge his house.’ *Forever*. *i.e.* finally; his house shall pass away. *His sons made themselves vile*. The verb used here invariably means *to curse*; but ‘they cursed themselves’ does not, without straining, give a good sense. The Septuagint for ‘themselves’ reads *God*, and the Syriac *the people*. [One Bible scholar] says ... that the right reading is *me*, and that this is one of eighteen places where the scribes have changed *me* into *themselves* or *them*. But while thus there is much uncertainty about the right text, the evidence is too uncertain to act upon, and it is best to translate, ‘His sons have brought a curse upon themselves,’ while acknowledging that the ordinary rendering would be ‘have cursed themselves.’ *And he restrained them not*. The Versions generally take the verb used here as equivalent to one differing only in having a softer medial consonant and translate *rebuked*; but that really found in the Hebrew text signifies ‘to weaken, humble, reduce to powerlessness.’ The A.V. takes neither one verb nor the other in the rendering *restrained*. Eli ought to have prevented his sons from persisting in bringing disgrace upon God’s service by stripping them of their office. Their wickedness was great, and required a stern and decisive remedy. *Sacrifice nor offering*. The first of these is *zebach*, the sacrifice of an animal by the shedding of its blood; the second is the *minchah*, or unbloody sacrifice. The guilt of Eli’s sons could be *purged*, *i.e.* expiated, by none of the appointed offerings for sin, because they had hardened themselves in their wrong doing even after the solemn warning in ... 1 Samuel 2:27-36. Hence the marked repetition of the denunciation of finality in their doom. Again it is said that it is *forever*. It has, however, been well noticed that though the message of Samuel confirms all that had been threatened by the man of God, yet that no bitter or painful words are put into the mouth of one who was still a child. For this there may also be a further reason. The first message was intended to give Eli and his sons a final opportunity of repentance, and, that it might produce its full effect, the severity of the doom impending upon them was clearly set before their eyes. They did not repent. Eli hardened himself in his weakness, and took no steps to vindicate God’s service from the slur cast upon it by an unworthy priesthood. His sons hardened themselves in crime, and made their office a reproach. It was enough, therefore, to repeat and confirm generally the terms of the former prophecy, as no moral object would be gained by calling attention to the severity of the coming judgment.”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: “Once again Eli bears the brunt of the punishment, because, as head of the house, responsibility was his for seeing to it that blasphemy did not go unchecked. The history of his son’s insubordination no doubt went back to their youth, when it should have been possible to discipline them. As it is, the whole family will be condemned and *the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever*. Provision was made in the ritual for sacrifice on behalf of

1. Jonah 4:2

2. Matt. 12:31,32

the sin of the priests, but such sacrifice covered only unwitting sin (Lev. 4:2; cf. Lev. 4:13, 22, 27). Sin committed ‘with a high hand,’ in deliberate disregard for God’s law, such as Eli’s sons had committed, could not be dealt with by any sacrifice. Eli himself had foreseen a disastrous judgment (I Sam. 2:25), a prophet had already pronounce the decline of his family (I Sam. 2:31); now the Lord himself pronounces the inescapable doom of Eli’s house.”

What Joyce G. Baldwin states about the sacrifices described in Leviticus 4 is correct within the context of that chapter. The guilt offering was for sins committed unintentionally, whether by a priest, a prince or a commoner. But the topic must be seen in the larger context of Leviticus. Ms. Baldwin gives the impression that only sins committed unintentionally could be atoned for and that is not correct. Leviticus 6:1-7 makes provision for sinful acts committed intentionally. No distinction is made between a person’s status in the community, whether priest, prince or commoner. We read: “The Lord said to Moses: ‘If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do — when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the Lord, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty.’” There would have been a possibility for Eli’s family to receive forgiveness.

Morning did come that day and Samuel had to face Eli. We may assume that Samuel did not sleep anymore after he received the divine revelation. It is doubtful that Eli got much sleep either after he sent Samuel away the last time. He must have anticipated what was coming. He used his authority over Samuel in a way he never had with his sons, saying “May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “God do also more to you if you hide from me anything of all the things that He said to you.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “This was a very solemn adjuration. He suspected that God had threatened severe judgments, because he knew that his house was very criminal; and he wished to know what God had spoken. The words imply thus much: If thou do not tell me fully what God has threatened, may the same and greater curses fall on thyself.” Eli knew what was coming.

Bible scholars have commented differently to Eli’s reaction upon hearing the message from the young Samuel. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “There is much of a godly submission, as well as a deep sense of his own unworthiness, found in these words. He also had sinned, so as to be punished with temporal death; but surely there is no evidence that the displeasure of the Lord against him was extended to a future state.” In *The Pulpit Commentary* we read: “When Eli has heard the message, he says, *It is Jehovah*. Though he had not had the courage to do what was right, yet his submission to God, and the humility of his resignation, prove that the Holy Ghost had in these years of waiting being doing its work upon the old man’s heart. Eli’s adjuration, we must further note, was equivalent to putting Samuel upon his oath, so that any concealment on his part would have involved the sin of perjury.” Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* observes: “[Eli] accepted graciously all that he heard though the further pronouncement of God’s judgment can only have added, in his old age, great sadness and apprehension of the future. Nevertheless, what the Lord does is *good*, Eli acquiesces in his will.”

Eli’s passive reaction is reflected in Hezekiah’s who, after hearing that Israel would be taken into captivity to Babylon at a later date also acquiesced for the wrong reasons. We read: “‘The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?’”¹ There are times when God prefers opposition to acquiescence, as in the case of Moses. When Israel sinned by making a gold calf, God told Moses that He would no longer be in the midst of the people.

1. II Kings 20:19

We read: “Moses went back to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.’” God replied: “Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” “Then Moses said to him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?’” “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’”¹ If Eli had gotten up from his chair, stripped his sons of their priestly ephods and chased them away from the tabernacle, God would probably have said to him also: “I am pleased with you and I know you by name.” Eli’s answer sounds pious but I don’t believe it pleased God.

V.19 would seem to have been the right place to make the chapter division, because it is at this point that the mantle falls from Eli’s shoulder and is put on Samuel. After this first introduction into the presence of the Lord, Samuel continued to live in His presence and hear God speak to him. The words spoken the first time at the divine encounter “Speak, for your servant is listening” became the theme of this young man’s life. It brought about the radical change from the previously existing situation about which we read: “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions” to “The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.” It began by “listening.” The Hebrew word is *shama`* which means: “to hear intelligently,” implying obedience. In relationship with God to hear is to obey.

b. Disaster, repentance and deliverance (4:1b – 7:17)

i. Defeat and loss of the ark of the covenant (4:1b-22)

1 Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek.

2 The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.

3 When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.

6 Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp,

7 the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before.

8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

9 Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

1. Ex. 32:31,32; 33:3, 15-17

10 So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers.

11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

12 That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head.

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

14 Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?" The man hurried over to Eli, 15 who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see.

16 He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day." Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"

17 The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

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

19 His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains.

20 As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention.

21 She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"-because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.

22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about this war: "The Hebrew (and therefore most of our versions of the text) implies that Israel was the aggressor in the battle, but the LXX preserves a longer text, seemingly omitted accidentally from the Hebrew MT, but printed in the JB. Part of this includes the text: 'It happened at that time that the Philistines mustered to fight Israel and Israel went out ...' According to this extra information, Israel was forced into battle by the Philistine attack. Aphek was over twenty miles north of Ekron, the northernmost of the five cities of the Philistines (the others being Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Gath), and in the foothills to the west of Shiloh. The threat was obviously against the central sanctuary there. Ebenezer was to be named in a victory a little later (I Sam. 7:12); if the two battles happened in the same spot, it was situated between two towns, and was probably not inhabited at the time Israel encamped there."

The Philistines appear to have been the major threat to Israel's survival in the land at this point. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states about them: "The Philistines were the sole non-Semitic inhabitants of Palestine. They came from Caphtor (Amos 9:7; Jer 47:4-5; Deut 2:23), which has usually been identified with Crete. Some scholars believe these Philistines were the displaced persons uprooted by the Achaean invasion of ancient Greece, the Aegean Islands, and the coast of Asia Minor in the 1200's. The Philistines were organized under five lords, each of whom controlled one of their five chief cities - Ashdod, Ekron, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Gath. Their centers lay in the path of conquering armies; and so, eventually, the Philistines pass off the scene of Israel's history, except in their bequeathing to the land of Israel the name Palestine. The earlier Philistine population in Canaan during the patriarchal times was swelled by these displaced persons. *In the field*. The battle took place in open country, probably in the Plain of Sharon, where the Philistines had the advantage with their chariots (1 Sam 13:5; 2 Sam 1:6). The Israelites held their ground but suffered serious loss of men."

Barnes' Notes helps to clarify the historical setting of this war. We read: "The mention of the Philistines connects the narrative with Judg 13-16. Since the Philistine servitude lasted forty years (Judg 13:1), and seems to have terminated in the days of Samuel (1 Sam 7:13-14) in about the 20th year of his judgeship (1 Sam 7:2); and since it had already begun before the birth of Samson (Judg 13:5), and Samson judged Israel for 20 years 'in the days of the Philistines' (Judg 15:20), it seems to follow that the latter part of the judgeship of Eli and the early part of that of Samuel must have been coincident with the lifetime of Samson."

The Book of Judges reveals that Israel failed to carry out the Lord's command to claim all of the land for themselves and either exterminate or chase out the original inhabitants whose measure of iniquity had filled to the brim. This led to serious consequences and became a hindrance for the Israelites' unique relationship to God. God allowed the Philistines, among others, to remain to test Israel. We read: "These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses. The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."¹

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary states about the continuing Philistine-Israelite Struggle: "In Judg 3:3 the Philistines are left to prove Israel. Shamgar (Judg 3:31) is said to have slain 600 Philistines with an ox goad. The tribe of Dan had to move to the NE because of the Philistine advance (18:2). In 13:1, just previous to the time of Samson, Israel was overrun by the Philistines for forty years. Samson, the Israelite hero, produced great victories over the Philistines but eventually met death in the Philistine temple of Dagon (chaps. 13-16). About 1050 B.C., at the battle of Ebenezer, the Philistines again overran the whole country, destroying Shiloh and carrying away the Ark (1 Sam 4:4). The sacred relic of Israel, however, caused untold suffering to the Philistines, who returned it after seven months (5:6-12). About two decades later Israel recovered her territory under Samuel (7:1-14)." This is where we are at this time of Israel's history.

In the initial encounter Israel is defeated by the Philistines. This understandably caused alarm among the people. They operated on the assumption that they were fighting the Lord's wars and that consequently victory was secure. Had they known their history and remembered Israel's first defeat in Canaan at Ai, they would have concluded that sin among the people causes defeat.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The question, *Wherefore hath Jehovah smitten us?* expresses surprise. The elders had evidently expected victory, and therefore the domination of the Philistines could not have been so complete as it certainly was in the days of Samson. There must have been an intermediate period of successful warfare during which Eli had been their leader. *Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah.* This, the remedy suggested by the elders, was to employ their God as a talisman or charm. The ark was the symbol of Jehovah's presence among them, and of their being his especial people, and by exposing it to danger they supposed that they would compel their God to intervene in their behalf. They would have done right in appealing to their covenant relation to Jehovah; and had they repented of the sins which had grown up among them, fostered by the evil example of Eli's sons, he would have shown them mercy. But for God to have given Israel the victory because of the presence of his ark in their camp would have been to overthrow all moral government, and would have insured their spiritual ruin as inevitably as would the granting to any order of men now the power of working miracles or of infallibly declaring the truth."

Besides failing to recognize the role sin plays in defeat in spiritual and material domain, the Israelite leadership showed evidence of not knowing who the God was who was enthroned upon the ark of the covenant. They approached and handled the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth as any idol worshipper would approach his god. The presence of sin will make a person oblivious to spiritual reality. It

1. Judg. 3:1-6

is possible, as in the case of Jacob, to be unaware of God's presence. After having his dream during his first night on his way to Mesopotamia, we read about Jacob: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'"¹ The Israelites assumed that the Lord was in their midst but they had no idea what this meant. They believed that they could employ God as if they could put Him in front of their cart and make Him pull it.

The amazing thing is that God allowed Himself to be manhandled like this. We read of the incident, while David brought up the ark from the place where it had been stored to give it its central position among Israel, that Uzzah lost his life when touching the ark. "When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God."² Here God allowed Himself to be touched and even to be captured. The latter had been considered impossible by the Israelites; they never considered this could happen.

The same thing, but worse, happened when God became man and lived among us. He allowed Himself, not only to be touched, but to be captured, tortured and killed. No one ever assumed that that could happen to the Messiah. Most human beings have no idea what God is like or what sin is like, or what God is willing to do in order to redeem us from the sin that leads to defeat and death. Israel, in Samuel's day, had no idea what its war with the Philistines was all about either.

In the first encounter four thousands Israelite troops lost their lives. As in the battle of Ai in the days of Joshua, the Israelites could not understand how such a thing could happen. We read: "The elders of Israel asked, 'Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?'"³ They asked this to themselves, not to the Lord. Had they turned to the Lord in their defeat, He would have given them the answer.

When Israel was defeated in the initial attack of Ai, we read: "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?' The Lord said to Joshua, 'Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned...'"⁴ We read none of this in connection with the defeat here.

This is the first time ever we read that the ark of the Lord was taken into a war zone. This was not the Lord's doing. It was done upon man's initiative. The Israelites, so to speak, told the Lord what to do; He was never consulted in the matter.

If we look at the Israelite-Philistine conflict in the light of the spiritual battle that governs all human conflict, we understand that human beings believed they could face the powers of darkness without being covered by the full armor of God. They were totally defeated. But the most amazing part of the story is that God allowed Himself to be defeated with them. Again we see in this a shadow of the cross. In a way, the capture of the ark was a defeat for the Philistines. We will see in the following chapters that they could not handle the presence of the Lord in their midst. They were conquered in that they captured. It was in His death that Jesus conquered death. We read in Hebrews: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is,

1. Gen. 28:16,17

2. II Sam. 6:6,7

3. I Sam 4:3

4. Josh. 7:6-11

the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”¹ In a way Israel’s defeat was the best thing that could ever happen to them. It cleansed the land of the elements that had corrupted the service of the Lord and it demonstrated the glory of the Lord in the return of the ark.

The arrival of the ark among the Israelite troops had an overwhelming effect upon the enemy. When the Philistines learned what the shouts of the Israelites were about, they panicked and they began to fight for their survival. At that moment, Satan realized that his time was short. As we read in Revelation about Satan: “He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”²

Most Bible versions render the Hebrew words *haa’eeleh haa’adiyriym haa’alohim* as “these mighty gods.” Yet the name for “God” in Hebrew is already in the plural, so a translation “the mighty God” would seem appropriate. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “*These mighty Gods*. In Hebrew ‘*Elohim*, though plural, is used of the one true God, but in this sense has always the verb or adjective belonging to it in the singular. In ver. 7 the Philistines conform to this rule, and say, *Elohim is come*; but here the verb, pronoun, and adjective are all plural, *i.e.* they speak as heathen, to whom polytheism was natural (comp. ... 1 Kings 12:28).”

It is interesting to observe that Israel’s enemy was more aware of Israel’s supernatural history than the Israelites were themselves. It seems that the memory of the miracles that accompanied the exodus made more of an impression on the outside world than it did on those who had been the objects of it.

The Philistines also had a clearer concept of the power of God than the Israelites had. To Israel the presence of the ark was like having a fetish, something that would bring them good luck. They did not surrender themselves to God in order to be used by Him for His glory. They wanted God to surrender to them so that they could use Him in their battle with the enemy. When the Israelites first entered Canaan, God used them as His instrument to meet out punishment to people groups whose measure of iniquity had filled up to the brim. The land spewed out its inhabitants and God wanted Israel to clean up after them.³ There was nothing in this present encounter between Israel and Philistia that reminds us of that original mandate. God had used the Philistines to punish Israel for her sin and she rebelled against that.

The Philistines were so afraid of the God who was represented by the ark that they fought for their survival. Israel was soundly defeated and God allowed the ark to be captured. The Philistines thought they captured the ark, but this could not have happened unless the Lord allowed it. It almost appears as if God, in the image of the ark, was defenseless. People could do with Him as they wished. The Lion of Judah comes in this world as a Lamb. “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”⁴ But it was “the wrath of the Lamb” that made people cry out in terror, wanting them to be crushed by rocks and mountains, rather than facing the condemnation of His soft-spoken verdict.⁵

So the Philistines won the battle and the ark was captured. The two priests died in the fight. We are not told how they died. They could have been killed by enemy arrows or have committed suicide when they saw that the ark was taken. Their simultaneous death confirmed the prophecy God had given to Eli by mouth of the anonymous prophet.⁶ The Israelite army lost thirty thousand infantry troops.

A courier ran from the battlefield to Shiloh to report the news of the defeat. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: “It was a good twenty miles from Aphek to Shiloh; considering that the route was predominantly up-hill into mountainous country, the runner needed to be in good shape to cover the ground

1. Heb. 2:14,15

2. Rev. 12:12

3. Lev. 18:23

4. Isa. 53:7

5. Rev. 6:16,17

6. 1 Sam. 2:34

the same day. His disheveled appearance indicated that he was in mourning; he would be seen to bring bad news.”

The first thing Eli heard was the reaction of the people in town who got the news of the defeat. He was not the first one to hear what actually happened. It would have been the appropriate thing to do for the runner to report first to the highest authority. The fact that he did not is an indication of the confusion that reigned as a result of the unimaginable thing that had happened.

When Eli is informed, the thing that hit him most is the word of the capture of the ark. It must be said to his credit that this affected him more than the death of his two sons. We learn several things about Eli at this point that had not been mentioned earlier: He was ninety-eight years of age, he was blind and severely overweight. The news made him jump up, which he was unable to do, so that he fell off his chair, broke his neck and instantly died. That was the end of his forty years as high priest and leader of the nation.

Phinehas’ wife was pregnant and evidently close to the time of her delivery. The news about the capture of the ark, the death of her father-in-law and of her husband sends her into labor. The Hebrew text reads literally: “and she bowed herself and travailed for her pains came upon her.” The Hebrew word for “to bow” is *kara`*, which literally means “to bend the knee.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in Jacob’s blessing of his son Judah: “You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he *crouches* and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?”¹ *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this: “While in some parts of the East parturient women anciently gave birth to their offspring in a standing posture ... in others they are accustomed to bring forth kneeling, as is still the custom in Abyssinia.”

If there is any significance in the order of priority in which Phinehas’ wife received the news of the defeat – the ark, her father-in-law, her husband, it may be that Mrs. Phinehas lived closer to the Lord than her husband ever had. Her naming of her son Ichabod points in that direction. The meaning of Ichabod has been given as “inglorious” or “where is the glory?” The text makes clear that she had had throughout her life a clear conviction that the presence of the ark meant the presence of the glory of the Lord. She may have been one of the very few in her day who believed and lived this. In leaving this earth she left behind a monument in the baby she had given birth to. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes about him: “He was thus important as a symbol, though little is recorded of him as an individual.”

ii. The Philistines fall foul of the ark (5:1-12)

1 After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

2 Then they carried the ark into Dagon’s temple and set it beside Dagon.

3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

4 But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.

5 That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon’s temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

6 The Lord’s hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors.

7 When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."

1. Gen. 49:9

8 So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.

9 But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors.

10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people."

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

12 Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, introduces this chapter with the following comments: "In order to appreciate the events that follow, it is necessary to know a little more about the Philistines, who feature predominantly at this period in Israel's warfare, and who were eventually to give their name to the country – Palestine. Their name, *p̄lištīm* in Hebrew, *prst* in Egyptian texts, first appears in Egyptian royal inscriptions of 1185 BC, though the 'Sea Peoples' of which they were part were named two centuries earlier in the Amarna Letters, and small numbers of Philistines had settled in the Gaza area in patriarchal times. They belonged originally in the region of Asia Minor, but migrated via Caphtor (Amos 9:7), that is Crete, first to Egypt, and later, between 1200 and 1050 BC, they settled on the coastal plain of south-west Canaan. No mention is made of Philistines in Joshua, so they must have been later arrivals than Israel in Canaan. There is some evidence that they may have come in the first instance as mercenaries of the Egyptians, who had nominal control of Canaan at that time. The Philistines adapted easily to their new environment, taking over the city-state organization they found, and apparently absorbing Canaanite language, for there appears to have been no language barrier between them and the inhabitants, particularly Israel. In this chapter they prove equally ready to adopt another deity in addition to their own, and such syncretism was totally alien to the whole revelation given to Israel of Yahweh, the Lord of hosts, visible and invisible. Militarily, the Philistines were highly organized and well disciplined, added to which they possessed advanced weapons made of iron, as opposed to bronze (I Sam. 13:19-23). To be overcome by enemies such as these was alarming, and reminiscent of bondage in Egypt, but without the advantage of the Lord God 'on their side.' There was, moreover, determination on the part of the Philistines to dominate the population and make them slaves (I Sam. 4:9)."

The Philistines were under the mistaken impression that they had won the war with Israel, as they had now captured Israel's God. In the same way Satan must have believed temporarily that he had won the battle when the Son of God died on the cross and entered Hades, the kingdom of death. But Jesus conquered death by dying. The capture of the ark of the covenant was the Philistines' undoing. The ark dethroned their idol and threatened their nation with extinction.

Charles H. Spurgeon once preached an interesting sermon on this chapter entitled "Dagon's ups and downs." Yet God also demonstrated His mercy toward the Philistines. No one was killed by touching the ark.

There is in this report about the capture of the ark no record about what happened to Shiloh as a result of the Philistine victory. It is from a psalm composed by Asaph years later that we learn how the enemy slaughtered the inhabitants and ransacked the place. We read: "He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. He sent [the ark of] his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep."¹ We also find two references in Jeremiah that indicate that the story of

1. Ps. 78:60-64

Shiloh continued to occupy an important place in Israel's history. In one reference God reminds the people that what happened at Shiloh with the tabernacle could happen again with the temple in Jerusalem. We read: "Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel."¹ And at another place the people react to Jeremiah's preaching with: "Why do you prophesy in the Lord's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?"²

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "From Psalm 78:60-64; ... Jeremiah 7:12; 26:9, we gather that from Aphek the Philistines marched upon Shiloh, and having captured it, put all whom they found there to the sword, and leveled the buildings to the ground. Especially their wrath fell upon the priests, in revenge for the bringing of the ark to the camp, by which the war was made a religious one, and the worst feelings of fanaticism aroused. Of all this the history says nothing, nor of the measures taken by Samuel under these trying circumstances."

It seems that the mention of Ebenezer at this point is historically premature. The name was probably not given to that place until Israel's victory over the Philistines, which is recorded in a later chapter. The use of the name at this point, suggests hope of victory that was to come. It is as if the writer, at the point where all seems lost, points to the victory to come, as someone standing at the feet of the cross where Jesus is dying mentions that there will be resurrection on the third day.

So the ark is placed in Dagon's temple as a gesture to honor the idol. The name Dagon refers to a fish. According to *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* "Our fabulous mermaid is derived from this Phoenician idol." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* writes about the idol: "An ancient Mesopotamian deity, transported early to the west. Dagon is generally represented as having the body or trunk of a fish, with a human head and hands, and as being the symbol of water and all the vivifying natural powers that take effect in warm countries through water. The Babylonian-Assyrian, and later Canaanite, Dagon is described by Philo of Byblos as the god of grain. ... Dagon was revered among the early Phoenicians. He had importance as the national god of the Philistines, who set up temples in his honor at Ashdod, Gaza, and elsewhere. Numerous towns were named after him, such as Beth-dagon (Josh 15:41). His temple has been found at Ugarit near that of Baal, with features found in later Hebrew architecture. Instances connected with the temple of Dagon are the scene of Samson's death (Judg 16:23-30), the experiences connected with the Hebrew Ark at Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1-7), and the fastening of Saul's head in the temple of Dagon at Bethshan, which has been excavated at this famous fortress site guarding the eastern approaches of Jezreel."

The obvious intent in placing the ark next to the image of Dagon was to attribute the Philistine victory to the intervention of their deity. For the God of Israel this arrangement was supposed to be the ultimate humiliation. Dagon had won the war and Yahweh was defeated!

The real humiliation begins the next morning and the day after. Dagon is found flat on his face before the ark. The roles have been completely reversed. The captor bows down in reference to the captive. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry on earth as Messiah, Satan came to Him with a proposition: "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"³ We have the assurance that, at the end of time Satan will be forced to bend his knee before Christ and, however reluctantly, will recognize Him as Victor. We read: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and

1. Jer. 7:12

2. Jer. 26:9

3. Matt. 4:8-10

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”¹ What happened at Ashdod is a prelude to the day of final apotheosis in which God will be all and in all.

Dagon’s “confession” takes place in stages. The first morning the priests of the idol find their god “fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD!” Thinking that it must have been an accident, Dagon’s worshippers lift him up and put him back on his stand. The fact that the deity is unable to move himself and is dependent upon helping human hands does not seem to bother the worshippers. The prince of darkness himself could have performed that feat but he was clever enough to remain at a distance.

The next morning reveals God’s total victory over the enemy in that the statue has completely disintegrated: All human parts of the statue are broken and spread all over the place, only the fishy section is left whole. None of the Philistines will have appreciated the divine humor of the situation. The pun may only work in the English language, but we find ample proof in this picture that to get involved in idolatry is at least “fishy.” Those who love the Lord, that is those who have lost the war, have ample reason for laughter and rejoicing. This is like the joy of Jesus’ resurrection on the third day.

The demonstration of God’s glory and superiority did not put the Dagon worshippers under conviction. There must have been among them a concept of a Creator to whom worship was due. Paul’s comment: “What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse,² applies to these Philistines as well, but in their idolatry they had moved so far from this truth that it did not effect them to the point of recognition. The fact that the worshippers of Dagon would not put their feet on the threshold of the idol temple since the head of their god had laid on it testifies to the hardening of their heart. There is an interesting prophecy in Zephaniah that makes us understand that Dagon or idols related to his family continued throughout the ages and affected the Israelites also. We read: “On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.”³

The Pulpit Commentary shows some real insight into the spiritual application the incidents must have had upon the local population. We read: “We cannot in English render the full contemptuousness of this phrase, because Dagon is to us a mere proper name, with no significance. In the original it conveys the idea that the head, the emblem of reason, and the human hands, the emblems of intellectual activity, were no real parts of Dagon, but falsely assumed by him; and, deprived of them, he lay there in his true ugliness, a mere misshapen fish; for *dag*, as we have seen, means a fish, and Dagon is here a diminutive of contempt. In spite of his discomfiture the Philistines were true to their allegiance to their god, because, believing as they did in ‘gods many,’ he was still their own national deity, even though he had been proved inferior to the God of Israel, and would probably be rendered more particular and exacting as regards the homage due to him from his own subjects by so humiliating a defeat. For the gods of the heathen were jealous, fickle, and very ill tempered if any slight was put upon them. After all, perhaps they thought, he had done his best, and though worsted in the personal conflict, he had managed so cleverly that they had gained in fair fight a great victory.”

The Philistine population was affected by the presence of the God of Israel in a way that threatened the existence of the whole nation. An epidemic of tumors broke out. The Hebrew word used is *ophel*, which can be rendered “a tumor, “a mound,” or “fortress.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in Moses’ warning of the Israelites against unfaithfulness: “The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.”⁴ *The King James Version* renders the

1. Phil. 2:9-11
2. Rom. 1:19,20
3. Zeph. 1:9
4. Deut. 28:27

word generally with “hemorrhoids.” But it may refer to any kind of tumor or even to an outbreak of the plague.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* gives the following comment on the sickness that afflicted the population: “The population of Ashdod and its environs recognized the terrifying plague that struck their city as the *hand of the Lord* at work. The LXX adds ‘And rats appeared in their land, and death and destruction were throughout the city’ (cf. NIV mg.). It is well known that rats carry bubonic plague, which causes painful swelling of the lymph nodes, or buboes, in the armpits and groin. Untreated, the disease is fatal in well of half of those who contract it. Little wonder there was panic, if this was the illness they suffered, but D. J. Wiseman points out that bubonic plague is attested only many centuries later in Syria and Libya. The interpretation given by Josephus that the disease was dysentery seems less likely, though a recent writer proposes a tropical form of bacillary dysentery.”

Because of the humiliation of Dagon and the suffering of the people, the Philistines tried to move the ark away from their idol temple, hoping that this would ease the tension. It is not clear what motivated the Philistine rulers to play a game of musical chair with the ark, as if a change of venue would bring about a change of the reality of confrontation. The Lord of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth was in their midst. They refused to recognize Him as such, as the One to whom honor and worship was due. Having sided with God’s adversary they were unwilling to switch sides. God so loves the world that He is willing to save whoever comes to Him. The Philistines wanted Yahweh as a captive they had overpowered and shackled. They did not want His glory, His love, and His salvation. The plague that was the result of God’s presence among them was ultimately of their own making.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments: “The princes of the Philistines probably imagined that the calamity which the Ashdodites attributed to the ark of God, either did not proceed from the ark, i.e., from the God of Israel, or if actually connected with the presence of the ark, simply arose from the fact that the city itself was hateful to the God of the Israelites, or that the Dagon of Ashdod was weaker than the Jehovah of Israel: they therefore resolved to let the ark be taken to Gath in order to pacify the Ashdodites. According to our account, the city of Gath seems to have stood between Ashdod and Ekron.” Whatever the cause, the ark did the rounds of several cities of which Gath and Ekron are specifically mentioned.

It was at Ekron that the suggestion was first made to send the ark back to Israel for fear that it would cause the death of the cities and ultimately of the whole country. Interestingly, the panic moved the people in the right direction. “The outcry of the city went up to heaven,” the people began to direct their prayer to the right source. Had they persevered and obeyed the answer they would undoubtedly receive, Palestine would have become a different place to live in, both for the Philistines as for the Jews.

iii. The return of the ark 6:1 – 7:2

*6:1 When the ark of the Lord had been in Philistine territory seven months,
2 the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it back to its place."*

3 They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you."

4 The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers."

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

6 Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

7 "Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up.

8 Take the ark of the Lord and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way,

9 but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the Lord has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance."

10 So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves.

11 They placed the ark of the Lord on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors.

12 Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

13 Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight.

14 The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord.

15 The Levites took down the ark of the Lord, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the Lord.

16 The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron.

17 These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the Lord—one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron.

18 And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers — the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock, on which they set the ark of the Lord, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

19 But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them,

20 and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?"

21 Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to your place."

7:1 So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord.

2 It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.

At the end of seven months, the leaders of the Philistines decided they had had enough and they consulted their own priests to find out what action to take. These priests were servants of Dagon. Their suggestion, therefore, is a clear confession of Dagon's defeat and of Yahweh's victory. Yet, they do leave the door open for the possibility that everything that happened was mere coincidence. The ark was to be sent back in a way that made it obvious that no natural elements were in play. To hitch cows that had never been yoked to a cart is a recipe for trouble. To separate cows from their calves and submit them to this kind of treatment makes compliance nigh to impossible. And to expect cows to start running to an unknown destination under those circumstances would rule out all possibility for coincidence.

The return of the ark, according to the advice of the priests and diviners, had to be accompanied by some clear tokens of regret. The ark must be sent back with a "guilt offering." The Hebrew word used is 'asham, which stands for the sinful act, as well as for the sacrifice that atones for it. The word is used in

Leviticus in the verse: “As a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.”

The suggestion by the priest that the guilt offering should consist of “five gold tumors and five gold rats” is, to put it mildly, interesting. It expresses an acknowledgment of guilt and an acceptance of the punishment meted out to the people as well as to the leaders. The number five refers to the number of dignitaries in leadership who accepted responsibility for the disaster that struck the country as a whole. Some commentators have difficulty connecting the rats, or mice to the boils. If we assume that the boils were evidence of a bubonic plague, the association with rats is not difficult to establish. If, as some believe, field mice are meant, we are looking at two separate and unconnected calamities. The Hebrew word used is *`akbar*, which in the list of unclean animals in Leviticus is translated “rat.” We read: “Of the animals that move about on the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, *the rat*, any kind of great lizard, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon.”¹

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on these creatures: “This animal is supposed by some to be the jerboa, or jumping mouse of Syria and Egypt ... by others, to be the short-tailed field-mouse, which often swarms in prodigious numbers, and commits great ravages in the cultivated fields of Palestine. Images of the destroyers were also formed to protect against the thing injuring; just as may be seen in Palestine at the present day, images of the eye to protect against ‘the evil eye.’”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments on the phrase “because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers”: “The same plague has fallen upon all the people and their princes. The change of person in the two words, *l^kkulaam*, ‘all of them,’ i.e., the whole nation of the Philistines, and *l^kcarⁿneeykem*, ‘your princes,’ appears very strange to us with our modes of thought and speech, but it is by no means unusual in Hebrew. The selection of this peculiar kind of expiatory present was quite in accordance with a custom, which was not only widely spread among the heathen but was even adopted in the Christian church, viz., that after recovery from an illness, or rescue from any danger or calamity, a representation of the member healed or the danger passed through was placed as an offering in the temple of the deity, to whom the person had prayed for deliverance.”

The reference to Israel’s exodus from Egypt and the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart is an indication of how profound an impression this part of the history of salvation had made upon the heathen world. Not only was the knowledge of the event widespread, but it was preserved throughout the centuries that followed even after Israel’s conquest of Canaan.

The cows’ behavior confirmed the understanding of the spiritual leaders of the land. The animals made a beeline to “Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left.” Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “The circumstantial evidence makes the narrative vivid, as if written by someone present. The mound which covers the ancient site stands on a ridge between two valleys which meet on the west. Since wheat would be grown in the valleys, it is understandable that the Philistines would come upon the harvesters at work before reaching Bethshemesh itself. *Wheat harvest* time was May/June. Nothing is known of this *Joshua* in whose field the cows halted. Work ceased in order that everyone could join in joyous worship, the large stone presumably providing a natural altar for the sacrifice of both cart and cows, though it also served as a table on which to place the ark and the Philistines’ offerings. A wide outcrop of rock could have served both purposes. Satisfied that their sacred objects had been safely received, the Philistine lords could return home.”

We read at this point that “the Levites” took care of the ark from here on. *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “The word ‘Levites’ here probably means priests (Ex 4:14), sons of Levi, since Bethshemesh was one of the cities of the priests (Josh 21:13-16).”

It is hard to believe, as the text could suggest, that the ark was left on this rock for any length of time. What is said about the rock probably means that it became a landmark that marked the return of the ark

1. Lev. 11:29,30

and of the glory that had left the land for a period of time. The dying words of Phinehas' wife, who named her son "Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel'"¹ were undone.

It is interesting that we only learn at this moment the names of the places where the five Philistine officials who had sent the guilt offering resided when the gold copies of rats and boils is received by the Israelites. We are not given any specifics as to what happened to these articles; they may have been kept by the ark as a reminder of what God had done to the Philistines who thought they had conquered the Creator of heaven and earth.

The Hebrew text of v.18 reads literally: "Whereon they set the ark of the Lord whereon the great Abel, which stone remains this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "All this part of the verse is exceedingly corrupt, and requires large interpolations to obtain from it any meaning. Both the Vulgate and the Syriac retain the unmeaning word Abel; but the Septuagint gives us what is probably the true reading: 'and the great stone whereon they set the ark of Jehovah, which is in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite, is a witness unto this day' (comp. ... Genesis 31:52; ... Isaiah 30:8)."

Evidently, the ark was, at least initially, handled appropriately by those who were qualified to carry it. It was not until afterwards that people took liberties with it that turned out to be costly in terms of human life. People do not realize that holiness can be very dangerous. The general consensus of Bible scholars is that the number "three score and ten fifty thousand men" as appears in *The Interlinear Bible*, is incorrect. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "From the manner in which the text stands, and from the great improbability of the thing it is most likely that there is a corruption in this text, or that some explanatory word is lost, or that the number fifty thousand has been added by ignorance or design; it being very improbable that such a small village as Beth-shemesh should contain or be capable of employing fifty thousand and seventy men in the fields at wheat harvest, much less that they could all peep into the ark on the stone of Abel in the grainfield of Joshua."

What must be noted is the difference between the way the Lord reacted to the manhandling of the ark by the Philistines, who did not know any better, and that of the Israelites, who could have known. The curiosity of the latter who tried to peek inside, probably lifting up the cover of the ark, which was the place where atonement of the sins of the people had been made, and looking at the two tablets with the Ten Commandments, cost the lives of seventy people.

The Pulpit Commentary suggests that the abuse was the result of intoxication. We read: "The occasion of the calamity was probably as follows: — As the news of the return of the ark spread from mouth to mouth, the people flocked together to take part in the sacrifice, which would of course be followed by a feast. Heated thereat by wine, perhaps, and merriment, they lost all sense of reverence, and encouraged one another to look into the ark and examine its contents, though the words need not absolutely mean more than that 'they looked at the ark.' Even so the men of Beth-shemesh, as a city of priests, must have known that death was the penalty of unhallowed gazing at holy things (... Numbers 4:20), and it is more than probable that those who were smitten were priests, because in them it would be a heinous sin; for it was a repetition of that contempt for religion and its symbols which had been condemned so sternly in Eli's sons. The mere seeing of the ark was no sin, and had given the people only joy (ver. 13), but as soon as they had received it the priests ought to have covered it with a veil (... Numbers 4:5). To leave it without a veil was neglectful, to pry into it was sacrilege."

We are not told how death came to the perpetrators. If it were instantaneous it would probably have scared the people sufficient to limit the number of trespassers. But we do not know.

In their desire to get rid of the ark the people seem to put the blame for the disaster upon God instead of upon themselves. Their fear of the Lord turns out to be the wrong kind. Asking God to move somewhere else was not the answer, but that is what happened. The presence of the Lord always changes people's behavior. Those who refuse to be changed are those who ask Him to move somewhere else. But

1. I Sam. 4:21

being in the presence of the Lord is not always avoidable. No one describes this better than the Apostle Peter. We read: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him."¹

There does not seem to be a specific reason for choosing Kiriath Jearim as the next place to store the ark. Evidently, returning the ark to Shiloh was no longer an option since that place had been completely destroyed by the Philistines in their last battle with Israel. *Barnes' Notes* states: "It has been thought that there was a high place at Kirjath-jearim (the hill, 1 Sam 7:1), the remnant of its old pagan sanctity when it was called Kirjath-Baal, 'the city of Baal' (see Josh 18:14; 2 Sam 6:2); and that for this reason it was selected as a proper place to send the ark to." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds: "They sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim - 'the city of woods,' called also Kirjath-baal (Josh 15:60; 18:14; 1 Chron 13:6-7). This was the nearest town to Beth-shemesh, and being a place of strength, was a fitter place for the residence of the ark. The inhabitants belonging to the Hivite tetrapolis were the sacred servants of the sanctuary, and therefore the proper parties to whom, in the emergency, the custody of the ark should be committed. What a sad degeneracy for the Levitical house of Aaron in Beth-shemesh to be less fitted, from their ignorance and irreligion, to act as the servants of Yahweh than the Hivites of Kirjath-jearim! Beth-shemesh being in a low plain, and, Kirjath-jearim on a hill, explains the message, 'Come ye down, and fetch it up to you.'"

Bible scholars disagree about the meaning of the consecration of Eleazar in connection with the keeping of the ark. Some believe that he was consecrated for the task because he was not a Levite, others that he was a Levite and the consecration set him apart for this specific kind of service. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "The transfer of the ark was completed; we are not told whether Abinadab and his son Eleazar were priests, though the name Eleazar was associated with priestly genealogies (Exod. 6:23), and to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:3). *Twenty years* probably belongs to the Mizpah incident, as NIV indicates. The period between the death of Eli and David's accession was almost certainly more than twenty years."

About these twenty years, Ms. Baldwin states: "The Hebrew construction is unusual, hence the tentative translations (e.g. RV mg 'was drawn together after'; NIV 'mourned and sought after'). There was a feeling that all was not well, and Samuel recognized this as the moment when he could call for repentance and recommitment. The absence of Samuel from the scene in 1 Samuel 4 – 6, which is often accounted for in terms of literary sources ... has a bearing on God's dealings with Israel. Samuel would no doubt continue his regular work, but he waited for the right moment before calling a national convention."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The literal translation of this verse is, 'And it came to pass, from the day that the ark rested at Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years.' The words dwell wearily upon the length of this mournful period, during which Israel was in a state of subjection to the Philistines, with its national life crushed to the ground, and its strength wasted by unjust exactions and misrule. For though the Philistines gave up the ark, there was no restoration of the national worship, nor did they abandon the political fruits of their victory at Ebenezer. But quietly and calmly Samuel was laboring to put all things right. It was the principle of the theocracy that Jehovah punished his subjects for their sins by withdrawing his protection, and that on their repentance he took again his place at their head as their king, and delivered them. Samuel's whole effort, therefore, was directed to bringing the people to repentance. What means he used we are not told, nor what was his mode of life; but probably it was that of a fugitive,

1. II Peter 3:10-15

going stealthily from place to place that he might teach and preach, hiding in the caverns in the limestone range of Judaea, emerging thence to visit now one quarter of the country and now another, ever in danger, but gradually awakening, not merely those districts which were contiguous to the Philistines, but all Israel to a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the necessity of renewed trust and love to their God. And so a fresh spiritual life sprang up among the people, and with it came the certainty of the restoration of their national independence. *All the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah.* The word used here is rare, and the versions all differ in their translation of it. Really it is a happy one, embracing the two ideas of sorrow for sin, and also of returning to and gathering themselves round Jehovah. The Syriac alone retains this double meaning, by saying that 'they all cast themselves down after Jehovah,' *i.e.* that they sought him with deep humility. Gradually, then, a change of heart came over the people; but the removal of the ark to a more fit place, and the restoration of Divine service with ministering priests and Levites, could take place only after the Philistine yoke had been broken. From ... 1 Samuel 13:19- 22 we learn how vigilant and oppressive that tyranny was; and the heart of the writer, in editing this verse, was full of sorrow at the thought that the repentance of Israel was so slow and unready, and that therefore it had to wait twenty years before deliverance came."

Undoubtedly, the Spirit of the Lord worked during this period of reflection, remorse and soul-searching to bring the nation to the point where an all-out spiritual revival could occur and people would wholeheartedly turn away from their idol practices and dedicate themselves truly to the Lord.

iv. Repentance and recommitment at Mizpah 7:3-17

3 And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the Lord for you."

6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah.

7 When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines.

8 They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines."

9 Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him.

10 While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.

11 The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us."

13 So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.

14 The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

15 Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life.

16 From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.

17 But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord.

Two general principles that rule the relationship between a spiritual relationship with God and a political one as a nation are evinced in Israel's condition at this point of transition. At least some people had understood that the presence of the Lord in their midst constituted the glory of Israel. The dying words of Phinehas' wife: "The glory has departed from Israel"¹ were a faithful and correct interpretation of what had happened to Israel as a nation.

Now the ark had returned, but the glory had not been restored. It could be objected that during the administration of Eli and his two rogue sons, Hophni and Phinehas, not much of Israel's glory was in evidence, but that does not mean that it was not there. The fact that Jacob, at Bethel, had not recognized the presence of the Lord at that place, saying: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven"² did not change the reality of God's presence. God's presence does not depend upon our sense of reality, but our experience of it does.

On the other hand, political oppression of a nation by another one does not eliminate the presence of God and the experience of it. During the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, the brother of a dear friend of mine was caught helping a British pilot, who had been shot down, escape. He was condemned to death by a firing squad. On his way to the wall where he would be shot, he sang in a loud voice the rhymed version of the Psalm "[Now] will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God."³ At such points one wonders, who is the oppressed?

As Israel became more and more aware of the fact that the presence of the ark had not brought the political freedom and independence they were hoping for, they began to give themselves to self-examination. Eventually they turned to Samuel for guidance. It is amazing to us that, in their quest for truth, these people overlooked what would seem to us the most obvious obstacle to fellowship with God, viz., their disobedience to the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments."⁴

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on the idols mentioned: "Ashtoreth (pl. 'Ashtaroth') was worshipped over a wide area as the goddess of fertility, love and war (Gk. 'Astarte'), and plaques of naked female figures from the Bronze and Iron Ages in Palestine are numerous. The *Baals* were the corresponding male deities. This depraved cult had become widespread at this period, involving Israel in breaking the first and second commandments, and resulting in loathsome sexual indulgence. The Canaanite way of life was totally opposed to everything Israel should have stood for as the people of God, and therefore repentance, if it was to be credible, had to entail renunciation of this foreign worship." We conclude from this that the giving up of "the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths" was not merely a matter of disposing of some statutes, burning them or thrashing them, but that it involved a pledge of sexual purity and change of lifestyle. If the mystery of sex, which in the words of the Apostle Paul, is a physical expression

1. I Sam. 4:21

2. Gen. 28:16,17

3. Ps. 43:4

4. Ex. 20:2-6

between man and wife of their spiritual relationship with Christ,¹ is detached from the spiritual reality it is supposed to represent, all of man's moral behavior goes down the drain.

Samuel's statement: "If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" demonstrates that there is a relationship between political, national freedom and the freedom of a personal relationship with God. It is true that, in practice, one can exist without the other, but that is not the ideal. Jesus says: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ... I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."² At that time, however, Israel was occupied by Roman troops and did not enjoy political freedom. I remember the opening words of a sermon, preached by a pastor of the church my parents attended at the end of the Second World War in Europe. He shouted: "We are free!" and then followed with the question: "Are we really free?"

Once the nation of Israel had carried out a spiritual spring cleaning, Samuel gathered them for a congregational meeting at Mizpah at which he interceded for them before the Lord. The meeting was marked by the carrying out of a ritual in which water was poured out. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "The pouring of water as a sign of penitence is attested only in this passage. The nearest parallel was the pouring out of water from the pool of Siloam within the temple area on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in memory of the gift of water from the rock in the Exodus." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "While the drawing of water was a joyful act (... Isaiah 12:3; ... John 7:37, 38), as symbolizing the winning from the depths below of the source of life and health, the pouring it out before Jehovah expressed sorrow for sin, and so it is explained by the Chaldee Paraphrase: 'They poured out their heart in penitence like water before the Lord' (comp. ... Psalm 22:14). It might here also signify weakness and powerlessness, the being 'as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again' (... 2 Samuel 14:14). They further expressed their sorrow by fasting, enjoined 'for the afflicting of their souls' upon the great day of atonement (... Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; ... Numbers 29:7). And to these symbolical acts they joined the confession of the mouth, acknowledging that 'they had sinned against Jehovah.'" In the reference of II Samuel, the woman who speaks to King David uses the expression to denote the act of dying: "Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die."³ It stands for a confession that cannot be revoked.

The verse ends by stating: "And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah." The Hebrew text reads literally: "And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah." The Hebrew verb used is *shaphat*, which, besides meaning "to judge," can also mean "to govern." The idea conveyed is that, from this point on, Samuel was considered to be the leader of the nation, both in a spiritual and political sense.

The mass meeting at Mizpah caught the attention of the Philistines who interpreted it to be a preparation of a military character with the intent of attacking them. So they tried to prevent the attack by taking the initiative and attacking first. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments here: "The name Mizpah meant 'watchtower' – it was a vantage-point for military purposes and was itself visible from a distance. The Philistines, hearing of the great gathering of Israelites, supposed an attack to be imminent and moved up to take the initiative in the battle (cf. Judg. 20: 3a, 14). It was a testing moment for the Israelites, who had been defeated so decisively in the previous encounter (I Sam. 4:10-11). The circumstances, however, could not have been more different. Instead of brash, misplaced confidence in outward symbols (I Sam. 4:3), there was genuine if timid faith in the power of their God to save them from their enemies, expressed in the request to Samuel, *Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us*. Two thoughts are

1. See Eph. 5:25-32.

2. John 8:31,32,34,35

3. II Sam. 14:14

combined: 'do not cease from us' or 'keep silent from us,' expressing dependence on Samuel's support; and 'do not fail to pray,' indicating ultimate dependence on the Lord."

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments on Samuel's sacrifice of a suckling lamb, stating: "(A lamb that was still sucking, probably, according to Lev 22:27, a lamb seven days old), and offered it whole as a burnt-offering to the Lord.' *kaaliyl* is used adverbially, according to its original meaning as an adverb, 'whole.' The Chaldee has not given the word at all, probably because the translators regarded it as pleonastic, since every burnt-offering was consumed upon the altar whole, and consequently the word *kaaliyl* was sometimes used in a substantive sense, as synonymous with 'owlaah (Deut 33:10; Ps 51:21). But in the passage before us, *kaaliyl* is not synonymous with 'owlaah, but simply affirms that the lamb was offered upon the altar without being cut up or divided. Samuel selected a young lamb for the burnt-offering, not 'as being the purest and most innocent kind of sacrificial animal,' - for it cannot possibly be shown that very young animals were regarded as purer than those that were full-grown-but as being the most suitable to represent the nation that had wakened up to new life through its conversion to the Lord, and was, as it were, new-born. For the burnt-offering represented the man, who consecrated therein his life and labor to the Lord. The sacrifice was the substratum for prayer. When Samuel offered it, he cried to the Lord for the children of Israel; and the Lord 'answered,' i.e., granted, his prayer."

Much has been written of Samuel's role as priest, both in this instance and in other occurrences. Since his father, Elkanah, was from the tribe of Levi, as was noted earlier, this ought not to be too difficult to construe. Although no details are given, Samuel's descent would have qualified him as priest in direct descent from the Aaronic line.

We read in v.9 that the LORD answered Samuel's prayer as it was backed up by the sacrifice. What Samuel did was the Old Testament equivalent of a New Testament prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ, both being based upon the sacrifice that makes prayers acceptable to God.

The following verses clarify how this prayer was answered. Even before the sacrifice was completely consumed, the Philistines launched an attack and God interfered with a thunderstorm of such magnitude that it scared the Philistine army out of its wits.

The Pulpit Commentary almost gives us an eyewitness account of the event: "We have here a detailed and lively description of the whole event. The lamb is still burning upon the altar, and Samuel still kneeling before it, when the Philistine hosts appear upon the lofty plateau just below the hill of Mizpah, and marshal themselves for battle. It seemed as if Israel's case were hopeless, and many a heart, no doubt, was bravely straggling against its fears, and scarcely could keep them down. But as the enemy drew near the electric cloud formed in the heavens, and *Jehovah thundered with a great voice* (so the Hebrew) *on that day upon the Philistines*. Alarmed at so unusual a phenomenon, the Philistines hesitate in their advance, and Samuel, seeing their consternation, gives the signal for the charge, and Israel, inspired by the voice of Jehovah, rushes down the hill upon the foe. Full of enthusiasm, they forget the poorness of their weapons, and the weight of their impetuous rush breaks through the opposing line. And now a panic seizes the Philistines; they attempt no further resistance, but flee in dismay from the pursuing Israelites. Their course would lead them down a huge valley 1000 feet deep, at the bottom of which was a torrent rushing over a rocky bed; nor was their flight stayed *until they came under Beth-car*. Of this place we know nothing, but probably it was a fastness where the Philistines could protect themselves from further attack."

Samuel understood the importance of the moment and he made sure that the event would not be forgotten in Israel's history. To assure this, he built a monument, erecting a stone, which he called Ebenezer, meaning "Stone of help." The Hebrew text reads literally 'Eben-haa-'aazer. We assume that this word was chiseled upon the stone. In the speech that accompanied the consecration of the monument, Samuel explained that the stone was to serve as a reminder of God's help in the past, thus assuring His help in the future. This is what we conclude from the words "Thus far has the LORD helped us." The monument was meant to inspire faith in God in the future.

It was at the place of previous defeat that God gave them the victory. When Israel was defeated the first time, they had brought out the ark as a talisman, thinking that the presence of the ark would, in itself,

automatically assure victory. It became obvious that the physical presence of God only becomes significant when there is an inner spiritual relationship with Him. Since the fear of the Lord was missing among the Israelites who wanted to use the ark for their own benefit, the Lord allowed them to be defeated. In the second instance, the nation responded to their Lord by faith, although there was no physical evidence of the Lord's presence in the form on the ark. God answered to their faith and sacrifice by causing the fear of the Lord among the Philistines to lead to their defeat.

Although the defeat of the Philistines was not total at this point, as is clear from the wars Saul would be forced to fight with them, the day of Ebenezer marked a turning point in Israel's history. Victory would have been complete if faith in the God, who had helped them thus far, would have marked Israel's confidence for the future. That did not occur until David became Israel's monarch.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, describes the effect of the battle upon the nation under the guidance of Samuel. We read: "As the result of the Lord's help, and under the leadership of Samuel, Israel enjoyed a threefold benefit: i. the Philistines *were subdued* (after their forty-year period of supremacy, Judg. 13:1) for a time, but not indefinitely (they were to make even greater inroads into Israel's territory in the days of Saul); ii. Border cities from Ekron to Gath came under Israel's control, and land which the Philistines had captured was restored; iii. There was peace, not only between Israel and the Philistines, *because the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel* (cf. 1 Sam. 5:6,7,9), but also *between Israel and the Amorites*. The name 'Amorites' is used loosely to cover the Canaanite population, who regarded the Israelites as less of a threat to them than the Philistines, and so ceased to harry Israel. Canaanite city-states would have been indirect beneficiaries of Israelite successes in resisting or driving back the Philistines, and vice-versa. It was a natural sequel. The whole section ends with a summary of the ministry of Samuel, which is to be followed by one aspect of his work looked at in detail (1 Sam. 8 – 16). All his life he *judged Israel* – three times the fact is stated (the RSV's *he administered justice* is simply a variant to improve the English style); but, as has already become plain, the settlement of legal matters was only one aspect of his leadership. To all intents and purposes he was a supreme governor, of the type exemplified by Moses – appointed and equipped by the Lord to keep Israel in a right relationship with their Lord God, and depending upon his resources, in all their undertakings to live and work to his glory. It was a splendid vision, which Samuel was able to a degree to implement.

Samuel did not expect people to always come to him at Ramah, but traveled regularly to three centers: *Mizpah* (three miles north) and Bethel (a further four miles north) and *Gilgal* (much further away in the Jordan valley, near fords of Jordan, Josh. 4:19). These places were all on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim, to the south of Shiloh. The tribes which had settled in the extreme north and south of the country would not have had such regular visits. In these three instances *places* (Heb *miqômôt*) may mean 'sanctuaries'; the LXX has this meaning, and the mention that Samuel built an altar in Ramah would support this interpretation. Worship was central to all his activities, as it had been for Moses. But the writer is wanting to point the reader forward to an important development which will change the character of leadership in Israel."

c. The question of kingship 8:1 – 12:25

In introducing this section, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "1 Samuel 7 demonstrated Samuel's leadership at its best. At Mizpah he had brought the nation through religious reformation to repentance, while the stone called Ebenezer became a memorial to the fact that the Lord answered Samuel's intercessions and gave a signal victory over the Philistines. 'Hitherto the Lord has helped us' (1 Sam. 7:12) brought the triumphs of former days into the experience of the generation then living, and proclaimed his favor restored. While Samuel was judge all would be well. But changes were pending. The attempt to set up a dynasty had first been made after Gideon's triumph over the Midianites, but he maintained Israel's theocratic tradition: 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you

(Judg. 8:23). Ever since Moses had obeyed the Lord's call (Exod. 3:1-12), Israel's leaders had been divinely designated, and took their orders from God himself. The question of their setting up a dynasty did not arise until Abimelech, Gideon's son by a Canaanite concubine (Judg. 8:31) tried the experiment, which was short-lived. Nevertheless the comment, 'in those days there was no king in Israel' (Judg. 18:1; 19:1), and especially the added refrain in Judges 17:6 and 21:25, 'every man did what was right in his own eyes,' indicates the writer's opinion that a king would have restrained lawlessness and established order.

Conflicting opinions are reflected in the narratives of I Samuel 8 – 12. Samuel, who took the request for a king as a personal attack on his leadership, never quite became reconciled to the new regime, despite the divine guidance he received to anoint a king. He valued the distinctive witness of Israel's traditions to the viability of depending on the leadership of the unseen God, and could see no good coming from the adoption of Canaanite models of kingship. Yet God instructed him to anoint Saul, and Samuel presided throughout the various stages of establishing Saul in office. In the light of pressure of public opinion, the Lord gave Israel the king they requested. Samuel issued appropriate warning and exhortations. Despite Israel's apostasy in requesting a king, the Lord was positively at work to achieve his ultimate purpose."

i. The request for a king(8:1-22)

1 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel.

2 The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba.

3 But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.

5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord.

7 And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

10 Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king.

11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.

12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.

15 He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants.

16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use.

17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.

18 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us.

20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord.

22 The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town."

The Pulpit Commentary gives the following introduction to the part of the book of I Samuel that begins at this point: "The great interest of the First Book of Samuel lies in the fact that we have in it the orderly consolidation of two of the main factors in the preparation for the manifestation of our Lord, namely, prophecy and the kingdom. The first seven chapters give us the history of Samuel's birth, and of the gradual development in him of those spiritual powers which finally made him not merely a prophet, but the founder of prophecy as a permanent and regularly organized institution of the Jewish Church. The whole of the rest of the book, while adding many interesting particulars about Samuel, is occupied with the establishment of the kingdom and with Saul. We have in him, both in his uprise and his fall, one of the most remarkable personages of the Old Testament. But his character for good and for evil will develop itself as we proceed. Before, however, we can appreciate his history, it is necessary for us to understand something of the vast issues that depended upon the change of government effected in his person. With Samuel, then, and Saul we have come to the time when the prophet and the king take their due place in the development of Israel. They were both essential to its progress, and the accomplishment of its Divine mission, and in ... Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and again ... Deuteronomy 28:36, the establishment of the monarchy is spoken of as a virtual necessity. It was not Israel's highest ideal, far from it. Had religion been as far advanced as in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah, the theocracy might have existed in such a form as would have insured the national safety. But such as the people were in the centuries which followed the conquest of Canaan, it was rather a high and glorious idea than a fact capable of being realized. It was one of those magnificent thoughts which raised the Israelites so high above the level of ordinary nations, and gave such grandeur and nobleness to the long struggle of their history; but it was a thought, the value of which lay in its giving them a future, towards which their faces were ever turned, and which, by the sublimity of its conception, ever drew them onwards and upwards to all that was best and most Divine.

To be then Jehovah's own subjects, ruled directly by him, a republic with Jehovah for its chief, and its officers speaking at his command, and under his direct influence and control this was Israel's grand ideal. As a matter of fact, it did not give them peace at home nor security from foreign invasion. It did not even enable them to advance in the path of culture or morality, nor did it so work as to bind the twelve tribes together into a harmonious whole. Throughout the Book of Judges we find the record of a desperate struggle in which Israel again and again is in danger of being utterly destroyed from among the nations, and at the end of this period the Philistines are the dominant power, and Israel is disarmed and virtually at their mercy. The cause of this was that somehow or other the priests and Levites were unable to prevent the people from lapsing into idolatry, and though upon their repentance Jehovah, as their King, aid on every emergency raise men to be their saviors, yet the system was too cumbrous and exceptional for ordinary times. It was only in times of trouble that the nation roused itself to the conviction that it was Jehovah's realm, and fought with the heroism which so grand a thought must give it; at other times it sank down each day to a lower level, till all that the last judge, Samson, could do was to arouse the national spirit to a prolonged resistance and a last effort against the dangers and difficulties that were threatening Israel with gradual extinction ...

This powerlessness in war was the inevitable result of having no settled ordinary ruler, whose business it was to convoke the national forces, and provide for the general safety; but it was by no means the worst evil attendant in practice upon the theocracy. In the three last chapters of the Book of Judges we have the history of a fearful crime, punished with equally fearful cruelty. What makes it the more remarkable is that it took place in the days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, at a time when the public morality still stood high, and religion had great influence over the people. Now, had there been a king he would have punished the malefactors, as a matter of course; but when it had to be done by an extraordinary gathering of the people in arms, the Benjamites, always a high-spirited tribe, imagined themselves bound in honor to resist an invasion of their territory, and a violent civil war was the result. So embittered did the feelings of

the Israelites become at the brave defense of the Benjamites, that when at last they had overpowered them, they burned their cities with fire, and put men, women, children, and cattle to an indiscriminate slaughter. Repenting soon afterwards of their revolting cruelty, they treated the men of Jabesh-Gilead with almost equal violence, on the pretence of their not having taken part in the war, but really to provide the remaining Benjamites with wives. Now, both at the beginning and end of this narrative, it is carefully pointed out that all this crime and cruelty was the result of the state of anarchy which everywhere prevailed. 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes' (... Judges 21:25). There was no regular administration of justice, no person whose business it was to maintain law and order, no one whose authority kept malefactors in awe, and who, when a crime had been committed, would punish it in a regular manner, and with the general approval of all parties; and so every species of villainy could be practiced with impunity, until the patience of the community was exhausted, and it visited the offenders with a violence so summary as to make it repent afterwards of its own cruelty.

The position of these three chapters, immediately preceding in the Hebrew the Books of Samuel (for the insertion of the Book of Ruth is a modern attempt at a chronological arrangement), seems intended to point out that the king was as absolutely necessary for the wellbeing of the Hebrew commonwealth as he was essential for the perfecting of the Messianic idea. It is in Christ's kingdom that the theocracy becomes a realized fact, and Christ is above all things a King. Now in Israel the King was emphatically the Anointed One, *i.e.* the Messiah or Christ (... 1 Samuel 2:10, 35; 10:1; 12:3, etc.). True it is that in Christ all offices must be united, and he must be a Priest to make atonement and a Prophet to teach as well as a King to rule; yet we find in Israel, as the type of Christ's kingdom, that priest and prophet stood at the king's beck. In Solomon we have the delineation of Israel's king in his full power and glory; and we find him thrusting out Abiathar from being high priest (... 1 Kings 2:27), appointing the order of service for the priests and Levites (... 2 Chronicles 8:14), and having the prophets in attendance upon him to record his noble deeds (... 2 Chronicles 9:29). To Solomon's reign the Israelites ever looked back as giving the ideal of what their 'anointed one' should be, and onward they looked to the coming of One who should perfect this ideal, and instead of staining it with sin, as Solomon did, should raise it to the full and vast dimensions of Israelite thought. Most painful must it have been to the nation that each one of its first three kings, though rising every one far above the level of ordinary men, yet fell so very far short of their ideal. And then came the rent in the kingdom, and an ideal king was possible no longer.

But the prophets kept the thought ever alive in the hearts of the people, and in the fullness of time the Messiah came. Meanwhile the establishment of the earthly monarchy was an essential condition for the security, the continuance, and the development of Israel. Without a king Israel could never have performed its work of preparing for Christ. Even the organization of prophecy was delayed till there was a king, because when a nation has to fight for its very existence there is no room for a literary and educated order of men. Learning would have died out in the middle ages had there not been cloisters into which men who loved mental culture might retire. Still it was not this which made the people cling so tenaciously to the hope held out to them by Moses, but the daily vexation of Philistine misrule. And what the Philistines were to them now all the neighboring nations had previously been in turn. Throughout the Book of Judges we find a state of things described from which all thoughtful men must have desired deliverance, and the few exceptions, as when they flourished for a time under the strong hand of Gideon, only served to bring out the contrast more clearly between times when they had a ruler and times when they had none. We need not wonder, therefore, at the persistency with which the people urged their demand, even after the dark pictures which Samuel had drawn of what a king might become if he degenerated into a tyrant. But our admiration is due to the patriotism and generosity which made this noble-minded man grant their request, though he knew that he thereby limited his own powers, and gave his sons an inferior place. So also had Moses done before. While he gave Aaron high and perpetual office, he let his own family fall back into the position of ordinary Israelites. And, moreover, the king whom Samuel chose was a grand hero, though, like so many men gifted with great powers of command, he fell through that self-will which is the besetting sin of ruling natures. Few men can endure the trial of the possession of absolute power, and least of all those endowed with an

energetic and resolute temperament. It is a noble testimony that David bears to Saul and his heroic son in the 'Song of the Bow' (... 2 Samuel 1:19-27): 'mighty' they were, and 'the beauty of Israel,' though Saul marred his glory by great and ruinous faults. With Saul, then, the rest of the book is occupied, and it divides itself into two parts —

- (1) the founding and establishment of Saul's kingdom (chs. 8-15); and
- (2) its gradual decay and final fall (chs. 16-31)."

The above lengthy quotation from *The Pulpit Commentary* raises as many questions as it answers. Reading the record in I Samuel, gives the impression that the establishing of a monarchy in Israel had never been part of God's plan for His people. And yet, we find two references to a monarchy in Deuteronomy, in which Moses never speaks about the subject in a derogatory way. We read: "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."¹ And: "The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone."²

The whole concept of the coming of the Messiah was linked to the establishment of a heavenly kingdom, of which the earthly kingdom would be the foreshadowing. It is with kingdoms as with democracies, that a certain level of spiritual maturity is required to make either work properly. The same can be said about a theocracy. The theocratic model of the nation of Israel would have worked, were it not for the sinful nature of its subjects!

I believe that the key word in Israel's request for a king is in the phrase "appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." Besides the fact that Samuel's sons did not follow in their father's footsteps, giving themselves to corrupt practices, it was the embarrassment of being different from other nations that surrounded Israel that led to the request. The Israelites did not ask for a kingdom modeled on the pattern of the kingdom of heaven, but on that of the surrounding nations, people who were given to idol worship!

The testimony of Samuel's sons as being given to corruption suggests that young Samuel's education in the home of Eli had left some negative effects upon the boy as he grew into manhood. He had never seen a model of good parenthood in which the father led his sons into a life of righteousness. What God had said about Abraham, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him,"³ never became a reality in the family Samuel founded.

This did not dismiss Samuel's sons from their own responsibility for integrity in the same way that Eli's attitude did not take away the guilt of Hophni and Phinehas. Joel and Abijah were responsible for their own greedy lifestyle. They could never say what their father said at the end of his life: "As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand.

1. Deut. 17:14-20

2. Deut. 28:36

3. Gen. 18:19

Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right.” We read that the people answered: “You have not cheated or oppressed us. You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand.” “Samuel said to them, ‘The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.’ ‘He is witness,’ they said.”¹

So, our first impression is that the elders of the people were right when they made their demand for a king to lead them and to take charge of the nation against the enemy in case of war. Samuel’s reaction to this request strikes us as shortsighted. He takes it as a personal rejection, which means that he failed to understand that the lifestyle of his two sons would be detrimental to the wellbeing of the nation of Israel.

As we saw above, *The Pulpit Commentary*’s observation was that the establishment of a kingdom was “a virtual necessity.” But Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about: “The phrase a king to govern us like all nations (Heb. *gôyîm*, in the sense of ‘gentiles’). The phrase is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 17:14-15 where the desire to emulate other nations is foreseen and permitted, rather than approved.” I rather believe that it was not so much the establishing of the kingdom as the rejection of the theocracy that made the elders’ request appear to be an act of rebellion. As Israel’s later history shows in God’s choice of David, the “man after God’s own heart,”² proves that the king, who considered himself to be reigning by the grace of God, would be quite acceptable.

While Samuel considered the people’s request as a rejection of his own administration, God told him that it was much worse than that. Whether this was any consolation to the old prophet is not stated.

The Pulpit Commentary observes here: “And as they were asking not for the development and perfecting of their own institutions, but for a government modeled upon the institutions of the heathen round them, Samuel shows what are the dangers inherent in the establishment of a despot such as the kings of the heathen were. As a rule the kings of Judaea did not resemble the picture drawn by Samuel, but in spite of many blemishes remained same to their allegiance to Jehovah as the supreme Ruler of the nation, and confined themselves within the limits marked out for them by the Mosaic law.”

The clinching argument of the people is that they wanted to be “like all the other nations, with a king to lead [them] and to go out before [them] and fight [their] battles.” Samuel responded to this in the only way he knew; “he repeated it before the LORD.” And the Lord told him to acquiesce. The people must have understood that their being sent home meant that their request would be granted, but that it would take time to put the plan into practice. In concluding her comments on this event, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* states: “The collective decision of the community was taken seriously. There are ‘movements’ in society which need to work themselves out; here the people of God found themselves in tension between the traditional and the new, but in the case of the monarchy the new was not to be rejected ... The ideal was not an option, because it would not find support, so another way has to be chosen which involves a compromise. The Lord, like a master chess-player, achieves his objective despite human plans and policies that temporarily impede what he wants to do.”

ii. Saul’s secret anointing 9:1 – 10:16

9:1 *There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin.*

2 *He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites — a head taller than any of the others.*

1. I Sam. 12:2-5

2. I Sam. 13:14

3 Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys."

4 So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.

5 When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

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

7 Saul said to his servant, "If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?"

8 The servant answered him again. "Look," he said, "I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I will give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take."

9 (Formerly in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.)

10 "Good," Saul said to his servant. "Come, let's go." So they set out for the town where the man of God was.

11 As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and they asked them, "Is the seer here?"

12 "He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place.

13 As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward, those who are invited will eat. Go up now; you should find him about this time."

14 They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place.

15 Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel:

16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."

17 When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

18 Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, "Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?"

19 "I am the seer," Samuel replied. "Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart.

20 As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father's family?"

21 Saul answered, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"

22 Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited — about thirty in number.

23 Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the piece of meat I gave you, the one I told you to lay aside."

24 So the cook took up the leg with what was on it and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said, "Here is what has been kept for you. Eat, because it was set aside for you for this occasion, from the time I said, 'I have invited guests.'" And Saul dined with Samuel that day.

25 After they came down from the high place to the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house.

26 *They rose about daybreak and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, "Get ready, and I will send you on your way." When Saul got ready, he and Samuel went outside together.*

27 *As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us"-and the servant did so-"but you stay here awhile, so that I may give you a message from God."*

10:1 *Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?"*

2 *When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"'*

3 *"Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine.*

4 *They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.*

5 *"After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.*

6 *The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.*

7 *Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*

8 *"Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."*

9 *As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.*

10 *When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying.*

11 *When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"*

12 *A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"*

13 *After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place.*

14 *Now Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?" "Looking for the donkeys," he said. "But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel."*

15 *Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you."*

16 *Saul replied, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.*

This fascinating story begins with the genealogy of Saul's father, Kish, a Benjaminite, whose ancestry is traced back five generations to Benjamin, the founder of the tribe. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, this genealogy is incomplete. I quote: "The genealogy of Saul is rendered obscure by the Hebrew custom of abbreviating such records by the omission of names. The family documents were no doubt kept in full, but when transcribed, as here and in the First Book of Chronicles, only a summary is given, and as the omitted links are not always the same, great difficulty is necessarily the result."

The New International Version describes Kish as "a man of standing." The Hebrew words used are *gibbowr chayil*. We find the Hebrew word *gibbowr* used about the Nephilim, about whom the Bible states: "They were the heroes of old, *men of renown*."¹ The word is also used to describe Nimrod, about whom we read: "Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a *mighty warrior* on the earth. He was a mighty

1. Gen. 6:4

hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.'"¹ The word *chayil* in this context could refer to someone's wealth. As such it is used in the verse that describes the raid Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi carried out upon the inhabitants of Shechem: "They carried off all their *wealth* and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses."²

So when Saul, during their first encounter in typical Hebrew fashion says to Samuel: "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?" it was more an expression of modesty than of a real assessment of his family's status.

God's choice of Israel's first king was the best anyone could pick according to standards of human assessment and public appearance. Saul was handsome and tall and his antecedents were impeccable. There was nothing in this young man's background that would suggest that he would fail miserably.

In describing Saul, *The New International Version* calls him "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites." The Hebrew word used is *bachur*, which implies "first choice." The word is first used in the army Pharaoh put together to pursue and capture the Israelites who had left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land: "He took six hundred of *the best* chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them."³ The idea is that Saul would be everyone's first choice for the job. He was young, impressive, well-built, intelligent and attractive.

The story begins with two runaway donkeys. We could see some irony in God's choice of events that would bring the man of Israel's choice to the throne of the nation. One does not have to look far from the source to compare a human being to "a silly ass." Whether the animals are representative of the nation of Israel who asked for a king, or for the man who would fulfill the place, is up to the historian to decide. Donkeys filled an important role among the Israelites in the absence of horses, which were later introduced during the reign of Solomon.⁴

The story of Saul's ascent to the throne is filled with coincidences that are obviously divinely arranged. The missing donkeys bring Saul and his servant into contact with Samuel. We read that the search led the men "through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha ... into the district of Shaalim ... through the territory of Benjamin." Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about this journey: "The exact location of the districts mentioned is no longer certain, but *the hill country of Ephraim*, or Mount Ephraim, indicates the general direction, to the north of Gibeah, where Saul's home was (1 Sam. 10:26; 11:4). Saul and his servant made a circular tour, returning close to Ramah, though neither Samuel nor his city is named here. The reader knows Samuel came from the land of Zuph (1 Sam. 1:1), so he, unlike Saul, is aware that this journey has an importance that will take Saul by surprise. *The land of Benjamin* (the Hebrew lacks the 'ben') is almost certainly not the original reading. An area of Ephraim is required, and a less well-known place name has evidently been replaced by a familiar one."

We do not know how long this search took, but evidently it was long enough to cause concern at home. Donkeys were not supposed to stray so far from home that a hunt of more than a few days would be required to catch them.

When Saul is ready to call it quits, the servant suggests that Samuel be consulted. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "Ramah was the usual residence of Samuel; but several circumstances, especially the mention of Rachel's sepulcher, which lay in Saul's way homeward, lead to the conclusion that 'this city' was not the Ramah where Samuel dwelt. It seems strange that a dignified prophet should be consulted in such an affair. But it is probable that at the introduction of the prophetic office the seers had discovered things lost or stolen, and thus their power for higher revelations was gradually established."

1. Gen. 10:8,9

2. Gen. 34:29

3. Ex. 14:7

4. 1 Kings 4:26

From the words of one of a group of girls who says: “he has just come to our town today,” we could conclude that this particular town was not Samuel’s habitual residence. Why Saul’s servant then assumes that Samuel would be at this place is not clear. *The Pulpit Commentary*, however, assumes that the town is Ramah, which is the place where Samuel was born and later settled. In the beginning of this book it is called Ramathaim,¹ indicating that it was built on two hills.

It is also strange that Saul would not know about Samuel, as the text seems to indicate. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments here: “One puzzling, often-noted feature of the story is Saul’s ignorance of Samuel, but that may be to misinterpret the writer’s intention. What he wants to convey is rather Saul’s lack of awareness of the future. Just when Saul is ready to call off the whole venture, everything depends on his servant, who believes the man *of God* will give them the direction they need. A visit in time of need to a man of God was expected to change the whole situation, and on two counts this man was outstanding: he was esteemed by all who knew this, and his words were fulfilled (cf. 1 Sam. 3:19). Thus he passed the test of the true prophet (Deut. 18:22).”

Evidently, it was considered inappropriate to consult anyone who was considered to have supernatural gifts without offering some form of payment. The Hebrew word for the present Saul believed to be due is *teshuwrah*. This is the only place where this word is used in Scripture. It is derived from the word *shuwr*, which stands for any kind of payment, even for money given to a prostitute.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the matter of payment to Samuel: “Apparently the shekel, roughly stamped, was divided into four quarters by a cross, and broken when needed. What was its proportionate value in Samuel’s days we cannot tell, for silver was rare; but in size it would be somewhat bigger than a sixpence, and would be a very large fee, while the bread would have been a small one. It very well marks the eagerness of the servant that he is ready to part with the considerable sum of money in his possession in order to consult the seer. The whole conversation is given in a very lively and natural manner.”

About the editor’s comment on the word *ro’eh*, “seer,” *The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “This verse is evidently a gloss, written originally by some later hand in the margin, in order to explain the word used for seer in vers. 11, 18, 19. Inserted here in the text it interrupts the narrative, and is itself somewhat incomprehensible. The Septuagint offers a very probable reading, namely, ‘for the people in old time used to call the prophet a seer,’ *i.e.* it was a word used chiefly by the common people. Prophet, *nabi*, is really the older and established word from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end. The word *roeh*, used in this place for seer, is comparatively rare, as a popular word would be in written compositions. It refers to that which is seen by the ordinary sight, to waking vision ... whereas the other word for seer, *chozeh*, refers to ecstatic vision. *Roeh* is used by Isaiah ... apparently in much the same sense as here, of those whom the people consulted in their difficulties, and they might be true prophets as Samuel was, or mere pretenders to occult powers. The present narrative makes it plain that *roeh* was used in a good sense in Samuel’s days; but gradually it became degraded, and while *chozeh* became the respectful word for a prophet, *roeh* became the contrary. Another conclusion also follows. We have seen that there are various indications that the Books of Samuel in their present state are later than his days. Here, on the contrary, we have a narrative couched in the very language of his times; for the writer of the gloss contained in this verse was displeased at Samuel being called a *roeh*, but did not dare to alter it, though taking care to note that it was equivalent in those days to calling him a *nabi*.”

Saul and his servant meet some girls at the city well that supplied water for the whole city. The city was on a hill and the well was in the valley. The girls tell the two men that Samuel is in fact in town and that he will go to the place where the people have prepared a sacrifice which the prophet was supposed to bless before it could be brought. We are given no information as to the reason for the celebration. As it turns out the feast would be for Saul’s anointing, although nobody except Samuel knew this.

The Pulpit Commentary explains about the place of sacrifice: “Samuel, we read, had built an altar at Ramah (... 1 Samuel 7:17), and probably the present sacrifice was to be offered upon it. Such altars, and

1. 1 Sam. 1:1

the worship of the true God upon high places, were at this time recognized as right, and were, in fact, in accordance with, and were even the remains of, the old patriarchal religion. But gradually they were condemned, partly because of the growing sanctity of the temple, but chiefly because of the tendency of religious rites celebrated in such places to degenerate into nature-worship, and orgies such as the heathen were in the habit of holding on the tops of mountains and hills.”

So Saul meets Samuel. We read that God had revealed to Samuel the day before that Saul would be coming and that he was the man who should be anointed as the first king of Israel. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Now Yahweh had told Samuel [in] his ear a day before ...” Whether this means that Samuel actually heard the voice of the Lord or this is merely an expression is not clear. When Samuel sees Saul the Lord confirms to him that this is the man.

The words “I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me” seem to contradict what we read earlier when the elders of Israel came to Samuel with their demand for a king and God answered Samuel: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.”¹ The words here are reminiscent of what God said to Moses when he was called to go back to Egypt and lead the people out of their bondage. We read: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”² *Barnes’ Notes* observes about this: “These words are not very easily reconcilable with 1 Sam 7:13. It is possible that the aggressive movements of the Philistines, after the long cessation indicated by 1 Sam 7:13, coupled with Samuel’s old age and consequent inability to lead them to victory as before, were among the chief causes which led to the cry for a king. If this were so the Philistine oppression glanced at in this verse might in a general survey be rather connected with Saul’s times than with Samuel’s.”

Saul being “an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites — a head taller than any of the others,” as we read at the beginning of this chapter, would immediately have caught Samuel’s attention. Samuel seems to have had a weakness in admiring tall and handsome men. God had to correct him when he was sent to anoint David as the future king of Israel and he saw David’s oldest brother Eliab. We read: “When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’ But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”³ But in this case God confirms Samuel’s first impression, saying: “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”

In answer to Saul’s question Samuel identifies himself as the seer, proving at the same time his supernatural gift by answering Saul’s question about the donkeys before the question was asked. The addition “And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father’s family?” must have been incomprehensible to Saul. He had only come to ask about some lost animals. There is something in any encounter with God that produces infinitely more than expected. When doubting Thomas wanted proof of Christ’s resurrection by touching the marks of the crucifixion, he ended up by exclaiming: “My Lord and my God!”⁴

On the phrase “And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father’s family?” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Rather, ‘To whom belongs all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for thee, and for thy father’s house?’ The words were intended to indicate to Saul, though in an obscure manner, that the supreme power in Israel would be his. Why trouble about she-asses? They might be

1. I Sam. 8:7,8

2. Ex. 3:7

3. I Sam. 16:6,7

4. John 20:28

beautiful, and a valuable property for a husbandman; but he was about to become a king, to whom would belong everything that was best and most precious.”

Saul retorts that, as a member of the smallest tribe in Israel, Samuel’s words make no sense to him. The tribe of Benjamin had in fact been decimated by the other tribes after their crime committed on the concubine of a Levite. *Barnes’ Notes* explains: “The tribe of Benjamin, originally the smallest of all the tribes (Num 1:36), if Ephraim and Manasseh are reckoned as one tribe, had been nearly annihilated by the civil war recorded in Judg 20. It had of course not recovered from that terrible calamity in the time of Saul, and was doubtless literally much the smallest tribe at that time. Nothing could be more improbable, humanly speaking, than that this weak tribe should give a ruler to the mighty tribes of Joseph and Judah.”

About the rest of the chapter, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “Shy or not, Saul and his servant were ushered into the feast and seated at the head of the table, where places had been kept. They were honored guests! The leg of meat that the cook had set aside was the portion allotted to the priests, ‘And you shall consecrate ... the thigh of the priests’ portion ...’ (Exod. 29:27). Saul must have been mystified that not only was he expected, but he was also treated as though he were a priest. He did not yet know that he was the Lord’s choice for Israel’s first king, and so, as the Lord’s anointed, entitled to the special privileges, including the apportioned joint of meat.”

We must be careful not to draw too many spiritual applications from this. But the scene does give us an illustration of the surprising way God treats all those who are elect in Jesus Christ. We tend to see ourselves as sinful human beings in the presence of God (and correctly so), but God deals with us as kings and priests in His kingdom. At the moment of our conversion, most people have the experience of being “surprised by joy.”¹ And the surprises do not end throughout life if we walk with the Lord.

Joyce G. Baldwin continues her comments: “Having returned to the city, and spent the night in the cool of the roof-top, Saul was wakened early. The RSV’s *a bed was spread for Saul* follows the LXX here, while the AV and NIV keep to the Hebrew, he [Samuel] talked with Saul,’ which makes good sense. Outside the city, Samuel wanted a private word with Saul, hence the request that the servant should go on ahead.”

The chapter ends, inappropriately, with Samuel’s announcement that he has a personal message from God for Saul, meant only for his ears. The chapter division ought to have been made at another point in the text.

It seems that Saul’s coronation was done in reverse order. But before the nation of Israel would accept Saul as the candidate of their and God’s choice, Saul had to come to the point of accepting it himself. This, as we will see from the rest of the story, he had a difficult time doing. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on what happened: “Saul, on whom the occurrences of the previous day must have come as strange and unintelligible marvels, was no doubt still more embarrassed when one so old and venerable, both in person and office, as Samuel solemnly consecrated him to be Israel’s prince ... and gave him the kiss of fealty and allegiance. Samuel, therefore, answers Saul’s inquiring looks with this question, and, further, gives him three signs to quiet his doubts, and convince him that his appointment is from God.”

Samuel’s announcement comes in typical Hebrew fashion in the form of a question: “Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?” The Hebrew word rendered “leader” is *nagiyd*, which literally means commander in a wide application of functions, civil, military or religious. The word is used consistently for all the kings of Israel. In a footnote, *The New International Version* adds to v.1: “Hebrew; Septuagint and Vulgate over his people Israel? You will reign over the Lord’s people and save them from the power of their enemies round about. And this will be a sign to you that the Lord has anointed you leader over his inheritance.”

Samuel understood that Saul needed a lot of convincing that his coronation as king of Israel was not merely a figment of imagination of an old man. As proof of his divine inspiration Samuel predicts three events that will occur during Saul’s journey home, events that, humanly speaking, cannot be predicted. The first incident is the meeting of two men near the tomb of Rachel. They must be people who knew Saul and

1. Title of C. S. Lewis’ autobiography

the object of his search. Their message would be a confirmation of Samuel's initial answer to Saul's question, given before the question about the missing donkeys had been asked.

The second chance encounter would be at "the great tree of Tabor," where Saul will meet three men on their way to bring a sacrifice to God at Bethel. Samuel describes them in detail and tells Saul that they will offer him part of the bread they were going to give the Lord.

The third incident will be a spiritual experience for Saul, in which the Holy Spirit will come upon him when he meets a group of prophets, probably students of one of Samuel's schools.

About this encounter with the prophets, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "At Gibeah Samuel had established one of his schools of the prophets, by means of which he did so much to elevate the whole mental and moral state of the Israelites. The word rendered *company* literally means a cord or line, and so a band of people. These prophets were descending from the Bamah ... where they had been engaged in some religious exercise, and were chanting a psalm or hymn to the music of various instruments. Music was one of the great means employed by Samuel in training his young men; and not only is its effect at all times elevating and refining, but in semi-barbarous times, united, as it is sure to be, with poetry, it is the chief educational lever for raising men's minds, and giving them a taste for culture and intellectual pleasures. The musical instruments mentioned are the *psaltery*, Hebrew, *nebel*, a sort of harp with ten strings stretched across a triangle, the longest string being at its base, and the shortest towards its apex; the *tabret*, Hebrew *toph*, a tambourine struck by the hand; the *pipe*, Hebrew, *chalil*, i.e. 'bored' or 'pierced,' so called from the holes bored in it to make the notes, and being probably a sort of flute; and, lastly, the *harp*, Hebrew, *cinnor*, a sort of guitar, chiefly used for accompanying the voice, and sometimes played with the fingers, and sometimes with a plectrum or quill. There is nothing to indicate that there was only one of each of these instruments, so that the articles would be better omitted. No doubt every prophet was playing some one or other of them. *And they shall prophesy*. The conjugation used here is not that employed for the prediction of future events, but means, literally, and they will be acting the prophet, the right word for men who were in training for the prophetic office ... They were really engaged in chanting God's praises with fervor, and this was no doubt one of the methods employed by Samuel to refine and spiritualize their minds. Years afterwards David was thus educated, and learned at one of Samuel's schools that skill in meter and psalmody which, added to his natural gifts, made him 'the sweet singer of Israel.'"

The mention about Saul's spiritual experience when meeting the students of Samuel's school of prophets raises several questions about the work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life. One of our problems is that we tend to reason from the perspective of New Testament theology, as people who live after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and the church of Jesus Christ was born. The fact that the Holy Spirit came upon Saul, but left him again is rather puzzling to us. We read: "Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him."¹ We will have a closer look at this when we get to that part of the book. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* probably has the best comment on the present text regarding Saul's "conversion," stating: "This transformation is not to be regarded indeed as regeneration in the Christian sense, but as a change resembling regeneration, which affected the entire disposition of mind, and by which Saul was lifted out of his former modes of thought and feeling, which were confined within a narrow earthly sphere, into the far higher sphere of his new royal calling, was filled with kingly thoughts in relation to the service of God, and received 'another heart' (v. 9). Heart is used in the ordinary scriptural sense, as the centre of the whole mental and psychical life of will, desire, thought, perception, and feeling ... Through this sign his anointing as king was to be inwardly sealed."

Going by *The Pulpit Commentary's* observation, that the conjugation of "they will be prophesying" does not refer to any supernatural exercise of prophetic gifts, but probably simply to the enthusiastic singing of psalms or hymns, helps us to understand that Saul was merely swept off his feet by the joy and enthusiasm of the people he met and joined. The statement in v.9 – "God changed Saul's heart" is then not the equivalent of a born again experience as we presently understand it.

1. I Sam. 16:14

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, connects the phrase *God changed Saul's heart* with the words *you will be changed into a different person* in v.6, stating: "Saul was all set to be obedient, and as he left Samuel *God gave him another heart* (Lit. 'turned to him'; cf. v.6). A change took place in him because God was at work in him. All the signs were fulfilled, but only one is related. When he was with the prophets Saul also prophesied, and the people of the place, who evidently knew Saul well (evidence that supports Gibeah as the location), made disapproving comments. The *son of Kish* should know better than to get mixed up in such company. *Who is their father?* implies scorn for illegitimate prophets, who, in social terms were nobodies. Yet before long Saul would be opposing the prophet Samuel, hence the irony behind the remark, *Is Saul also among the prophets?*, which became proverbial for an incongruous alliance. Indeed he was not a prophet, though his ecstatic state suggested that he might be. The people of the time, familiar with the religious ecstasy in Canaanite rites (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:26-29), did not regard uncritically the implications of such behavior. The experience could have been of God, without necessarily indicating that Saul had the prophetic calling; time would tell, and there were objective tests (Deut. 18:22), just as there are for the church (I John 4:1-3). For Saul the important point was that Samuel's predicted signs had been fulfilled, and he could therefore be sure that the Lord was with him. There is no evidence that he ever prophesied again (except in his rejection and humiliation, I Sam. 19:23-24)."

There can be no doubt but Saul experienced a change of heart. The question raised, however, is what kind of change and how far did it go. It is not difficult to imagine Saul's state of mind as he left home, looking for some runaway donkeys and meeting Samuel, who with one remark turned his life upside down. The sudden change of status from an unknown farm boy to the rank of royalty would cause turmoil in any human soul. A logical first reaction would be, "Why me?" "Who am I?" "Is this real?" A change of heart would be needed for such conversion of status in life. In a way it was "from rags to riches" in a period of just a few hours. Saul left home to look for donkeys, he expected to come home as he went, having found them. He left a cowboy and came back king! That takes a change of heart.

About the conversation with Saul's uncle, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "According to ... Samuel 14:50, 51 ...1 Chronicles 8:33, this would be Abner. The conversation probably took place after Saul had returned from the Bamah and gone to his own home, or in so brief a summary much necessarily is omitted. It is curious that the conversation should have taken place with the uncle, and not with the father; but possibly the latter was too well pleased to have his son back again to be very particular in his inquiries. Not so Abner. He was evidently excited by his nephew's visit to the prophet, and struck perhaps by the change in Saul himself, and would gladly have heard more. But Saul does not gratify his curiosity. *Of the matter of the kingdom... he told him not.* It was not merely prudent, but right to keep the matter secret. An able man like Abner would probably have begun to scheme for so great an end. Saul's silence left the fulfillment of the prophet's words entirely to God." Another reason for Saul's silence on the subject may have been the fact that he had not yet been able to completely mentally and emotionally digest the matter.

iii. Saul elected and proclaimed king 10:17-27

17 Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the Lord at Mizpah

18 and said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.'

19 But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and clans."

20 When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.

21 Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found.

22 So they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" And the Lord said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage."

23 They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others.

24 Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

25 Samuel explained to the people the regulations of the kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. Then Samuel dismissed the people, each to his own home.

26 Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.

27 But some troublemakers said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

It is interesting to see how Saul actually became the official candidate for the throne of Israel. Samuel convoked the people at Mizpah for what we could call the equivalent of a general election. The difference here was that the choice was not made by public vote but by the drawing of lots. That was the way elections were conducted in a theocracy.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments here: "A day having been appointed for the election of a king, Samuel summoned a public convention, and, after having charged the people with a rejection of God's institution, and a superseding of it by one of their own, proceeded to the nomination of the new monarch. Since it was of the utmost importance for the preservation of the established theocracy that the appointment should be under the divine direction and control, the determination was made through the miraculous lot, by the people, as represented by their heads or delegates, tribes, families, and individuals, being successively passed, not en masse, but by their representatives, until Saul was found. His concealment of himself must have been the result either of innate modesty or a sudden nervous excitement under the circumstances. When dragged into view, he was seen to possess all those corporeal advantages which a rude people desiderate in their sovereigns, and the exhibition of which gained for the prince the favorable opinion of Samuel also. 'Thus a king was elected by the express declaration of the divine oracle, raised from an obscure family (1 Sam 9:21), in a mode so remarkable that he himself, as well as the entire nation, should know and feel that he derived his authority solely from that appointment' ... In the midst of the national enthusiasm, however, the prophet's deep piety and genuine patriotism took care to explain 'the manner of the kingdom' - i.e., the royal rights and privileges, together with the limitations to which they were to be subjected; and in order that the constitution might be ratified with all due solemnity, the charter of this constitutional monarchy was recorded and laid up 'before the Lord' - i.e., deposited in the custody of the priests, along with the most sacred archives of the nation. The same safeguard against royal usurpation, by the deposit of the charter limiting the royal prerogative, was taken in the case of his successors (cf. 2 Sam 5:3; 1 Kings 12:4; 2 Kings 11:17). It is evident from all this that the Hebrews were only the vicegerents of Yahweh: the executive power only was committed to them, while Yahweh reserved to Himself all legislative authority."

In his introductory remarks Samuel repeats the charge given earlier that Israel's desire to become a kingdom was based upon the wrong motives. They wanted to become like their neighboring nations and erase their distinction as a theocracy. Although, as we saw earlier, the Torah had made provision for this transformation, the wrong part of the people's request was their rejection of God as the Sovereign of the nation. They did not want a king under God, but a king instead of God!

The root of the problem was that the Israelites had forgotten where they came from. They had been a nation of slaves in Egypt and God had delivered them from their slavery and had given them freedom and dignity. People who forget their history have no future. We have to know where we came from to know where we are going. In this also, Jesus sets the example for us. We read that the reason for His washing of the disciples' feet was that [He] knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God."¹

1. John 13:3

Samuel sums up the nation's attitude in the words "you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses." The implication is that from now on you must save yourself from all your calamities and distresses.

No explanation is given as to the way in which Saul was chosen. The text reads that the tribe of Benjamin was "taken," followed by the clan of Matri and finally Saul, probably after the family of Kish had been identified as the final choice. The Hebrew word rendered "taken" is *lakad*, which literally means "to catch." Samuel knew all the time what the outcome of the selection would be, but there is no indication that the people were aware of this.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about this: "The casting of lots was a common practice throughout the ancient world, and provision was made in Israel for the Lord's guidance to be given in this way. The land of Canaan was allocated by lot (Josh. 18:10); lots decided the fate of the two goats on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:8-10); and the culprit responsible for the defeat at Ai was discovered by the same method (Josh. 7:16-18). Decision thus reached were accepted as final (Prov. 18:18), because the Lord was directing the outcome (Prov. 16:33)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the choice of Matri: "Matri is not mentioned anywhere else; and numerous as are the omissions in the genealogies, we can scarcely suppose that the name of the head of one of the main subdivisions of a tribe could be passed over. The conjecture, therefore, is probable that Matri is a corruption of Bikri, *i.e.* a descendant of Becher, for whom see ... 1 Chronicles 7:8."

Once it became known who God's choice of the first king of Israel would be people started looking for him but were unable to find him. Again we do not read how God was consulted, but the answer given is clear enough. Saul was there but he was hiding.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes here: "The fact that Saul is missing puts everyone in a quandary. Has the lot failed to give the right answer? *Is there yet a man to come hither?* (RSV mg., which gives the meaning of the Hebrew, while the text follows the LXX) implies that Samuel may have missed someone in operating the selection process. But the word of the Lord led the leaders to Saul's hiding-place. Why did he hide? He had had time to prepare himself for this moment, but seems not to have been able to see himself in the role of king, though he had now had the assurance of the prophetic anointing confirmed by the lot. Reluctantly he revealed himself to be of outstanding physique, and therefore acceptable to the people as their leader, but he did not want to be king."

There is a great and puzzling problem in Saul's selection as Israel's first king. The process of election, and even more God's previous revelation to Samuel about Saul, make it obvious that this man was God's choice. Saul had obviously not run for office and there are indications that he did not see himself as a likely candidate. His silence toward his uncle about his secret unction probably means that he had told no one about Samuel's revelation to him. The fact that he was hiding after the lot was cast indicates at least his reluctance. Saul may have had a premonition that he was not really God's choice although everything seemed to point in that direction.

He was not, as history would prove, "a man after [God's] own heart,"¹ as was God's testimony about David. There seems to have been a basic lack of the personal relationship with God that characterized David's life from the very beginning. It was not that Saul had no experience of the difference the Holy Spirit could make in one's life. We read earlier that "the Spirit of God came upon him in power,"² but this was evidently not followed by an act of personal surrender. In Saul and his reign God showed the truth of what Jesus said to His disciples: "apart from me you can do nothing."³ In Saul and his reign God demonstrated what happens when people live and work according to their own designs.

1. I Sam. 13:14

2. I Sam. 10:10

3. John 15:5

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the phrase “as he stood among the people”: “This rendering spoils the poetic force of the original, where the rapidity of their action is expressed by three preterits following hard upon one another. The Hebrew is, ‘And they ran, and took him thence, and he stood forth ... among the people, and he was taller,’ etc. And now Samuel presents him to the multitude as ‘the chosen of Jehovah,’ and the people shout their assent by saying, ‘Let the king live.’ For this the A.V. puts our English phrase, but the Hebrew exactly answers to the French *Vive le roi!*”

At this point Samuel abandons the warning mode and gives voice to his personal admiration of Saul, mainly based upon his physical appearance. This is followed by a rendering of a job description of the king, probably taken from the text in Deuteronomy.¹

The Hebrew word rendered “the regulations” is *mishpat*, which literally means “a verdict.” In this context “formal decree,” or “divine law” would be an acceptable translation. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on *mishpat*: “The difficult word already discussed in ... 1 Samuel 2:13; 8:11. Here, however, it is not used for rights so exercised as to become wrongs, but in a good sense, for what we should call a *constitution*. The heathen kings were despots, subject to no higher law, and Samuel, in ... 1 Samuel 8:11-18, speaks with merited abhorrence of their violation of the natural rights of their subjects; but under the theocracy the king’s power was limited by laws which protected, in the enjoyment of their privileges, the people, the priests, and the prophets. The latter class especially, as being the mouthpiece of Jehovah, formed a powerful check upon the development of despotic tendencies. In sketching Saul’s kingly rights Samuel would be guided by ... Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and would give the king his true position as the representative of Jehovah both in all matters of internal administration and of war.”

It seems that initially not much changed in daily life in the rather dramatic transformation of Israel from a theocracy to a monarchy. Saul went home, “accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.” The group who accompanied Saul and who may have become his advisors, life guard or ministers, was people of God’s choice. They probably volunteered for the job and Saul accepted them. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes about them: “Probably these were the men who formed Saul’s cabinet. They went home with Saul to Gibeah, where from his farm he ruled as a gentleman farmer.”

This made Gibeah the center of the land. From that time on the place became known as “Gibeah of Saul.”²

Those who sided with Saul contrast with a group called “troublemakers.” The Hebrew text calls them literally “children of Belial.” Although this was not the original meaning of the word, “Belial” in later times became a designation of Satan. Here they are contrasted with those whose hearts God had touched. The mention that they did not bring Saul any gifts indicates that others did. Although the report that everyone went home, including the king, suggests that not much changed outwardly in the beginning days of the kingdom, the foundational change of government would soon demonstrate itself.

At this point Saul shows another admirable character trait in that he does not react to criticism. We read “Saul kept silent.” Unfortunately, he did not maintain that attitude throughout his life.

iv. Saul confirmed as king 11:1-15

1 Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

2 But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."

3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

1. See Deut. 17:14-20.

2. I Sam. 11:4; 15:34; II Sam. 21:6; Isa. 10:29

4 When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud.

5 Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

6 When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger.

7 He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they turned out as one man.

8 When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

9 They told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be delivered.'" When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated.

10 They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever seems good to you."

11 The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

12 The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death."

13 But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel."

14 Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship."

15 So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the Lord. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, introduces this chapter by stating: "At this point in our Bible, at the break between 1 Samuel 10 and 11, there is a sudden transition from Saul to a new character, Nahash the Ammonite, and to a new location, Jabesh-gilead, away to the east of Jordan. In the Qumran manuscript 4QSam^a, however, an extra paragraph introduces this next incident, and Josephus reveals that it was part of the text he used. It appears to have been omitted from the LXX and MT by accident. It explains that Nahash had been oppressing the tribes of Reuben and Gad, putting out the right eyes of all the men they captured, but that seven thousand had taken refuge in the city of Jabesh-gilead. The last words of 1 Samuel 10:27 (RSV) are transformed by a slight change in the Hebrew to the meaning 'About a month later,' as in the LXX and Josephus, so giving an indication of the passing of time between the two incidents. As translated by McCarter, the addition reads: *Now Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had been oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites grievously, gouging out the right eye of each of them and allowing Israel no deliverer. No men of the Israelites who were across the Jordan remained whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But seven thousand men had escaped from the Ammonites and entered Jabesh-gilead.*"

Baldwin continues: "It may be that this additional material will one day be incorporated into the texts of our Bibles. If so, though it will not add substantially to the meaning of the text ... it will supply a helpful introduction to the Ammonite incident."

The name Nahash means "serpent." There is another Nahash in Scripture, who supposedly was the son of the one mentioned here. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* comments on this: "That father and son bore the same name makes it, likely that Nahash was a common title of the kings of Ammon, the serpent being the emblem of wisdom, the Egyptian Kneph also being the eternal Spirit represented as a serpent."

As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* correctly observes: "The Ammonites, who were related to Israel through Lot (Gen 19:38), lived a Bedouin type life in the territory east of Gilead." There is no record that the descendants of Lot ever left Canaan for Egypt as the rest of Abraham's family did during the famine

in the days of Joseph. They were not among the original inhabitants of Canaan either, since Lot had moved into the land when Abraham did and he lived there in the same manner as an immigrant as his uncle. Nahash's claim on Jabesh-gilead may have had some legal grounds. There was, however, no legality in the requirement of every male subjecting to the proposed eye surgery. The gouging out of a man's right eye makes him virtually useless in times of war. For those wearing a shield their left eye would be covered by the shield, and for shooting arrows, the left eye would be closed and the right would do the focusing. Nahash operation on Israel's men would mean virtual disarmament of the nation.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains: "The Ammonites had long claimed the right of original possession in Gilead. Though repressed by Jephthah (Judg 11:33), they now, after ninety years, renew their pretensions; and it was the report of their threatened invasion that hastened the appointment of a king (1 Sam 12:12)."

The cruel conditions of the pact to be concluded between the citizens of Jabesh-gilead and Nahash do not cause the people to make appeal to Saul or Samuel. It seems unreasonable to suppose that they may not have been aware of the coronation of their new king, although that may have been the case. But why would they not send messengers to Samuel?

Nahash seems to have been confident enough that a one week's truce would not lead to a change of conditions and so he agrees. His show of magnificence became an indication of his absolute power over his victims.

When the envoys of Jabesh-gilead arrive at Gibeah of Saul, they find the king plowing his field. The fact that the messengers do not approach Saul and directly give their message to him indicates that either they did not know or they did not take the kingdom seriously enough to go to the top.

Saul hears the message because he inquires about the cause of the people's weeping. Evidently, no one thought of King Saul in connection with an attack by a foreign nation. Yet those kinds of situations had been the reason for the request of the people to create a monarchy. The request had been: "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."¹

When Saul hears the message and realizes the insult to the nation as a whole if Nahash would be allowed to carry out his cruel design, he explodes in fierce anger. This eruption of emotions is attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit in him. We have seen Saul so far as a rather shy person, probably soft-spoken and mild-mannered. Such people do sometimes have the ability of switching to the other extreme of passion and erupt in uncontrollable anger. In this case, Saul's reaction is the Lord's doing. Saul kills the oxen he had been working with, cuts them in pieces, which he gives to the messengers, probably the messengers from Jabesh-gilead and others newly appointed to the job. It is a call to arms, a draft that cannot be evaded without severe punishment. Those who would try to evade the draft would lose all their cattle.

This brings an army of 330,000 troops to their feet: 30,000 from Judah and 300,000 from the rest of the tribes. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about the numbers: "The number of men who rallied should probably be interpreted as military units rather than 'thousands' (Heb. *'âlâpim*), as in 1 Samuel 10:19)." The plural in v.9 – "They told the messengers who had come..." still does not give the impression that Saul is really in charge of this operation. Ms. Baldwin continues her comment on v.10: "The messengers were thus able to return with positive news of military aid, which enabled the leaders of the besieged Jabesh to inform the Ammonites that *tomorrow* would be the decisive day. *We will give ourselves up to you* is the obvious meaning, but the Hebrew verb *yâ'â'* (lit. 'go or come out') can have military implications (as in 1 Sam. 18:13), 'he went out ... before the people' [as their commander]), so that the message contained a clever ambiguity, while giving the impression that surrender was intended."

Saul did what Gideon had done before, dividing his troops into three parts, which allowed him to attack the Ammonites at three different places, throwing them into a state of confusion.

1. 1 Sam. 8:19,20

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the campaign: “On the morrow ... Saul put the people in three companies - and marched them down the same pass by which Joshua had penetrated into the interior of the country. Crossing the Jordan-probably by the upper ford opposite Wady Yabes, which comes down from the east into the Jordan opposite Beisan (Beth-shan) - in the evening, Saul marched his army all night, according to Josephus ... 30 furlongs, and came by daybreak on the camp of the Ammonites, who were surprised in three different parts, and totally routed. This happened before the seven days’ truce expired. Josephus adds that they made a great slaughter-Nahash, the Ammonite sheikh, being among the number of the slain-and pursued the fugitives in a complete rout across the desert.”

The deliverance of Jabesh-gilead established Saul’s credentials as king over the nation. We do not know how large the opposition group against Saul’s reign was. The fact that the party of royalists asks for their heads probably means that they were a small minority. Yet, as *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Even after this glorious victory the people turn to Samuel, and doubtless his presence and influence had had great weight in gaining obedience to Saul’s command (ver. 7). They now, with the old tumultuous violence, demand that those who had opposed Saul’s election should be put to death. Probably the ringleaders of Saul’s opponents were some of the leaders disappointed at not being chosen themselves ... But Saul displays, first, the kingly virtue of clemency, saying, *There shall not a man be put to death this day* — a decision politic as well as generous, for bloodshed would have led only to future feuds; and, secondly, piety, in so humbly ascribing to Jehovah the salvation that had been wrought in Israel.”

The people of Jabesh remained grateful to Saul throughout his life, showing their gratitude some forty years later by giving him a decent burial after his suicide during a battle with the Philistines.¹

Saul’s victory over the Ammonites at Jabesh firmly established him as the sovereign of the whole nation of Israel. Samuel made sure that all the people accepted Saul as their monarch by making the celebration of this victory into a confirmation of the monarchy. This was done at Gilgal as, in all probability, the tabernacle was there at this time.

v. Samuel hands over to Saul 12:1-25

1 Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you.

2 Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day.

3 Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right."

4 "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand."

5 Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." "He is witness," they said.

6 Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your forefathers up out of Egypt.

7 Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your fathers.

8 "After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your forefathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place.

9 "But they forgot the Lord their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them.

1. See I Sam. 31:8-13.

10 They cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.'

11 Then the Lord sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies on every side, so that you lived securely.

12 "But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'-even though the Lord your God was your king.

13 Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you.

14 If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God — good!

15 But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

16 "Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes!

17 Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the Lord to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king."

18 Then Samuel called upon the Lord, and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.

19 The people all said to Samuel, "Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king."

20 "Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

21 Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless.

22 For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own.

23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.

24 But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

25 Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away."

The chapter can roughly be divided into four parts. In vv.1-5 Samuel asks for an evaluation of his performance in terms of integrity. In vv.6-11 he gives a brief description of God's deliverances during the period of theocracy, ending with the coronation of Saul as king. The third section deals with the facts that led to the present situation with Saul having become king (vv.12-15). In the last verses, 16-25, Samuel gives proof of God's displeasure with the transition from theocracy to monarchy by performing a miracle of a severe un-seasonal thunderstorm.

As has been mentioned earlier, the establishment of Israel's monarchy represents a watershed in the nation's history. Thus far Israel had been unique as the only nation in the world that was directly governed supernaturally. God had ruled the people through judges who mainly provided guidance in times of crisis. The fact that the people never saw themselves as divinely guided in this way is obvious from the repeated theme that runs the latter part of *The Book of Judges*: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."¹

The Hebrew text uses an idiomatic expression for leadership. It reads literally: "And now, behold, the king *walks before you*: and I am old and gray headed; and behold, my sons are with you: I *have walked before you* from my childhood up unto this day." Jesus uses the same idiom, which His listeners would easily have recognized, when He said: "The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and

1. Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he *goes on ahead of them*, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."¹

Samuel's request for evaluation of his administration had the double purpose of clearing his own name, while at the same time setting an example for King Saul to follow. The mention of his sons, who appear to have been present at the time, may be seen as a silent condemnation of their corrupt behavior.

In his initial reaction to the people's request for a king, Samuel had elaborated on the danger of corruption of power, emphasizing what a king could do with the lives and properties of his subjects.²

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on the historical perspective Samuel gives in his speech in vv.6-11, saying: "The events of the exodus, Sinai and the entry into Canaan became a kind of 'creed,' recited and commented upon on formal occasions of national assembly such as this. Many, if not all, of those listening to Samuel would have known the outline of events he recounted, but Samuel is calling each person to identify himself by faith with the past generations who experienced the Lord's deliverance, the saving deeds of the Lord were firstly *for you* and secondly *for your fathers*. Each new generation entered into the covenant commitment, with its obligations and privileges, but every act of obedience, and every act of apostasy, had repercussions that influenced the future. In order to understand their own situation in relation to their covenant God, those of Saul's generation needed to see how they had been brought to their land, and had experienced both defeat and victory, depending on their loyalty to the Lord. Even in the times of apostasy, once they turned to the Lord in repentance, he had sent deliverers.

Samuel sums up the basic sin of Israel in the words, *they forgot the Lord their God*. It is an indictment worth pondering. Having forgotten him they forsook him, and put in his place the seductive local cults connected with the *Baals and the Ashtaroth* ... The sermon is making the important point that, despite the despicable depths to which Israel fell, the Lord did not abandon them. Instead, he put them under pressure from enemies so as to cause them to seek him. Among the deliverers, Samuel names *Jerubbaal* (Judg. 6:32), better known as Gideon, *Barak* (the Hebrew has 'Bedan,' who is not mentioned in Judges; the RSV has followed the LXX), *Jephthah* (Judg. 11 – 12:7), and finally he includes himself, for he was reckoned among the judges (1 Sam. 7:15-16) and brought their era to an end. Thanks to these deliverers, Israel *dwelt in safety*; Samuel had had a crucial role to play, which all his hearers acknowledged. The sermon now touches each one personally."

Although we do not read this in the earlier account of Israel's request for a king, it appears from Samuel's words here that the Ammonite threat had been going on for a while and that this was one of the main reasons for the request. As we saw earlier in Joyce G. Baldwin's observation, the Qumran manuscript 4QSam^a has a paragraph which states that the tribes of Reuben and Gad had been subjected to the treatment that Nahash planned to impose upon the people of Jabesh-gilead. Samuel's words could be interpreted as meaning that the threat had been even more general.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments on v.13 – *Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you*: "They had not only chosen the king with the consent or by the direction of Samuel; they had even demanded a king of their own self-will." The point remains that the people's motive for requesting a king had not been to have a king-under-God, but a king-instead-of-God. Samuel urges the people to return to their Lord and pledge obedience to Him. Even at this point, if both people and king make that pledge the country will be blessed.

Following the miracle of the thunderstorm, the people react with confession and repentance. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments here: "The words of Samuel, reinforced by the storm, brought the assembly to repentance. This enabled the prophet to bring reassurance: *Fear not*. The *you* that follows is emphatic, as is the I in verse 23. Israel had done wrong; Samuel had his part to play, but what mattered most

1. John 10:2-5

2. See Sam. 8:10-18.

was the affirmation that *the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake*. What the Lord has undertaken to do, he will complete, because he is God and will not allow his purposes to be thwarted. This truth stands despite the apparent contradiction of it in verse 25. In the long term the threat was carried out, but as Paul argues, God did not cast off his people (Rom. 9 – 11; cf. esp. Rom.11:1).

Samuel had the ongoing task of intercession, which he had no intention of neglecting, together with that of instruction and counseling. His immediate exhortation to fear and serve the Lord he supported with the practical advice to *consider what great thing he has done for you*. Nothing is likely to prove a more effective incentive to faithful service.

Saul appears to have overcome his reluctance to accept his God-given calling. He was now fully installed as king of the tribes of Israel, who had by implication agreed to give him their allegiance. Any theorizing as to his role had to give way to practical considerations, for enemy incursions continued and required urgent military action. In this sphere, Saul had begun to gain a reputation; would he be able to keep it up? The ominous last words of Samuel's sermon were not encouraging, speaking as they did of the possibility of both the people and their king being swept away.

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

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

2. SAUL: THE FIRST KING (1 SAMUEL 13:1 – 31:13)

a. Key incidents in the reign of Saul (13:1 – 15:35)

i. Jonathan attacks the Philistine garrison (13:1-23)

1 Saul was [thirty] years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel [forty-] two years.

2 Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Micmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.

3 Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, "Let the Hebrews hear!"

4 So all Israel heard the news: "Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become a stench to the Philistines." And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

5 The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Micmash, east of Beth Aven.

6 When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.

7 Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.

8 He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

9 So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

10 Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

11 "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash,

12 I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

13 "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.

14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

15 Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeah in Benjamin, and Saul counted the men who were with him. They numbered about six hundred.

16 Saul and his son Jonathan and the men with them were staying in Gibeah in Benjamin, while the Philistines camped at Micmash.

17 Raiding parties went out from the Philistine camp in three detachments. One turned toward Ophrah in the vicinity of Shual,

18 another toward Beth Horon, and the third toward the borderland overlooking the Valley of Zeboim facing the desert.

19 Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!"

20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened.

21 The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads.

22 So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.

23 Now a detachment of Philistines had gone out to the pass at Micmash.

The Hebrew text of v.1 reads literally: “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel ...” That is the reading given by the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version*. There are some obvious problems in the text as it reads in *The New International Version*. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This verse literally translated is, ‘Saul was one year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel.’ In its form it exactly follows the usual statement prefixed to each king’s reign, of his age at his accession, and the years of his kingdom (... 2 Samuel 2:10; 5:4; ... 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42, etc.). The rendering of the A.V. is too forced and untenable to be worth discussing. As we have seen before, the numerals in the Books of Samuel are not trustworthy; but the difficulty here is an old one. The Vulgate translates the Hebrew literally, as we have given it; the Septuagint omits the verse, and the Syriac paraphrases as boldly as the A.V.: ‘When Saul had reigned one or two years.’ The Chaldee renders, ‘Saul was as innocent as a one-year-old child when he began to reign.’ In the Hexaplar version some anonymous writer has inserted the word thirty, rashly enough; for as Jonathan was old enough to have an important command (ver. 2), and was capable of the acts of a strong man (... 1 Samuel 14:14), his father’s age must have been at least thirty-five, and perhaps was even more. As regards the length of Saul’s reign, St. Paul makes it forty years (... Acts 13:21), exactly the same as that of David (... 1 Kings 2:11) and of Solomon (... 1 Kings 11:42); and Josephus testifies that such was the traditional belief of the Jews ... On the other hand, it is remarkable that the word here for years is that used where the whole number is less than ten. The events, however, recorded in the rest of the book seem to require a longer period than ten years for the duration of Saul’s reign; thirty-two would be a more probable number, and, added to the seven and a half years’ reign of Ishbosheth (see ... 2 Samuel 5:5), they would make up the whole sum of forty years ascribed by St. Paul to Saul’s dynasty. It is quite possible, however, that these forty years may even include the fifteen or sixteen years of Samuel’s judgeship. But the two facts, that all the three sons of Saul mentioned in ... 1 Samuel 14:49 were old enough to go with him to the battle of Mount Gilboa, where they were slain; and that Ishbosheth, his successor, was forty years of age when his father died, effectually dispose of the idea that Saul’s was a very short reign.”

What the text seems to say is that Saul recruited his army in the second year of his reign, which must have been after the incidents described in the previous chapter. We read that in the battle with the Ammonites three hundred thirty thousand troops were engaged, and it is probable that it was from this large army that Saul chose his elite troops of which “two thousand were with him at Micmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin.” A crisis occurred through the attack Jonathan made on a Philistine garrison at Geba, not only in terms of the safety of the nation but even more in the permanence of Saul’s reign.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: “Jonathan precipitated a crisis by defeating the Philistine garrison at Geba. The similarity of the name to Gibeah, where a garrison of Philistines had already been located (1 Sam. 10:5), and where Jonathan and his troops were stationed, has given rise to the suggestion that Gibeah should stand in the text here also. The two towns were only about four miles (6½ km) apart, and Michmash was another two miles (about 3 km) beyond Geba, in a northerly direction; though the rugged terrain involved extra exertion, it also provided excellent conditions for guerrilla warfare. Saul wanted to make the most of Jonathan’s victory by alerting everyone with the trumpet blast: *Let the Hebrews hear*. Or maybe it was the Philistine cry, ‘the Hebrews have rebelled!’ (cf. the NEB’s rendering, based on the LXX).

Who are meant by ‘the Hebrews’ (Heb. *‘ibrîm*) in this context? The term was not normally used by the Israelites of their own people, and a third party is assumed by the words that follow in verse 4, ‘And all Israel heard it said ...’ – which prompts us to ask ‘By whom?’ The fact was the Canaanite inhabitants remained in the land, some of whom occupied strategic cities like Jerusalem, and they as well as the

Israelites were threatened by the Philistine incursions. In addition, there were the un-enslaved fighters of the hills, who were ready to serve as mercenaries. From the Philistine point of view, all these sections of the population were viewed as subordinates who owed allegiance to the Philistine overlords, whose superior organization and technology earned them dominion and influence. All the inhabitants of the hill country of Canaan were potential slaves, producing food and serving as paid laborers of mercenaries. According to [some] this was the meaning of 'Hebrew,' a social group distinguished by sociopolitical rather than by ethnic or economic factors. Others, however, argue that the term has an ethnic connotation; it represents the descendants of Eber (Gen. 11:16), so designating a group wider than the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but nevertheless including them. This makes good sense here, because many of Saul's men had deserted, and now were desperately needed. On hearing the trumpet call, these troops would return to rejoin the battle lines."

The Hebrew text of v.5 reads literally: "And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen and people as the sand which [is] on the seashore in multitude." Bible scholars are rather unanimous in believing the text to be corrupt here, since such a number of chariots would need a larger number of horsemen or the horsemen could only handle one tenth of the number of chariots given. *The New International Version* adapts v.5 to read: "The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore," adding in a footnote: "Some Septuagint manuscripts and Syriac; Hebrew thirty thousand."

But the invading army was large enough to create panic among the Israelites and Saul saw many deserting their posts. There was, evidently, an arrangement between Samuel and Saul that the prophet would come to bring a sacrifice before the Israelite army would engage in a battle with the Philistine. There is no report of this prior arrangement anywhere in the text. But Saul knew that Samuel would come within a certain period of time. Bible scholars have argued about whether the number of seven days here is correct or not.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: "Samuel had at this time promised to come to him within seven days, and he kept his word, for we find him there before the day was ended; but as Saul found he did not come at the beginning of the seventh day, he became impatient, took the whole business into his own hand, and acted the parts of prophet, priest and king; and thus he attempted a most essential change in the Israelite constitution. In it the king, the prophet, and the priest, are in their nature perfectly distinct. What such a rash person might have done, if he had not been deprived of his authority, who can tell? But his conduct on this occasion sufficiently justifies that deprivation. That he was a rash and headstrong man is also proved by his senseless adjuration of the people about food, 1 Sam. 14:24, and his unfeeling resolution to put the brave Jonathan, his own son, to death, because he had unwittingly acted contrary to this adjuration, 1 Sam. 13:44. Saul appears to have been a brave and honest man, but he had few of those qualities which are proper for a king or the governor of a people."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary disagrees with Clarke's analysis of Saul's act of sacrificing: "Saul's sin was not his sacrificing. David and Solomon offered sacrifices without being censured. His sin was disobedience to a particular command of Samuel to wait seven days. It was Saul's impatience that brought censure. One can well understand his human tendency toward fear when, on the one hand, he saw his army fleeing at the least opportunity, and on the other, he saw the Philistines massing their chariotry and manpower. However, man's extremity always has been God's opportunity. Israel won wars not with numerical superiority but with men of dedicated valor. Samuel had believed Saul could provide this type of courage and was discouraged at the king's lack of faith in the hour of crisis. The single failure of a great man brought an end to the hope of a lasting dynasty. Leaders must not fail. Men who fail in the hour of decision prove faithless to the sacred trust and stand condemned before a holy God."

Clarke's observation about Saul's character is basically correct. But the problem was more than mere impatience in regard to Samuel's promise. The way Saul handled the situation indicates that his eye was more on the circumstances than on the Lord. He seems to have considered the bringing of the sacrifice

as nothing more as a ritual of religious requirement than a recognition that Israel's wars were God's responsibility and that the Lord of hosts was the supreme commander of Israel's army. A comparison with David's handling of a similar situation show the fundamental difference of relationship with God in the lives of both men. We read: "Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, 'Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.' So David did as the Lord commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer."¹

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "Saul knows he must soon make a move if the whole army is not to desert, and he is on edge as he impatiently waits for Samuel to offer the sacrifices that preceded battle, and demonstrated Israel's dependence on the Lord. It was a test case. When Samuel did not appear, Saul took matters into his own hand and offered the burnt offering. No sooner had he done so than Samuel arrived, only to be greeted by Saul as if nothing had happened. Either Saul was insensitive on spiritual issues, or he was bold-faced, for, by his disobedience, he was challenging Samuel's spiritual authority and therefore that of the Lord, whose prophet Samuel was." As Ms. Baldwin observes "It was a test case." And Saul failed the test, virtually ending his kingship then and there.

Saul's failure to wait for Samuel was in direct disobedience to the Lord's command, as we read in v.13. This act of disobedience cost him his royal throne, although he kept on reigning as if he was still king over Israel by the grace of God. This made him in fact a usurper. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on Saul's act of disobedience: "Saul had for some time been swerving from his proper and bounden allegiance to Yahweh as king of Israel, by acting as an autocrat in appointing a standing army (1 Sam 13:2) - a great innovation - and now in not patiently waiting the time fixed for celebrating the solemn rites of religion. He seems to have been desirous of exercising independent authority, like the pagan rulers in the neighboring countries, and to have become imperious and self-willed, giving unmistakable indications that, under his government, the divine law, as established by Moses, would soon have been superseded, had not Yahweh, in this first stage of the monarchy, interposed, raising up a new dynasty, and thus vindicated His theocratic supremacy by a precedent set up as a beacon, too much disregarded, for the warning of future kings in Israel."

The incident is a vivid illustration of the relationship between God's decree and man's freedom to act according to his own will. In Saul's case the matter becomes more complicated when we bring into it the feature of God's foreknowledge. The text makes it clear that Saul's dynasty would have continued had he been obedient to God's specific command. In disobeying he virtually lost his status as king over Israel. That fact that he continued to reign, although no longer as God's representative in a theocracy drained his life of whatever value it had ever had. The saddest part of the story is that Saul never seems to have realized the dramatic change in his position. There is no indication that there was ever any repentance. Saul did not ask for forgiveness. He continued his life as if nothing had changed, and maybe basically it never had. Saul never considered himself to be king-under-God.

At this point David it introduced, although his name is not mentioned here. This is the only place in Scripture where God describes him as "a man after his own heart." David became what Saul could have been, an image of Jesus Christ, of whom the Father would testify: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."²

The Pulpit Commentary comments here: "The language of prophecy constantly describes that as already done which is but just determined upon. As David was but twenty-three years of age at Saul's death, he must now have been a mere child, even if he was born, (see ver. 1). But the Divine choice of Saul, which

1. II Sam. 5:22-25

2. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

upon his obedience would that day have been confirmed, was now annulled, and the succession transferred elsewhere. Years might elapse before the first earthly step was taken to appoint his successor (... 1 Samuel 16:13); nay, had Saul repented, we gather from ... 1 Samuel 15:26 that he might have been forgiven: for God's threatenings, like his promises, are conditional. There is no fatalism in the Bible, but a loving discipline for man's recovery. But behind it stands the Divine foreknowledge and omnipotence; and so to the prophetic view Saul's refusal to repent, his repeated disobedience, and the succession of David were all revealed as accomplished facts."

After Samuel leaves, Saul is left with an army of about six hundred, twice as much as the troops that were available to Gideon.¹ But Saul did not have any of Gideon's faith that brought about the victory. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments here: "The whole of the Israelite army at this time, and not one sword or spear among them!" There were only two swords and spears and they belonged to the royal family. But even that armor was not available to Gideon. He defeated the Amalekites with an armory of toys: jars with torches and trumpets.

ii. Jonathan's second initiative 14:1-23

1 One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father.

2 Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men,

3 among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.

4 On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez, and the other Seneh.

5 One cliff stood to the north toward Micmash, the other to the south toward Geba.

6 Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

7 "Do all that you have in mind," his armor-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."

8 Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us.

9 If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them.

10 But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the Lord has given them into our hands."

11 So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. "Look!" said the Philistines. "The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in."

12 The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel."

13 Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him.

14 In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.

15 Then panic struck the whole army — those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties — and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.

16 Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions.

1. Judg. 7:5-8

17 Then Saul said to the men who were with him, "Muster the forces and see who has left us." When they did, it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer who were not there.

18 Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God." (At that time it was with the Israelites.)

19 While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."

20 Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords.

21 Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.

22 When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit.

23 So the Lord rescued Israel that day, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.

In this story Jonathan demonstrates the faith in God's promise that was lacking in his father. It is a beautiful account of what God will do with those who trust Him completely and unconditionally. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "This vivid and attractive account of Jonathan the prince, and his bold sortie against the enemy, provides a detailed picture of the king who would have been Saul's successor, had Saul 'obeyed the commandment of the Lord.' The word of the Lord to Samuel when the identity of Israel's first king was being revealed was, 'He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines' (1 Sam. 9:16), and Jonathan took that word with all seriousness."

Jonathan, we are told, did not tell his father what he planned to do. This may mean that he recognized his father's lack of faith in God. Saul was not an example of a man of faith whose relationship with God was something a son could emulate. The father could have learned something from the son. Had Jonathan confided in Saul, the king would probably have prevented him from carrying out his reckless plan.

Saul is found "under a pomegranate tree in Migron" with all that is left of the Israelite army: six hundred soldiers. Ahijah, the official priest of the nation is with him. *The Pulpit Commentary* states about the latter: "It is interesting to find the house of Eli recovering at last from its disaster, and one of its members duly ministering in his office before the king. It has been debated whether he was the same person as Ahimelech, mentioned in ... 1 Samuel 21:1, etc., the supposition being grounded on the fact that Ahiah is never spoken of again. But he may have died; and with regard to the argument drawn from the similarity of the names, we must notice that names compounded with *Ah* (or *Ach*), brother, were common in Eli's family, while compounds with *Ab*, father, were most in use among Saul's relatives. Ahiah or Ahijah means *Jah is brother*; his father is Ahitub, *the brother is good*; why should he not call another son Ahimelech, *the brother is king? Jehovah's priest in Shiloh*. This refers to Eli, the regular rule in Hebrew being that all such statements belong, not to the son, but to the father."

Vv.4 and 5 give us a rather detailed description of the terrain Jonathan and his helper had to navigate. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, explains: "The ravine which Jonathan and his companion had to negotiate was precipitous and involved skilful rock climbing. So noted were these cliffs that they had names: the south-facing cliff on the north side was *Bozez*, 'shining,' because it was in the full sun; the shadowed north-facing cliff which they had to descend was *Seneh* (meaning 'thorny,' or perhaps 'blackberry-covered'). This was the last route anyone in their right mind would choose to take, hence the surprise Jonathan managed to spring on the enemy."

Jonathan uses the word "uncircumcised" for the Philistines. *Barnes' Notes* comments on this: "It is remarkable that the epithet 'uncircumcised,' used as a term of reproach, is confined almost exclusively to the Philistines. (Compare 1 Sam 17:26,36; Judg 14:3; 15:18, etc.) This is probably an indication of the long oppression of the Israelites by the Philistines and of their frequent wars."

The words "Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf" are no indication of doubt, but rather of the fact that faith in God means taking risks. And "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" distinguishes Jonathan's faith in God from that of his father, who panicked when his troops deserted

him. This prince realized that anyone who sides with the Lord of hosts is a majority. In His life on earth Jesus knew this. Although when He said to His disciples: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”¹ He did not avail Himself of that advantage.

Like Gideon, Jonathan put out a fleece to make sure that he was in the Lord’s will in what he hoped to achieve. It would have been easier to fight Philistines who were coming down, than to climb up and fight those who had the advantage of height. Yet, Jonathan chooses the latter as an indication of God’s approval of his plan. If we keep in mind that the ascent was a feat that could only be achieved by an accomplished rock-climber, the victory of Jonathan and his arm-bearer is even more amazing.

The Philistine ate their words spoken in mockery: “The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.” Actually, it was the last words they ever spoke. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: “When the Philistines saw them, they responded with contempt, calling them *‘ibrīm, Hebrews*, a derogatory term here, almost ‘cavemen.’ By taunting the two men to *Come up* the Philistines imply that the rock face is too steep for anyone to climb. If they do manage it, the Philistines will ‘teach [them] a lesson’.”

The words, “The Lord has given them into the hand of Israel” demonstrates that Jonathan considered himself to be representing the whole nation. This was not merely a personal adventure.

“Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet” suggests that the ascent was made very rapidly, which, considering the terrain, was deemed to be an impossibility by the Philistines, who were completely taken by surprise. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “Septuagint ... and they looked toward the face of Jonathan, and he smote them, and his armour-bearer gave it them (dealt similar blows) behind him. This accords with the statement of Josephus, that Jonathan’s feat was performed very early in the morning, when the Philistine army was mostly asleep, and some newly awake.” Evidently, Jonathan knocked down the men and his armor-bearer killed them as they fell to the ground. The number of Philistines killed is given as “some twenty men,” and the space in which this was done as “an area of about half an acre.” *The New International Version* states in a footnote: “Hebrew half a yoke; a ‘yoke’ was the land plowed by a yoke of oxen in one day.”

Jonathan’s surprise attack would not have sent the whole Philistine army running for its life had God not added by sending an earthquake. The Hebrew text uses the word *charadah*, “quake,” “tremble” three times, referring to the people, and once *ragaz*, “to quiver,” referring to the ground. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that the text may not be stating that there was an actual earthquake. We read: “This may be taken literally, but is more probably a poetical description of the widespread terror and confusion which prevailed far and near.” If there had been an earthquake, Saul and his army at Gibeah would have noticed this and they would have drawn the conclusion that the Philistines were running away from a natural disaster. Saul supposed, however, that some of his men had caused the disturbance and so he ordered a body count. When it was found that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing, Saul decided to consult the Lord.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: “At this crisis Saul refers to his new adviser, Ahijah, who had brought the ark of God into battle (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3, and its disastrous sequel). It seems that Saul was still expecting explicit divine orders to be given, but in the event he did not wait for them, even if they would have been forthcoming, because the escalating noise from the Philistine camp demanded his attention. Saul had been sitting waiting for a lead when he should have been on the attack, and now he was on the attack when he needed to listen to the advice he had presumably requested. There was nothing orderly about the ensuing battle. The *Hebrews* are clearly distinguished from the Israelites here, and the author has in mind uncommitted ‘outlaws,’ who, on assessing that the Israelites have the upper hand, switch their allegiance to them from the Philistines. Similarly, those who had fled to hide in the hills of Ephraim heard rumors of the turn of events and rallied to Saul and Jonathan, so as to share in the victory. For *the Lord*

1. Matt. 26:53

delivered Israel that day; he had done his saving work and the Philistines fled westwards in panic, and so were defeated."

iii. Saul's rash oath 14:24-46

24 Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food.

25 The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground.

26 When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out, yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath.

27 But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened.

28 Then one of the soldiers told him, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be any man who eats food today!' That is why the men are faint."

29 Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey.

30 How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?"

31 That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon, they were exhausted.

32 They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood.

33 Then someone said to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that has blood in it." "You have broken faith," he said. "Roll a large stone over here at once."

34 Then he said, "Go out among the men and tell them, 'Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it.'" So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there.

35 Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first time he had done this.

36 Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive." "Do whatever seems best to you," they replied. But the priest said, "Let us inquire of God here."

37 So Saul asked God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did not answer him that day.

38 Saul therefore said, "Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today.

39 As surely as the Lord who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathan, he must die." But not one of the men said a word.

40 Saul then said to all the Israelites, "You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here." "Do what seems best to you," the men replied.

41 Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, "Give me the right answer." And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared.

42 Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken.

43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." So Jonathan told him, "I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?"

44 Saul said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan."

45 But the men said to Saul, "Should Jonathan die — he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's help." So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

46 Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on Saul's rash oath: "The incident is one of a number of examples in Scripture of rash vows and oaths that are better avoided (cf. Judg. 11:31-40; Eccl. 5:4-5; Matt. 5:33-37). It also illustrates Saul's knack of getting the wrong end of the stick in things spiritual."

We read in v.24 that the people "were in distress." The Hebrew word used is *nagas*, which, used as a noun, means "slave driver."¹ The implication is that Saul's troops may have considered their king to be a tyrant at this point. It seems that Saul was losing the sharp edge of his leadership that he had demonstrated earlier. Jonathan correctly observed: "My father has made trouble for the country." All this can be traced back to the incident reported in the previous chapter, where Saul's disobedience to God's direct command virtually cost him the throne of Israel. As far as God was concerned, Saul was no longer the king.

None of the orders Saul gives in this chapter give indication of his hearing of the voice of God and obeying it. Saul's conduct contrasts sharply with the act of faith demonstrated by Jonathan. Even from a human viewpoint it makes no sense to send an army into battle without providing for the physical needs of the troops. Yet, the way Saul forced the people to take an oath of fasting gives the impression that God was involved in this. After all, swearing an oath means calling upon the Name of the Lord. The same pious attitude is demonstrated in Saul's way of determining whose fault it was that God no longer spoke to him. In all this Saul acted as if his fellowship with God was uninterrupted. Everything he did was for the purpose of maintaining resemblance of divine inspiration. Saul was more interested in what man thought about him than about God's judgment.

The Biblical Illustrator gives a pertinent comment by W. G. Blaikie on Saul's attitude, which reads: "That Saul was now suffering in character under the influence of the high position and great power to which he had been raised, is only too apparent from what is recorded in these verses. No doubt he pays more respect than he has been used to pay to the forms of religion. But how are we to explain his increase of religiousness side by side with the advance of moral obliquity and recklessness? Why should he be more careful in the service of God while he becomes more imperious in temper, more stubborn in will, and more regardless of the obligations alike of king and father? The explanation is not difficult to find. The expostulation of Samuel had given him a fright. The announcement that the kingdom would not be continued in his line, and that God had found a worthier man to set over His people Israel, had moved him to the quick. There could be no doubt that Samuel was speaking the truth. Saul had begun to disregard God's will in his public acts, and was now beginning to reap the penalty. He felt that he must pay more attention to God's will. If he was not to lose everything, he must try to be more religious. There is no sign of his feeling penitent in heart. He is not concerned in spirit for his unworthy behavior toward God. He feels only that his own interests as king are imperiled. It is this selfish motive that makes him determine to be more religious.

Alas, how common has this spirit been in the history of the world! Louis XIV² has led a most wicked and profligate life, and he has ever and anon qualms that threaten him with the wrath of God. To avert that wrath, he must be more attentive to his religious duties. He must show more favor to the Church, exalt her dignitaries to greater honor, endow her orders and foundations with greater wealth. But that is not all. He must use all the arms and resources of his kingdom for ridding the Church of her enemies. For twenty years he must harass the Protestants. What the magnificent monarch did on a large scale, millions of obscurer men have done on a small. It is a sad truth that terror and selfishness have been at the foundation of a great deal of

1. See Ex. 3:7.

2. King of France

that which passes current as religion. But it is all because what he calls religion is no religion; it is the selfish bargain-making spirit, which aims no higher than deliverance from pain; it is not the noble exercise of the soul, prostrated by the sense of guilt, and helpless through consciousness of weakness, lifting up its eyes to the hills whence cometh its help, and rejoicing in the grace that freely pardons all its sin through the blood of Christ, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit that renews and sanctifies the soul. The first thing that Saul does, in the exercise of this selfish spirit, is to impose on the people an obligation to fast until the day be over. Jonathan was a true man of God. He was in far nearer fellowship with God than his father, and yet so far from approving of the religious order to fast which his father had given, he regards it with displeasure and distrust. Godly men will sometimes be found less outwardly religious than some other men, and will greatly shock them by being so. God had given a wonderful deliverance that day through Jonathan. Jonathan was as remarkable for the power of faith as Saul for the want of it. At worst, it was but a ceremonial offence, but to Jonathan it was not even that. But Saul was too obstinate to admit the plea. By a new oath, he devoted his son to death. Nothing could show more clearly the deplorable state of his mind. In the eye of reason and of justice, Jonathan had committed no offence. He had given signal evidence of the possession in a remarkable degree of the favor of God. He had laid the nation under inconceivable obligations. All these pleas were for him; and surely in the king's breast a voice might have been heard pleading, Your son, your firstborn, 'the beginning of your strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power'! Is it possible that this voice was silenced by jealousy, jealousy of his own son, like his after-jealousy of David? What kind of heart could this Saul have had when in such circumstances he could deliberately say, 'God do so, and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan'? But, 'the Divine right of kings to govern wrong' is not altogether without check. A temporary revolution saved Jonathan. It was one good effect of excitement. In calmer circumstances, the people might have been too terrified to interfere. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not. Evidently the military spirit ruled in Saul, but it did not bring peace nor blessing to the kingdom. Once off the right rail, Saul never got on it again; rash and restless, he doubtless involved his people in many a disaster, fulfilling all that Samuel had said about taking from the people, fulfilling but little that the people had hoped concerning deliverance from the hand of the Philistines."

In spite of the poor condition of the Israelite troops, they routed the Philistines and soundly defeated them. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on "from Micmash to Aijalon": "The route was substantially the same as that by which Joshua chased the Canaanites (Josh 10:10). It was a distance of some twenty miles."

Saul's soldiers were so hungry because of their day-long fast that they fell upon the animals the Philistines had left behind and began to devour the meat that was still raw. When this was reported to Saul, he again demonstrated his spirituality in public fashion, quoting Scripture passages that forbid the eating of blood.¹ The same public demonstration of piety in public is demonstrated in Saul's erecting of an altar, probably to bring a thank offering sacrifice. We read: "Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first time he had done this." *The Pulpit Commentary* states about this: "Literally, 'As to it he began to build an altar unto Jehovah.' On these words the question has arisen whether the meaning be that Saul began to build an altar, but with characteristic impetuosity left off before he had completed it; or whether on that occasion he commenced the custom followed by David (... 2 Samuel 24:25) of erecting altars as the patriarchs had done in old time. The latter interpretation is more in accordance with the usage of the Hebrew language, and is approved by the translations of the Septuagint and Vulgate."

The oath Saul had forced the people to swear expired at sundown. So when Saul was about to issue the order to pursue the Philistines during the night, the army had been fed with the spoils of the first campaign. We do not read with whom the conversation about battle strategy in v.36 is carried on, but it probably involved the captains of the various companies of the army. The priest who is present at this war council suggests that God should be consulted. So Saul takes it upon himself to ask the Lord. But God is no longer willing to speak to Saul.

1. Lev. 7:26

The same thing happened in the last days of Saul's life under the same circumstances of a battle with the Philistines. We read: "The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.'"¹ At that time Saul decided that if God did not speak to him, he would turn to Satan. He did not realize that the devil had been his master for most of his life as king.

This time Saul never considered the possibility that God did not speak because of his own disobedience. He places the fault with someone else.

One of the great problems in the description of the following scene is how Saul found out who sinned. If God did no longer speak, why would the drawing of lots (which is probably what happened) reveal God's judgment?

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on the ensuing scene: "So eager was Saul to set himself in the right and gain God's favor that he determined to have even Jonathan put to death. The irony was that without Jonathan's heroic lead there would have been no victory in the first place, and the rank and file, who had by their silence protected Jonathan (v. 39), now took matters into their own hands and saved the life of (Heb. *yipdû*, 'ransomed') the one who had wrought salvation (Heb. *yçsû'd*) that day. *He had wrought with God*, they say, so acknowledging that the whole episode had been a divine rather than a human deliverance. The outcome did nothing to reassure Saul, who was virtually given a vote of 'no confidence'; as for the Philistines, they escaped further pursuit that night. Saul was left in an agony of doubt as to his relationship with the Lord, and therefore his confidence in his ability to rule was further undermined. So far as outward observance of religious ritual was concerned, he had done the right thing, but he had failed to appreciate the crucial importance of submitting his will to that of the Lord God of Israel."

The Pulpit Commentary follows this up with: "With despotic violence, without waiting to learn what the offence was, and judging simply by consequences, because he was delayed in following up the pursuit, he takes a solemn oath that the offending person shall be put to death. Thus twice in the same day he was guilty of the sin of rash swearing. The people condemn him by their silence. They had obeyed him with ready devotion; but now they listen in terror to the rash and violent words which condemn to death the young hero by whom God had that day wrought deliverance for them."

iv. A survey of Saul's reign 14:47-52

47 After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them.

48 He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.

49 Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal.

50 His wife's name was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of Saul's army was Abner son of Ner, and Ner was Saul's uncle.

51 Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.

52 All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.

1. I Sam. 28:4-7

The Hebrew of v.47 reads literally: “So Saul took the kingdom over Israel ...” The Hebrew word used is *lakad*, which sometimes refers to being chosen by lot. The same verb is used in describing the way Saul was identified as God’s choice for the throne. We read: “When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was *chosen*. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri’s clan was *chosen*. Finally Saul son of Kish was *chosen*.”¹

This brief survey of Saul’s reign at this place may seem strange to us. *Barnes’ Notes* observes about this: “There is not the slightest indication from the words whether this ‘taking the kingdom’ occurred soon or really years after Saul’s anointing at Gilgal. Hence, some would place the clause 1 Sam 14:47-52 immediately after 1 Sam 11, or 1 Sam 12, as a summary of Saul’s reign. The details of the reign, namely, of the Philistine war in 1 Sam 13; 14, of the Amalekite war in 1 Sam 15, and the other events down to the end of 1 Samuel, preceded by the formulary, 1 Sam 13:1, would then follow according to the common method of Hebrew historical narrative.”

The Pulpit Commentary writes about these verses: “Instead of *so* the Hebrew has *and*, rightly; for this is no result or consequence of Saul’s victory over the Philistines, but a mere historical introduction to the summary of his wars. The more correct translation would be, ‘When Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought,’ etc. Saul’s reign was valiant and full of military glory. He was, in fact, in war all that the people had longed for, and not only did he gain independence for Israel but laid the foundation of the vast empire of David and Solomon. But it is not the purpose of Holy Scripture to give us the history of all Saul’s valiant exploits, but only of his moral probation and failure. Of wars we read more than enough in profane history; here we read of the formation of character, and how a hero in the midst of noble and worthy feats of arms may yet lose something nobler and worthier — the favor of God.”

In the mention of Saul’s sons Ishbosheth is missing. Some commentators believe the reason to be that Ishbosheth was too young to go to war. But, as *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* keenly observes, “Why then mention his daughters and his wife? Did they go with him to the war?” Some Bible scholars take *Ishvi* to be another name for Ishbosheth. The mention of his wife’s name suggests that Saul may have been the only monogamous king in Israel. There is, however, mention of other sons of Saul born to him by Rizpah, who David handed over to the Gibeonites in order to appease them.² But it is not clear whether Rizpah was actually Saul’s second wife or not.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the conclusion of this section: “The summary ends with two important particulars respecting Saul’s kingdom — the first, that the Philistines were powerful and dangerous enemies to Israel all his days; the second, that in order to carry on the war with them he ever kept around him the nucleus of a standing army. In thus forming a ‘school of heroes’ he raised the whole spirit of the people, and took an essential and necessary step for maintaining Israel’s freedom. With much of the despot in him, Saul had grand qualities as a soldier, and for many years admirably fulfilled the primary object for which he was chosen. And while he was thus giving the nation internal security, Samuel was teaching it how to use its growing prosperity, and was raising it in the scale of intellectual worth. If in the time of the judges we have Israel in its boyhood, as in the Sinaitic desert we have it in its infancy, under Saul and Samuel it reached its manhood, and became a powerful, vigorous, and well ordered community, able to maintain its freedom, and with means for its internal development in the schools of the prophets, which ended in making it not merely enlightened itself, but the giver of light to the rest of mankind.”

v. Samuel’s final confrontation with Saul 15:1-35

1 Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord.

1. I Sam. 10:20,21

2. II Sam. 21:8,9

2 *This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt.'*

3 *Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'*

4 *So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim — two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah.*

5 *Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine.*

6 *Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.*

7 *Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt.*

8 *He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword.*

9 *But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs — everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.*

10 *Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel:*

11 *"I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.*

12 *Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."*

13 *When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."*

14 *But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"*

15 *Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."*

16 *"Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.*

17 *Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel.*

18 *And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.'*

19 *Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?"*

20 *"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king.*

21 *The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal."*

22 *But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

23 *For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."*

24 *Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.*

25 *Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord."*

26 *But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!"*

27 *As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore.*

28 Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors — to one better than you.

29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

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

31 So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

32 Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him confidently, thinking, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."

33 But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal.

34 Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul.

35 Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.

There was a certain Amalek, who was the grandson of Esau, but *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about the Amalekites: "They are not to be identified with the descendants of Esau (Gen 36:12,16) because they are mentioned earlier, in the account of the invasion of Chedorlaomer (Gen 14:7) and in Balaam's prophecy (Num 24:20) Amalek is called 'the first of the nations,' which seems to refer to an early existence. We are uncertain of their origin, for they do not appear in the list of nations found in Gen 10. They do not seem to have had any relationship with the tribes of Israel, save as, we may surmise, some of the descendants of Esau were incorporated into the tribe. It is probable that they were of Semitic stock though we have no proof of it."

The confrontation between Israel and Amalek goes back to ancient times when the Israelites had just crossed the Red Sea and began their journey through the desert of Sinai to Canaan. Amalek had attacked Israel in the back, and while Moses prayed on top of a hill with his hands lifted to heaven, Joshua defeated the Amalekites.¹ At that point God had said to Moses: "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Since the Amalekites were not among the inhabitants of Canaan, no campaign against them was carried out in the conquest of the promised land. Moses had challenged the next generation of Israelites, who were too young, or yet unborn at the time of Amalek's attack, to keep the memory alive: "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!"²

Saul was now given the divine command to carry out the historic warning God had issued several centuries earlier. About four or five centuries separated Saul from Moses. That means that God's confrontation with Amalek had been dormant for about four or five hundred years. At this time the memory may have been virtually blotted out from Israel's memory. In modern history to wage a present-day campaign against an ancient enemy would be considered ridiculous, except, perhaps in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The only way God's command to Saul can be justified is when we see it in the light of God's confrontation with His archenemy, Satan. Amalek's attack of Israel in the desert had been a satanic effort to prevent Israel from reaching Canaan, thus hindering God's plan of salvation for the world through His chosen people.

1. See Ex. 17:8-16.

2. Deut. 25:17-19

Saul had no idea how important the role was that God had given him to play in this “holy war.” That which Moses began by lifting his hand to the throne of the Lord, would be completed by Saul. Moses had said: “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord. The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”¹ There is a sense in which God’s war with “Amalek” is still being fought in our generation and we are called upon to lift up our hands to the throne of God.

The Pulpit Commentary makes this observation about the test given to Saul in this command to wipe out the memory of Amalek: “Alike promises and threatenings, blessings and punishments are conditional; for there is no heathen fatalism in Holy Scripture, but mercy waiting to triumph over justice. God, then, was not willing lightly to cast away so noble an instrument as Saul. His first sin too had been committed when he was new in the kingdom, and in a position of danger and difficulty. He waits, therefore, till Saul has had some years of success and power, and his character has developed itself, and is taking its permanent form; and then again gives him a trial in order to test his fitness to be a theocratic king. The interest, then, of this chapter lies in the unfolding of Saul’s character, and so it follows immediately upon ch. 14., which was occupied with the same subject, without any note of chronology, because the historical narrative is subservient to the personal. Hence, too, Samuel’s solemn address, reminding Saul that he was Jehovah’s anointed one, and therefore had special duties towards him; that he had also been anointed by Samuel’s instrumentality, and after earnest instruction as to his duties; and, finally, that Israel was Jehovah’s people, and their king, therefore, bound to obey Jehovah’s commands.”

The way Samuel introduces the divine message to Saul, saying: “I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel,” suggests that the fighting of the war with Amalek, resulting in its total annihilation, was the actual reason for which God had chosen Saul to be king. This would be the most important thing he would ever do as king of Israel. This was the feat upon which history would judge his achievements as king.

The command clearly states that Saul must “totally destroy” Amalek. The Hebrew verb used is *charam*, which means “to strike by a ban,” or “to make accursed.” The verb is used seven times in this section, leaving no doubt as to what is meant.

Saul knew enough of his nation’s history to realize that the Kenites had not been involved in Amalek’s historic attack when Israel traversed the desert. So he sent the tribe, that had intermingled with Amalek a warning to save themselves before the attack upon Amalek would be launched. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: “The services of Jethro the Kenite to the Israelites in the period of wanderings led to a firm alliance between Israel and the Kenites. These people had accompanied Israel to Jericho, and then gone to dwell with the Amalekites in the desert south of Judah. Famous among the Kenites was Jael, whose husband, Heber, had migrated to north Palestine (Judg 4:11; 5:24). And the Rechabites, who belonged to this tribe (1 Chron 2:55), long preserved the nomadic habits of their ancestors (Jer 35:7-10).”

The warning to the Kenites made a surprise attack upon Amalek impossible, but that does not seem to have been a problem for Saul’s sweep through the whole area “from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt” covers the whole of the nomadic tribe. But from that point on, Saul and his army became selective in what part of the divine order that they would obey and what they would ignore.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on Saul’s behavior: “In the aftermath of the battle, Saul interpreted in his own way the instruction of Samuel. Though the population as a whole was destroyed in accordance with the decree to devote them to the Lord, *Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep*; there is a clear hint that Saul wanted to keep on the right side of popular opinion. The Amalekite people were dispensable, but it was a pity to destroy excellent stock!” Achan’s sin at Ai ought to have been a warning for Saul and his men. But the sight of herds of choice animals was too much for them to resist. The pious excuse that some could be used as sacrifices to the Lord seemed enough of an excuse to cover up their iniquity.

1. Ex. 17:16

Vv.10 and 11 express God's and Samuel's deep emotions about Saul's disobedience. God says to Samuel: "I am grieved that I have made Saul king." The Hebrew word used is *nacham*, which literally means: "to sigh." It has, however, a larger application, according to the context in which it is used. For instance, we read: "When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, 'He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.'"¹ But the same word also occurs in: "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."²

The thought seems to us to clash with the divine attributes of foreknowledge and immutability. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "In the language of the OT, God is said to 'repent' when a change in the character and conduct of those with whom he is dealing leads to a corresponding change in his plans and purposes toward them. His repentance is not to be understood as his regretting his action, nor is it a sign of changeableness. His promises and threats are often conditional (Jer 18:8-10)." The text in Jeremiah reads: "and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."

What makes it difficult for us to understand is that we use the word "repent" only in the context of sinful behavior, which of course is not the framework in which it can be seen in connection with God. Even if we allow "repent" to mean merely a change of mind, it does not seem appropriate to apply it to God, whose foreknowledge is perfect and eternal. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about this: "The Lord's word, *I repent that I have made Saul king*, seems to be contradicted later by Samuel (v.29). The Lord does not change his mind in the sense that his purposes change, but he could no longer use Saul. Saul himself was fully responsible for his attitudes and action. The sovereign God is so fully in control that he takes in his stride the actions of human beings and adjusts his plans when necessary, but achieves his ultimate aims."

Actually, the whole idea to allow Israel to choose Saul as king had never been God's perfect plan for His people. Saul was not the man "after God's own heart." But Saul was given the possibility of being an image of the King of kings in his surrender to the will of God and in absolute obedience. That role he forfeited. We will never be able to fully grasp the balance and relationship between God's foreknowledge and election and man's free will. What we gather from God's "repentance" is that God reacts emotionally to our lack of loving obedience, more or less as human beings do who are created in His image. That seems to be the main idea in regard to Saul's disobedience.

Samuel shared in God's grief on a human level. When God's revelation came to him he spent the night in tearful prayer of intercession. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "It is remarkable how often Samuel is represented as 'crying' unto God (see ... 1 Samuel 7:8, 9; 12:18)."

Commenting on vv.12-16, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "Expecting that Saul would still be in the Negeb, Samuel set off southwards, only to find that he had gone in the wrong direction. Saul had already returned from fighting the Amalekites, and had celebrated his victory by setting up a commemorative monument in Carmel (cf. 1 Sam. 25:2), a place about ten miles south of Hebron and not to be confused with Mount Carmel. Thanks to Israel's 'bush telegraph,' Samuel was saved a long fruitless journey, and found Saul comparatively close at hand in Gilgal, where Saul's kingship had been confirmed (1 Sam. 11:14-15). This was to be the final confrontation between Samuel and Saul, but Saul, in the full flush of his victory, greeted Samuel with enthusiasm, in the misplaced confidence that he had done what had been asked of him. In answer to Samuel's enquiry about the noise of penned-up animals, Saul was still unconcerned. *They ... the people* had spared the best animals for *sacrifice to the Lord your God*. The little word 'your' speaks volumes about Saul, who does not speak of 'our God.' One suspects that there were

1. Gen. 5:28,29

2. Gen. 6:6

more selfish motives at work than the desire to sacrifice when the decision was made not to kill the best of the stock, but Saul knows how to put the case to best advantage. *The rest we have utterly destroyed* betrays a totally inadequate appreciation of all that was meant by *hçrem*, with its dedication of everything to the Lord, including the ‘perks’ from the battle and the enemy king.”

The Hebrew text of v.12 reads literally: “he set him up a place.” The Hebrew word used is *yad*, which means “hand,” usually an open hand. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states about the monument Saul had erected: “It is more than probable that, as the Hebrew text plainly states, the memorial of the victory was in the form of a colossal hand of stone, wood, or other durable material. Many such forms of the human hand exist among the monuments of ancient Egypt ... The erection of this vain-glorious trophy was an additional act of disobedience. His pride had over-borne his sense of duty, in first raising this monument to his own honor, and then going to Gilgal to offer sacrifice to God.”

From Saul’s efforts of self-glorification we deduct that he completely failed to understand the spiritual implications of the historic enmity between Amalek and Israel. Amalek had been the instrument in Satan’s hand to harass Israel on her way to Canaan, attacking her in the back.¹ Had Saul known intimacy in fellowship with God, he would have recognized who the enemy was. To save the king of Amalek would give the real enemy a foothold among the people of God.

Being completely oblivious to the seriousness of his disobedience, Saul greeted Samuel exuberantly. He thought that Samuel (and God) would be just as proud of him as he was himself! There had never been any unconditional surrender to God in Saul’s life. Jesus’ words in *The Sermon on the Mount* apply to Saul as well: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”²

Whether Saul really thought that he had been totally obedient or not is a matter of doubt. The erection of a monument in his honor could point in the opposite direction. Sometimes monuments are used to cover up, more than to reveal.

What is obvious from the dialogue between Samuel and Saul is who the one is who has real authority in Israel. It ought to have been King Saul, who was God’s anointed; it turns out to be Samuel who did the anointing. Samuel not only interrupts the king, he tells him to keep quiet. It does not seem that Samuel repeated word-for-word what God had told him the night before. Actually, we do not read what the exact words were. In vv.17-19 Samuel pleads compassionately with Saul to remember where he came from and what his attitude about kingship had been in the past. The humility Saul had initially demonstrated in the early days had completely evaporated. The power given to him had corrupted him to the point where he thought he was in complete charge without any responsibility of having to account for his actions. Saul had forgotten that God had made him what he was: “the head of the tribes of Israel.” Saul had come to the place where he thought he had worked himself up in the world in his own power. As it turns out Saul’s actions were dominated by fear of the people. V.15 – “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites ...” V.21 – “the soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder ...” This raises the question as to who was in charge. An army general who obeys the commands of his troops is not a supreme commander. In earlier campaigns Saul had demonstrated a power to command that bordered on tyranny. Saul’s power had not changed; he only passed on the blame.

The excuse for his disobedience is the pious pretext of giving sacrifices to the Lord. The ban would have taken care of that. Moses had given clear instructions regarding the carrying out of a ban over a people that had given up on God, which would apply to the Amalekites also: “If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the

1. Ex. 17:8-16

2. Matt. 7:21-23

people of their town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt. None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the Lord will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, because you obey the Lord your God, keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes."¹ Had Saul done his homework, he would not have incurred the fierce anger of the Lord.

The Hebrew text reads for "that was devoted to God," "the things which should have been utterly destroyed." In Hebrew this is represented by the single word *cherem*. Saul condemned himself in his choice of words.

Samuel's reply has become a classic text for defining obedience to God. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states about this: "In a memorable prophetic utterance, Samuel pronounces for all time the futility of attempting to rely on ritual sacrifice when what is required is obedience. No ceremonial can make up for a rebellious attitude to God and his commandments, because obstinate resistance to God exalts self-will to the place of authority, which belongs only to God. That is why it is as bad as *divination* (by evil spirits), and tantamount to *idolatry*, for another god, self, has usurped his place. The parallel statements of the last two lines (five words altogether in the Hebrew) bring out the justice of the condemnation. Saul has disqualified himself for kingship in Israel. He has refused to defer to the divine king."

The Apostle Paul states clearly what the value is of observance of ceremonial rituals in man's relationship with God. He uses circumcision as an example, but what he says applies to the whole matter of obedience. We read: "Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."²

Jeremiah expresses this more powerfully and poetically in his condemnation of the people of Jerusalem: "This is what the Lord says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: 'Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.'" Without wholehearted obedience no ritual has value before God. Rituals that are not couched in obedience are performed for the benefit of man, not for the glory of God. Jesus poured out the full measure of His loathing upon people who used ceremonial rituals to cover up the sin in their life. We read: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."³ And: "They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."⁴ Such is the trap for people who seek respectability. How serious the matter of respectability can be is clear from Jesus' warning:

1. Deut. 13:12-18

2. Rom. 2:25-29

3. Matt. 23:25,26

4. Mark 12:40

“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”¹

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes about Samuel’s words: “Samuel must not be regarded as in any way disparaging the ordinances of the Mosaic law. The sacrifices had been appointed by divine authority, and therefore were to be duly performed. But they were merely expressive of the faith and piety cherished by the worshippers; and whenever the outward observance was considered of greater importance than the inward sentiment or the spiritual feeling, there was a perversion of religion which was displeasing to God. Obedience is the true test of a religious profession.”

One of the problems in bringing animal sacrifices in the Old Testament worship setting was that a person had to identify himself with the animal, confessing that what happened to the animal ought to happen to him. He ought to have died for his sins and been burned. The fact that another living being took his place allowed him to continue to live. The ritual could easily be carried out without an inner realization of identification. The laying of one’s hand on the animal’s head was not always backed up by a surrender of the will. The hand is not always an instrument of the heart. In that case the sacrifice was no real sacrifice, because it was not backed up by obedience.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on this: “A careful conformity to moral precepts recommends us to God more than all ceremonial observances, Mic 6:6-8; Hos 6:6. Obedience is enjoyed by the eternal law of nature, but sacrifice only by a positive law. Obedience was the law of innocence, but sacrifice supposes sin come into the world, and is but a feeble attempt to take that away which obedience would have prevented. God is more glorified and self more denied by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burnt upon the altar than to bring every high thought into obedience to God and the will subject to his will. Obedience is the glory of angels (Ps 103:20), and it will be ours ... Nothing is so provoking to God as disobedience, setting up our wills in competition with his. This is here called rebellion and stubbornness, and is said to be as bad as witchcraft and idolatry, v. 23. It is as bad to set up other gods as to live in disobedience to the true God. Those that are governed by their own corrupt inclinations, in opposition to the command of God, do, in effect, consult the teraphim (as the word here is for idolatry) or the diviners. It was disobedience that made us all sinners (Rom 5:19), and this is the malignity of sin, that it is the transgression of the law, and consequently it is enmity to God, Rom 8:7. Saul was a king, but if he disobey the command of God, his royal dignity and power will not excuse him from the guilt of rebellion and stubbornness. It is not the rebellion of the people against their prince, but of a prince against God, that this text speaks of.”

David would later answer Samuel’s question to Saul in one of his psalms: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?”: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’”² The author of Hebrews quotes David, applying his words to our Lord Jesus Christ, with a slight change that makes it refer to the incarnation: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.”³ Christ’s ultimate sacrifice makes it possible for us to identify with His obedience and incline our hearts to submission.

Saul’s reaction to Samuel’s indictment seems to be a confession of sin, but it is not the kind of confession that brings about forgiveness. From what follows it becomes clear that the important thing for Saul was popularity, not acceptance by God. He asked for Samuel’s forgiveness, not for God’s. Saul lacked the conviction of the Holy Spirit that made David cry out to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”⁴

1. John 5:44

2. Ps. 40:6-8

3. Heb. 10:5

Mark the difference between David's confession and Saul's. "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.'"¹ Saul answered Samuel: "I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them," virtually blaming his troops for his own disobedience.

The Pulpit Commentary, after having pointed out that Saul, as king, could have used his authority to command his troops to obey, which he failed to do, states: "Nor can we suppose that his confession of sin arose from penitence. It was the result simply of vexation at having his victory crossed by reproaches and disapproval from the only power capable of holding him in check. It seems, too, as if it were Samuel whom he feared more than Jehovah; for he speaks of *thy words*, and asks Samuel to pardon his sin, and to grant him the favor of his public presence with him at the sacrifice which was about to be celebrated in honor of their triumph." And *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes about *I have sinned*: Saul's penitence was not genuine. He still attempted to shift the blame to the people. His main concern was his fear that the breach between Samuel and himself might become a public scandal and weaken his authority. Notice that Saul feared the people instead of fearing Jehovah, and obeyed their voice instead of obeying the voice of Jehovah."

The main thing of importance to Saul at this moment was the way the matter would look in public. If Samuel agreed to accompany him in the bringing of a sacrifice, it would look as if everything was all right. This Samuel refuses to do. As far as he was concerned Saul was no longer the king of Israel from that moment on. That meant that Samuel was no longer his subject and he owed him no civil obedience.

The following incident provided Samuel with an object lesson. As the old prophet turned to walk away, Saul grabbed his robe. Evidently Samuel kept on walking and the robe tore, leaving Saul with a piece of cloth in his hands. There must have been some violence involved in this.

The Pulpit Commentary has an interesting comment on Saul's tearing of Samuel's cloak. We read: "Saul in his eagerness seizes hold of Samuel's *mantle*. The A.V. is very careless about the exact rendering of words of this description, and seems guided in its choice of terms simply by the tear. Now the mantle, *addereth*, though used of the Shinar shawl stolen by Achan (... Joshua 7:21, 24), was the distinctive dress of the prophets, but naturally was never worn by Samuel himself. Special dresses came into use only gradually, and Elijah is the first person described as being thus clad. Long before his time the schools of the prophets had grown into a national institution, and a loose wrapper of coarse cloth made of camel's hair, fastened round the body at the waist by a leathern girdle, had become the usual prophetic dress, and continued so to be until the arrival of Israel's last prophet, John the Baptist (... Matthew 3:4). The garment here spoken of is the *meil*, on which see ... 1 Samuel 2:19, where it was shown to be the ordinary dress of people of various classes in easy circumstances. Now the *meil* was not a loosely flowing garment, but fitted rather closely to the body, and, therefore, the tearing of it implies a considerable amount of violence on Saul's part. *Skirt*, moreover, gives a wrong idea. What Saul took hold of was the *hem*, the outer border of the garment, probably at Samuel's neck or shoulder, as he turned to go away. He seized him, as we should say, by the collar, and endeavored by main force to retain him, and in the struggle the hem rent. And Samuel, using it as an omen, said, *Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. Neighbour* is used in Hebrew in a very indefinite manner, and here means generally 'some one, whoever it may be,' but one who will discharge the duties of thy office better than thou hast done."

The New International Version renders v.29 – "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind." The Hebrew word for "glory" used here is *netsach*, which literally means "a goal," or "a bright object at a distance towards one travels." Sometimes it is translated "strength," or "victory." The phrase is rather unique in Scripture. As *Barnes' Notes* observes, it is "A phrase which occurs only here. The word means, perpetuity, truth, glory, victory, and trust, or confidence."

4. Ps. 51:4

1. II Sam. 12:13

The Bible seems to contradict elsewhere Samuel's statement that God does not change His mind. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "He who is Israel's Victory, or He in whom Israel has victory, will not repent. In ver. 11 God was said to repent, because there was what appeared to be a change in the Divine counsels. 'God gave Israel a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath' (... Hosea 13:11). But such modes of speaking are in condescension to human weakness. Absolutely with God there is no change. He is the Eternal Present, with whom all things that were, and are, and shall be are one. But even looked at from below, as this finite creature man looks at his Maker's acts, there is no change in the Divine counsels, because, amidst all the vicissitudes of human events, God's will moves calmly forward without let or hindrance. No lower or secondary motives influence him, no rival power thwarts him. One instrument may be laid aside, and another chosen, because God ordains that the instruments by which he works shall be beings endowed with free will. Saul was the very counterpart of the Jewish people — highly endowed with noble qualities, but headstrong, self-willed, disobedient. Nevertheless, he laid the foundation for the throne of David, who in so many points was the ideal of the theocratic king; and Israel in like manner prepared the way for the coming of the true Messianic King, and gave mankind the one Catholic, *i.e.* universal, religion. 'He who is Israel's Victory does not repent.'"

No real reason is given as to why Samuel changed his mind and accompanied Saul at the bringing of the sacrifice. It cannot have been Saul's second confession of sin, the effect of which was offset by his desire to appear in public as if nothing had changed. Samuel may simply have felt pity for this man whom he had admired and for whom he would continue to mourn the rest of his life.

Referring to Saul's confession and Samuel's reaction to it, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Here Saul's meaning seems to be, Well, granting that I have sinned, and that this sentence of exclusion from the kingdom is passed upon me, yet at least pay me the honor due to the rank which I still continue to hold. And to this request Samuel accedes. Saul was *de facto* king, and would continue to be so during his lifetime. The anointing, once bestowed, was a consecration for life, and so generally it was in the days of the son that the consequences of the father's sin came fully to pass (... 1 Kings 11:84, 35; 14:13, etc.). Had Samuel refused the public honor due to Saul's rank, it would have given an occasion for intrigue and resistance to all who were disaffected with Saul's government, and been a step towards bringing back the old anarchy."

Vv.32 and 33 describe the execution of King Agag, the king of Amalekites. There is confusion among Bible scholars about the meaning of some of the Hebrew words in these verses. The Hebrew text reads literally: "And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said surely bitterness of death is past." The Hebrew word rendered "delicately" is *ma`adan*, which is derived from a word meaning "a delicacy," or "pleasure." We find it in the verse: "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring *delight* to your soul."¹ The idea seems to be that Agag was in good spirits, thinking his life would be spared. Whether this had been Saul's intent or not, we do not know. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "By a slight emendation some read, came in fetters. Others, by a clever emendation, read, came in backwards. Some think he was doing the dance of death. The Hebrew word is quite uncertain of meaning." *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The Septuagint and Vulgate translate this word *trembling*, and the Syriac omits, probably from inability to give its meaning. Most commentators render *cheerfully*, *joyfully*, forming it from the same root as Eden, the garden of joy (comp. ... Psalm 36:8, where Eden is translated *pleasure*). The very word, however, occurs in ... Job 38:31, where the A.V. renders it *bands*, and this seems the right sense: 'Agag came unto him in fetters.' The idea that Agag came cheerfully is contradicted by the next clause — *Surely the bitterness of death is passed*. Though put affirmatively, there is underlying doubt. It is no expression of heroic contempt for death, nor of real confidence that, as Saul had spared him hitherto, his life was in no danger. He had been brought to the national sanctuary, and a great festival in honor of the success of the army was to be held. It was entirely in accordance with the customs of ancient times that his execution should be the central feature of the spectacle. Agag's words show that this fear was present in his mind, though they are put in such a form as to be a protest against his life being taken after so long delay. Samuel's

1. Prov. 29:17

reply treats Agag's assertion as being thus at once a question and a protest. The bitterness of death has still to be borne, and the cruelty of Agag's past life makes the shedding of his own blood just. The Syriac translates, 'Surely death is bitter;' the Septuagint, 'If death be so bitter,' with which the Vulgate agrees. Thus they all understood that Agag came trembling for his life."

Another word of interest is in v.33 where *The New International Version* reads: "And Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal." The Hebrew text reads literally: "And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces." The Hebrew verb used here is *shacaph*. Since this is the only place in Scripture where this word occurs, its meaning remains obscure. Some commentators believe that Samuel did not perform the execution himself, but ordered Agag to be put to death. The conjugation of the verb would allow for this interpretation.

This was the last encounter between Saul and Samuel. We do read that Saul was in Samuel's presence at a later time, when he had heard that David was hiding in Ramah, but that can hardly be seen as a real meeting. We read: "So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'"¹

Samuel's grief over Saul's failure to be the man of God equaled God's grief over him.

b. David comes into prominence 16:1 – 19:17

i. David's secret anointing 16:1-13

1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me." The Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'

3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate."

4 Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

5 Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord."

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either."

9 Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the Lord chosen this one."

10 Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these."

11 So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

12 So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

1. I Sam. 19:23,24

13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The grief of Samuel was prolonged almost to a sinful extent, nor can we wonder at it. We who see Saul’s whole career, and know how deeply he fell, are in danger of discrediting his high qualities; but those who were witnesses of his military skill and prowess, and saw him and his heroic son raising the nation from its feebleness and thralldom to might and empire, must have given him an ungrudging admiration. Both David’s dirge (... 2 Samuel 1:19-27) and Samuel’s long mourning, and the unqualified obedience which he was able so quickly to extort from a high-spirited people unused to being governed, bear decisive testimony to his powers as a ruler and commander in war. But God now warns Samuel to mourn no longer. Saul’s rejection has become final, and God’s prophet must sacrifice his personal feelings, and prepare to carry out the purpose indicated in ... 1 Samuel 13:14; 15:28. We must not, however, conclude that Samuel’s sorrow had only been for Saul personally; there was danger for the whole nation in his conduct. If willfulness and passion gained in him the upper hand, the band of authority would be loosed, and the old feebleness and anarchy would return, and Israel become even more hopelessly a prey to its former troubles.”

Samuel’s experience in the rejection of Saul was like a death in the family. The Hebrew word *‘abal* literally means “to bewail.” The common use in Scripture is in connection with death, as in Jacob’s reaction to the word that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. “Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and *mourned* for his son many days.”¹

Although God’s admonition to Samuel sounds like a condemnation, it can also be seen as a recipe for healing. It is as if God tells Samuel that the death of one king will be compensated for by the birth of another.

How tyrannical Saul’s reign had become is obvious from Samuel’s fear for his life if he would anoint someone to take the king’s place. At this point Samuel is not ready to obey the Lord unto death. It would be inappropriate to comment on this. Only those who have demonstrated that kind of obedience would have a right to speak. What Samuel’s reluctance proves, however, is that his mourning over Saul had strained his intimacy with God. And that needed to be healed. As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “This is another instance of human infirmity in Samuel. Since God had sent him on this mission, He would protect him in the execution.”

“Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord’” sounds like a devious way to carry out God’s command without endangering his own life. The ceremony in which a sacrifice to the LORD would be brought would serve as a cover-up to the real intent of his visit. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “This was strictly true; Samuel did offer a sacrifice; and it does not appear that he could have done the work which God designed, unless he had offered this sacrifice, and called the elders of the people together, and thus collected Jesse’s sons. But he did not tell the principal design of his coming; had he done so, it would have produced harm and no good: and though no man, in any circumstances, should ever tell a lie, yet in all circumstances he is not obliged to tell the whole truth, though in every circumstance he must tell nothing but the truth, and in every case so tell the truth that the hearer shall not believe a lie by it.” *The Pulpit Commentary* agrees with Clarke, stating: “The question has been asked, Was there in this any duplicity? In answer we may ask another question: Is it always necessary, or even right, to tell in all cases the whole truth? If so, quarrels and ill-feeling would be multiplied to such an extent that social life would be unendurable. All charitable, well disposed persons suppress much, and keep a guard over their lips, lest they should stir up strife and hatred. Now here there was to be no treason, no inciting to civil war. David, still a child, was to be set apart for a high destiny, possibly without at the time fully knowing what the anointing meant, and certainly with the obligation to take no step whatsoever towards winning the crown that was to descend upon his head. This was his probation, and he bore the trial nobly. And what right would Samuel

1. Gen. 37:34

have had, not merely to compel David to be a traitor, but to place Jesse and his family in a position of danger and difficulty? To have anointed David publicly would have forced Jesse to an open rupture with the king, and he must have sought safety either by fighting for his life, or by breaking up his home, and fleeing into a foreign land. David in course of time had thus to seek an asylum for his parents (... 1 Samuel 22:3, 4), but it was through no fault of his own, for he always remained true to his allegiance. Even when David was being hunted for his life, he made no appeal to Samuel's anointing, but it remained, what it was ever intended to be, a secret sign and declaration to him of God's preordained purpose, but of one as to which he was to take no step to bring about its fulfillment. It was a pledge to David, and nothing but misery would have resulted from its being prematurely made known to those who had no right to know it. God wraps up the flower, which is in due time to open and bear fruit, within many a covering; and to rend these open prematurely is to destroy the flower and the fruit that is to spring from it. And so to have anointed David openly, and to have made him understand the meaning of the act, would have been to destroy David and frustrate the Divine purpose."

The only thing God tells Samuel is to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse's sons to be king. In a way this was to be a test for Samuel, who tended to be fascinated by the outward appearance of young handsome men.

We find the family tree of Jesse in *The Book of Ruth*, where we read: "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.' Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David."¹

God says to Samuel: "I have chosen one of his sons to be king." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this: "The language is remarkable, and intimates a difference between this and the former king. Saul was the people's choice-the fruit of their wayward and sinful desires for their own honor and aggrandizement; the next was to be of God's nomination, who would consult the divine glory, and selected from that tribe to which the pre-eminence had been early promised (Gen 49:10)."

It is in fact remarkable that in choosing a king, Jacob's prophecy, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" had never before entered the picture, although it must have been preserved in the archives of Israel's history.

When Samuel arrived at Bethlehem the elders of the city met him with apprehension. We are not told the reason for this. Some Bible scholars suggest that Bethlehem was not one of the places Samuel usually visited when making the rounds of the country and that his reason for coming would be to investigate some crime that had been reported. The elders may have had a guilty conscience, but we are not given any details. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests: 'Perhaps they looked upon Samuel as the judge who had come to their city to hold court and to punish their offenses (1 Sam 7:16).' The Hebrew words *bow`ekaa shaloom*, "do you come in peace," may just be a form of greeting.

The ceremony involving the sacrifice was probably separate from the private meeting at Jesse's house. We assume that, although Samuel did not make a public announcement about the real reason for his coming, he must have taken Jesse into his confidence. Samuel did make sure, however, that Jesse and his sons were ceremonially clean before they participated in the sacrificial meal that followed the killing and

1. Ruth 4:18-21

burning of the animal. We assume that David was not present at this event, since Samuel remained unaware of his existence until the end.

The Pulpit Commentary suggests that the presentation of Jesse's son took place between the bringing of the sacrifice and the following meal, which took a considerable amount of time, "as the victim had to be skinned and prepared for roasting, and finally cooked."

Evidently, Jesse actually had had eight sons, since we read "Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel," and David had not yet appeared at this time. We only read here the names of the first three. There is a more complete list of Jesse's sons in *First Chronicles*, where we read: "Jesse was the father of Eliab his firstborn; the second son was Abinadab, the third Shimea, the fourth Nethanel, the fifth Raddai, the sixth Ozem and the seventh David."¹

God communicated silently with Samuel as the sons passed before Samuel. Samuel's first impression was that Eliab was God's choice. This conclusion was based upon Eliab's height and possibly some other external features that reminded Samuel of Saul, about whom we read: "as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel [had then] said to all the people, 'Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.'"² The Lord checked Samuel's reflections, indicating that Eliab's heart was not toward God.

Samuel must have been puzzled when seven sons passed before him and the Lord did not indicate any of them as the one to be anointed. There must have been a moment when the prophet asked himself if he had misunderstood the Lord's directions. When he learns that there is one more, the youngest, he orders to have him come. We are not given any details about David's age here. He must have been a teenager, since Jesse would not have sent him to guard the sheep if he had been a mere kid. But David was considered too young to participate in a sacrificial celebration.

When David comes in Samuel sees a boy who is "ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features." The Hebrew word translated ruddy is *'admoni*, "reddish." This could refer to his complexion or to his hair. David may have been a redhead. The only other time the word is used, apart from a description of David is at the birth of Esau. We read about Esau's birth: "The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau."³ *The New King James Version* describes David as "ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking." *The New Living Translation*: "He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes." These were not the features Samuel looked for in a king. Even after growing up David kept those features. When a few years later he faced Goliath, we read: "He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him."⁴ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on David's complexion: "Usually this designates the red hair and fair skin regarded as beautiful in southern countries, where the hair and the complexion are generally dark. However, 'admoni, 'ruddy,' may refer to the youth's physical prowess. David and Esau are the only two in the OT referred to by this term. Perhaps the word 'warrior' would be a better translation than ruddy."

David's anointing was for the purpose of preparing him for the throne of Israel. Samuel knew this, but whether he communicated this to Jesse and the family is not stated. About this anointing "In the midst of his brethren," *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Probably they understood by the anointing that David would become a disciple of Samuel, or in time might become a prophet in Samuel's stead, as later Elisha became the ministering servant of Elijah."

The immediate result of the anointing in David's personal life was that the Holy Spirit came upon him in power. This power probably accounts for David's reply to Saul as he was questioned about his ability to face Goliath and he answered the king: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or

1. I Chron. 2:13-15

2. I Sam. 10:23,24

3. Gen. 25:25

4. I Sam. 17:42

a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.”¹ Such Samson-like performance could only be executed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

ii. Saul needs a musician 16:14-23

14 Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.

15 Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.

16 Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better."

17 So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me."

18 One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the Lord is with him."

19 Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep."

20 So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul.

21 David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers.

22 Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him."

23 Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

There are in this section some statements that present theological problems to us; this requires a closer look. We read that the Spirit of the Lord who had worked in Saul since his anointing for the kingdom departed from him and that an evil spirit took His place. We are told that this evil spirit came from the Lord.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on this: “*The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul*, as he had done from Samson (Judg. 16:20), and with equally tragic consequences, for Saul became troubled by *an evil spirit from the Lord*. Though ‘evil’ should be read in the sense of ‘injurious’ here (so NIV mg.), the statement remains problematic to the modern reader, who finds it incompatible with the goodness of God. The writer of the book of Job made the point, ‘Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble’ (Job 2:10, NIV), while at the same time indicating in the remainder of his book how costly such acceptance can become. On a national level, invasion and defeat by a ruthless enemy had also to be accepted from the Lord, whose sovereign direction of history involved the discipline of his people: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things’ (Isa. 45:6-7, NIV). As a philosophical problem, the origin of suffering continues to be baffling, but the people of God are encouraged in Scripture to take adversity of all kinds direct from the Lord’s hand (cf. John 9:5; 11:4; 2 Cor. 12:7-10), and through such acceptance God is glorified. In the case of King Saul, it is important to note that signs of mental illness began to occur only after the confrontation with Samuel of the question of obedience to the divine command. This suggests that his illness was due to his rebellion against God; certainly he was held responsible for his actions, and regarded himself as responsible (I Sam. 24:16-21; 26:21).”

It is interesting to observe that Ms. Baldwin ascribes Saul’s behavior to “mental illness” instead of demonic oppression or possession. Although Satan is ultimately the source of all illness, there is a difference between the medical condition of clinical depression and demonic activity in human life. Some of what we

1. I Sam. 17:34,35

read here, which is so puzzling to us, may be ascribed to the way people in Old Testament times interpreted irrational behavior. Actually, we do not know how much spiritual activity is involved in some symptoms for which we think we have a medical explanation. The fact that conversion, fellowship with God and prayer often make a difference in the health of our bodies, suggests that the spirit plays a more important role than we often credit.

The Hebrew word translated “evil” is *ra`*, which has a whole gamut of meanings, all of them rather negative. The first time the word is used is in connection with “the tree of the knowledge of good and *evil*.”¹ Next it describes the condition of the human heart at the time of Noah’s flood: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only *evil* all the time.”² We find it in the confrontation between Isaac and the Philistines. We read: “Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. Isaac asked them, ‘Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?’ They answered, ‘We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’ — between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you that you *will do us no harm*, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the Lord.’”³ Moses, having become desperate by the rebellion of the Israelites against his authority, says to the Lord: “If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own *ruin*.”⁴

It remains true that God is never the source of evil. “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”⁵ Death and all that is related to it is the result of separation from God. When Saul disobeyed God’s direct command, he separated himself from God and switched his allegiance to the enemy. The way we can read the words “an evil spirit from the Lord” may be ‘a spirit that was the result of separation from the Lord.’ The fact that God claims responsibility for the results of our disobedience may remain puzzling, but it suggests at the same time that the evil experiences would have been prevented if obedience had been conformed to.

The Pulpit Commentary has the following intriguing observation about Saul’s behavior: “A study of Saul’s character makes it probable that, as is often the case with men of brilliant genius, there was always a touch of insanity in his mental constitution. His joining in the exercises of the prophets (... 1 Samuel 10:10-12) was an outburst of eccentric enthusiasm; and the excitement of his behavior in the occurrences narrated in ch. 14. indicate a mind that might easily be thrown off its balance. And now he seems to have brooded over his deposition by Samuel, and instead of repenting to have regarded himself as an ill-used man, and given himself up to despondency, until he became a prey to melancholy, and his mind was overclouded.”

At that time people already recognized the importance of music upon human emotions and its therapeutic effect upon people who were emotionally disturbed. It is still true that in some cases Mozart can have a greater effect upon people than tranquilizers. This statement, however, must not be taken as a medical prescription.

Music is one of the most mysterious elements of human life. It takes more than a human ear to be able to hear it. We may be able to hear the sounds but in order to translate what they say to us and what the emotions are that the notes convey, we need the spiritual receptacles of the heart. There is music in heaven, but I doubt that there will be any in hell. Music speaks where words no longer suffice. It explains the

1. Gen. 2:9

2. Gen. 6:5

3. Gen. 26:26-29

4. Num. 11:15

5. 1 John 1:5

inexplicable! Ironically, music was born in a family that did not have a reputation of spirituality. It was Lamech's son Jubal of whom we read that "he was the father of all who play the harp and flute."¹

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, explains about David's harp: "David's *lyre* (Heb. *kinnôr*) was evidently portable, whereas illustrations from antiquity suggest that the harp was a larger instrument, less easily carried around. It is the earliest stringed instrument mentioned in the Bible (Gen. 4:21), and the only one referred to in the Pentateuch."

One of Saul's servants recommends David to Saul, saying that "he is a brave man and a warrior." We have no problem accepting the fact that David had acquired a reputation for his harp playing, his eloquence and his good looks, but we find no record at this point to justify the description "a brave man and a warrior." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The description is full and interesting, but it has its difficulties. David is not only skilful in music, of which art he would have had ample scope to manifest his powers in the service of the sanctuary at Ramah, but he is also *a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters*, or, rather, *intelligent in speech* ... as well as handsome and successful. Nevertheless, in ... 1 Samuel 17:33-36 David appears as a youth about to make his first essay in fighting; and though the two exploits mentioned there, of killing the lion and the bear, might justify his friend in calling him *a mighty valiant man*, literally, 'a hero of valor,' they do not justify the words *a man of war*. It is strange, moreover, that Saul should be so entirely ignorant of David's person and lineage as he is represented in the narrative in ch. 17, if thus David was court musician, though reference is made there to this visit of David to Saul in ver. 15. Possibly, however, David and this youth may have served together in repelling some marauding expedition of the Philistines, and though David may not have actually done much, — nothing, at all events, so well worth repeating to Saul as the combats with the wild beasts, — yet he may have achieved enough to convince his friend that he had in him the qualities of *a man of war*, *i.e.* of a good soldier. For the rest, we must conclude that this first visit of David was a very short one, and that after playing before Saul and being approved of, he then returned home, ready to come again whenever summoned, but that Saul's malady did not immediately return, and so a sufficient interval elapsed for Saul not to recognize him when he saw him under altered circumstances. Saul's question, 'Whose son is this stripling?' (... 1 Samuel 17:56) seems to imply that he had a sort of confused idea about him, without being able exactly to recall who he was. The ultimate consequences of this introduction to Saul, as well as its immediate effect, are all narrated here after the usual manner of Old Testament history."

The great importance of this passage is, of course, the fact that David, who had been anointed to be the future king, was here introduced to the one who still was the king of Israel. This is the more interesting since David, having been anointed, must have been aware of the historical significance of this event. In a way his introduction to Saul was the first step in his ascent to the throne. Entering into Saul's service was like the grooming Joshua received in his service for Moses.

When Saul sends the message to Jesse to make David available to him, he does not mention any of the recommendations that had been given to him. We do not even read that Jesse was told that David had to bring his harp. Saul must have been told that David kept his father's sheep, since that is the only thing he mentions in the message. The implication is that Jesse would have to look for another shepherd.

The way the whole story unfolds suggests that the chronology has not been followed closely. David probably started out by playing his harp before the king and only later entered into his service permanently, serving as the king's armor-bearer.

Saul had affection for David. *The New International Version* reads: "Saul liked him very much." The Hebrew text reads literally: "he loved him greatly." The same word is used here as in God's Word to Abraham: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, *whom you love*, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."²

1. Gen. 4:21

2. Gen. 22:2

David's music did have the desired effect upon Saul's depression. When David played the evil spirit left Saul. Demons do not like music. Joyce G. Baldwin, in 1 and 2 Samuel, comments: "Unwittingly, Saul was becoming dependent on the one designed to succeed him."

iii. Saul needs a warrior to fight Goliath 17:1-18:5

17:1 Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah.

2 Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines.

3 The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

4 A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall.

5 He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels;

6 on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back.

7 His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

8 Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me.

9 If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."

10 Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."

11 On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul's time he was old and well advanced in years.

13 Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah.

14 David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul,

15 but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

16 For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

17 Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp.

18 Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them.

19 They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

20 Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry.

21 Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other.

22 David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers.

23 As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it.

24 When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

25 Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel."

26 David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

27 They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him."

28 When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."

29 "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

30 He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before.

31 What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

32 David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

33 Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth."

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock,

35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.

36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.

37 The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

38 Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head.

39 David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.

40 Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

41 Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David.

42 He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him.

43 He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

44 "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"

45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

46 This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.

47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

48 As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

49 Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

50 So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

51 David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

52 Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron.

53 When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp.

54 David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, and he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.

55 As Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is that young man?" Abner replied, "As surely as you live, O king, I don't know."

56 The king said, "Find out whose son this young man is."

57 As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

58 "Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

18:1 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.

2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house.

3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

5 Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.

This chapter describes the best-known and most dramatic confrontation between Israel and the Philistines. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states: "The ongoing war with the Philistines was about to enter a new phase, to be fought, not this time in the central hills from which the enemy had been chased westwards, but nearer their territory on the borders of Judah. The emphatic *Socoh*, which belongs to Judah, shows the Philistines encroaching nevertheless. The names Socoh and *Azekeh* are preserved in the names of present-day villages in the foothills due west from Bethlehem, and *the valley of Elah*, in which both were situated, drains the water from the hills into the Mediterranean during the rainy season."

The new feature in this particular confrontation is the appearance of Goliath. The Hebrew text describes him with a combination of two words *`iysh-benayim*, which literally translated means "a man in the space between two armies." The term only occurs in this chapter in the Bible. It is generally translated "champion." The designation "middleman" would be appropriate, although in this context it is not used in the sense of mediation.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary states about Goliath: "Goliath, although repeatedly called a Philistine, was probably descended from the old Rephaim, of whom a scattered remnant took refuge with the Philistines after their dispersion by the Ammonites (Deut 2:20-21; 2 Sam 21:22)." It is not clear whether Goliath was a descendant of the Anakim or Nephilim who were reported to live in Canaan when the twelve spies surveyed the country. The spies had told Moses: "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." Joshua destroyed most of those but some took refuge in Philistine country.¹

Goliath was a giant of over nine feet tall. His helmet and his mail coat weighed approximately 125 pounds and the point of his spear weighed 15 pounds. We may assume that these statistics were collected after David had killed the giant.

1. Josh. 11:21,22

Goliath challenged any of Saul's troops to engage in a duel with him, which would be the equivalent of a budding teenager trying to take on a world champion heavyweight boxer. Goliath's taunt was "Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul?" Neither parts of the statement were true. Goliath was not a Philistine in the proper sense of the word and Saul's soldiers were not his "servants." The Hebrew word *`ebed* basically refers to a slave, as in Noah's curse on Ham's son Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."¹ But who would be brave enough to go to Goliath and correct him?

Apparently, the formation of both armies was such that the battle had come to a stalemate. They faced each other on opposite sides of a ravine. Efforts to cross the chasm would have given the advantage to the other group. If it were not for the unequal chance anyone facing Goliath would have, the giant's proposition would have seemed reasonable. Yet, his taunt did nothing to break up the deadlock. The purpose was obviously more to add insult to injury which might lead to Israel's peaceful withdrawal and a takeover of the area by the Philistines.

Enter David! The introduction of David as if he were a new character in the book seems strange and redundant. Most Bible scholars believe that vv.12-15 ought not to be here. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the verses do not appear in some reliable ancient manuscripts as the Septuagint and the Vatican manuscript. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "It is impossible to make a clear consistent sense of the history unless these verses are omitted. Let anyone read the eleventh verse in connection with the thirty-second, leave out the forty-first, and connect the fifty-fourth with 1 Sam 18:6, and he will be perfectly convinced that there is nothing lacking to make the sense complete ... If the above is taken in as genuine, the ingenuity of man has hitherto failed to free the whole from apparent contradiction and absurdity."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "Mention of David's name requires an explanation of his circumstances at the time. His Ephrathite father (cf. I Chr. 4:4; Ephratah was mother of Hur, who was 'father,' maybe the civic leader, of Bethlehem), was already too old for military service, but his three eldest sons were in Saul's army at the front line, and needing supplies of food. David, the youngest, had the responsibility of fulfilling this errand in addition to looking after his sheep. While Saul was fully occupied with military maneuvers he would not need his minstrel, so David was back home for a while. The need to keep the army fed took David to the front and introduced him to the Philistine challenger."

David must have arrived at the battlefield on the fortieth day of the confrontation, since it turned out to be the last day of Goliath's life. Socoh was close enough to Bethlehem that David could reach it in time to see the troops take their positions in the battle formation. Their shouting of the battle cry adds a touch of irony to the account.

Another strange phenomenon is the men's reaction to Goliath's insults. Since there was the chasm that separated the two armies, there was no immediate danger to their lives and their panic and running away in fear was uncalled for. There was no reason to doubt that all Goliath wanted was a one-on-one encounter with someone he could kill. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes, the Israelites drew back in haste from the edge of the ravine, which Goliath could no more have crossed, encased in armor weighing approximately two hundred fifty pounds, than a knight could have done in the Middle Ages. Panic tends to rob people of their reason. David came just in time to overhear the soldiers repeat, what everyone already knew, that Saul had promised a substantial reward for the one who killed Goliath, including the hand of the princess and tax exemption for his family. Although David asked the men to repeat what they said, that was not the reason that made him volunteer.

David's vision of what constituted the real power of the nation of Israel was what was lacking among the soldiers. King Saul had never demonstrated any understanding of this high concept of the nation of which he was the leader. What they considered to be an insufficient defense, David called "the armies of the living God." *Barnes' Notes* comments on this: "This fine expression occurs first in Deuteronomy ... and

1. Gen. 9:25

next in Josh 3:10, and 2 Kings 19:4. We find it twice in the Psalms of David (Ps 42:2; 84:2), four times in the prophets, and frequently in the New Testament. It is generally in contrast to false gods (1 Thess 1:9, etc.).” It was this concept of who God is and what it means that He had chosen Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, that made David the man after God’s heart and the greatest king of Israel.

David’s oldest brother Eliab, the one Samuel had admired so much when he first saw him, heard David’s words and he must have felt condemned, otherwise his explosion of anger makes no sense. Eliab may have been jealous that David had been anointed, thinking that he should have been chosen. So he avails himself of the opportunity to put his youngest brother in his place. Since the scene played out in public and despair reigned among the troops, this little ray of hope, the fact that someone could possibly volunteer to risk his life, provided a boost of morale. Whether anyone would give David a chance to succeed is doubtful, but any spark is better than no fire at all.

So word reaches Saul, who evidently shared in the army’s despair. The king calls David and David says: “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

The following scene is replete with details that are both humorous and sad. Saul knew that humanly speaking David did not have a chance, yet he ends up by giving his permission for David to face the giant. It was as if he were ready to feed David to Goliath. Whether Saul believed that David actually had fought and killed a lion and a bear seems doubtful. He may have considered David’s claim youthful bragging. Maybe David’s words that Goliath “defied the armies of the living God” struck a cord in the king’s heart.

We do not know how tall David was at this point in his life. Even if, as a teenager his body was full-grown, he would not have measured up to Saul, who “was a head taller than any of the others.”¹ Dressing up David in the king’s armor was an exercise in futility. David leaves unarmed and descends in the ravine to pick up some pebbles for his slingshot. The fact that he chose five stones suggests that he thought he might have to shoot more than once. Whether this was proof of a lack of perfect faith we leave in the middle.

There was never a more mismatched duel than the one between David and Goliath. It is true that no one in Israel could measure up to the giant physically. Even Saul, who was the tallest in Israel, would have fallen short by several feet. But the difference between David and Goliath was so great that the latter felt insulted. This was not even going to be a match. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about the confrontation: “This was no ordinary battle, but one in which God’s honor was at stake, and in this circumstance David’s exposure to danger permitted God’s honor to be more clearly acknowledged than if David had more obviously been a match for the Philistine. At no point did David take any credit for the successful outcome, which he confidently expected. By using his sling, David could operate beyond the range of Goliath’s weapons.”

David expressed his understanding of the importance of the encounter most clearly in the words “the battle is the LORD’s.” The duel evinces a divine principle that runs throughout the whole of Scripture. The Apostle Paul calls it “the foolishness of God,” saying: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” We see it in Gideon’s battle with the Midianites,² and ultimately in Jesus’ crucifixion.

In the sixteenth century history of The Netherlands there was a war between that country and Spain. The king of Spain was a staunch Roman Catholic who had inherited from his father, Charles V, The Netherlands, which had followed the reformation. The king set out to occupy the country and bring its population back to the Roman Catholic Church. In order to do this he sent out the Armada, the strongest fleet of its day. The Dutch met the vessels with little fishing boats that were below the reach of the ships cannons but inflicted substantial damage to the men-of-war. But what defeated the Spanish was a huge North-western gale that hit the North Sea and sunk some of the ships. The Dutch coined a medal with the text “God’s breath destroyed them!”

1. I Sam. 10:23

2. Judg. 7:2,4

Goliath cursed David by his gods. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The Hebrew is singular, ‘by his god,’ *i.e.* the deity whom he had elected to be his especial patron.” We do not know which one that was.

Goliath must have been familiar with the Name YHWH. The capture of the ark must still have been fresh in the memory of the Philistines at this point. We do not know if Goliath had ever cursed the Name of Israel’s God. The fact that Israel was God’s chosen nation made God “the God of the armies of Israel.” Tragically, David was the only person in Israel who recognized this. David’s vision for the glory of God is most impressive. He realized that much more was at stake than Israel’s victory over a bothersome neighbor. He wanted the whole world to know that there is a God in Israel. David also knew that God would vindicate His own glory and that, consequently, David was invincible in this encounter. Yet, there must have been in David’s heart the thought that he could be killed. He knew, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would know later,¹ that God could save him, but, like them, he was willing to give his life, if that was what God required. Like the conquerors of the beast in Revelation, David “did not love [his] life so much as to shrink from death.”²

While Goliath must have moved slowly, David could run toward him and ready himself by putting a stone in his sling. *The Pulpit Commentary* describes what happened: “As the giant’s helmet had no visor, that protection not having as yet been invented, and his shield was still carried by his armor bearer, his face was exposed to David’s missiles. And in those days, before firearms were invented, men by constant practice ‘could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss’ (... Judges 20:16). And even if David were not quite as skilful as those Benjamites, yet, as the giant could move only very slowly, the chances were that he would hit him with one or more of his five pebbles. As it was, he struck him at his first attempt upon the forehead with such force that Goliath was stunned, and fell down upon his face to the ground.

The sling, Hebrew *qela`*, was part of David’s shepherd’s equipment. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* explains: “The sling was first developed and used by shepherds for protecting their livestock against wild animals. This was a simple weapon, composed generally of a small piece of leather or animal hide. Small stones or pebbles were generally used as ammunition in a sling. While the sling is a simple weapon in terms of construction, it is difficult to fire with accuracy. Only trained and experienced soldiers were equipped with slings. Next to archers, the slingers were the most effective long-range warriors in Old Testament times. The advantage of such a long-range weapon is illustrated by the most famous sling story of all-David’s victory over Goliath. The young, inexperienced David killed the giant because of his trust in God. David also had a decided advantage in the contest because Goliath was armed with a spear and a sword, both of which were short-range weapons. Slingers were important elements in the Israelite army. The Benjamites also had a unit of 700 left-handed slingers who could ‘sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss’ (Judg 20:16).”

The record states with a note of amazement: “So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “It is evident that the narrator regarded David’s victory as extraordinary; and no doubt it required not only great courage, but also perfect skill, as only the lower portion of the forehead would be exposed, and on no other part of the giant’s body would a blow have been of any avail. The narrator also calls attention to the fact that David relied upon his sling alone, for *there was no sword in the hand of David*. Slings probably were regarded as useful only to harass an enemy, while swords, which they had only lately been able to procure (... 1 Samuel 13:22), were regarded as the real weapons of offence. David, therefore, completes his victory by killing Goliath with his own sword as he lay stunned upon the ground. As Ahimelech considered it fit for David’s own use (... 1 Samuel 21:9), it was probably not so monstrous in size as Goliath’s other weapons.”

1. See Dan. 3:16-18.

2. Rev. 12:11

At this point it was the Philistine army's turn to panic. They had believed themselves to be invincible, thinking that no one would ever succeed in killing their hero. If they had withstood the Israelite attack they would have had a chance. Their panic was caused by more than the death of Goliath alone. The Philistines must have heard David's claim that the Israelite army represented the living God, the One whose ark they had been forced to return. It was their fear of the Lord that made them run.

The statement that David took Goliath's head and brought it to Jerusalem raises some questions. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "It is surprising to read that David *took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem*, in view of the fact that this city was still in Jebusite hands, until David captured it (2 Sam. 5:6-10), but little is on record to give information about the status of the city just before that event. The city had been taken by Judah and destroyed (Judg. 1:8), but it soon recovered (Judg. 1:21; cf. Josh 15:63), though no king is subsequently mentioned in the city. Friendly relations between Israel and Jerusalem obtained during the judges period (Judg. 19:10-12), or at least a state of neutrality; the city was surrounded by Israelite settlements on all sides except the west, which was semi-desert, and, in company with the remainder of the Canaanite population, was indebted to Israel for protection against invaders. Was David already becoming the strategist, giving this important city reason to recognize Israel's dominance?"

It is possible that the narrator has run ahead of his subject and describes here a feat that David actually performed after his capture of Jerusalem. The head of Goliath was David's trophy, a reminder of his first victory that propelled him to the highest popularity in the nation. The head could have been kept in a small casket and preserved as memorabilia for the future king's personal collection.

On the sword which David put in his own tent, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "This clause, like the former, is proleptical. David being on a temporary visit to his brethren, could have no tent of his own on the field. But on his commencement of a wandering life he would have a tent, in which he kept the armor of Goliath, until it could be deposited in the safe custody of the sanctuary at Nob, where it was placed as a votive offering to the Lord."

Saul's question to Abner as to who David was also seems puzzling. Unless we disregard the chronology, Saul ought to have remembered David as the one who played the harp for him. We read earlier: "David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers."¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "We have seen that the narrative in ... 1 Samuel 16:21-23 carries the history of David's relations with Saul down to a much later period, and that in ver. 15 of this chapter David is represented as not dwelling continuously at Saul's court, but as having returned to Bethlehem and resumed his pastoral occupations there, whence he would be summoned back in case of the recurrence of Saul's malady. It is plain from what is stated here that David had not thus far spent time enough at Gibeah to be personally well known either to Saul or his officers." As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* suggests: "The growth of the beard and other changes on a now full-grown youth prevented the king from recognizing his former favorite minstrel."

Saul calls him "young man." The Hebrew word *na'ar* covers a rather large part of manhood from the age of infancy to adolescence. Abraham used the word for men who went to war with him, saying to the King of Sodom: "I will accept nothing but what my *men* have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."² And in the story of Hagar and Ishmael, it is used for the latter, who may have been a teenager at that time. We read: "God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the *boy* crying as he lies there. Lift the *boy* up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."³

1. I Sam. 16:21

2. Gen. 14:24

3. Gen. 21:17,18

We assume that this conversation between Saul and Abner, as well as David's introduction, or reintroduction to the king, took place after the pursuit of the Philistine army by the Israelites.

At the audience with King Saul, David was also introduced to Jonathan. We read that Jonathan "became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." The Hebrew text reads literally: "Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." The Hebrew words used are *qashar nephesh*, "soul-bound." David and Jonathan became lifelong soul mates, a relationship the Scriptures sanctify and declare healthy, good and glorifying to God. It is difficult to discuss the subject in a modern culture in which alternate sexual orientations, which the Scriptures condemn, are declared normal and acceptable. The friendship of these two young men is above suspicion. Jonathan was the crown prince, who had demonstrated deep faith in God and courage that would have earned him a purple heart in modern times. He recognized the same faith-born bravery in David, whom he had witnessed killing the giant. Jonathan gave David his uniform, thus declaring him to have become a member of the royal elite.

David also earned, or re-earned Saul's affection. The king did not allow David to return to his father's house, but promoted him instantly to officer of his army. In this new function David did so well that he rose to the top in a very short time. This established David's popularity both in the palace, in the army and outside. But, as Joyce G. Baldwin observes in her commentary *1 and 2 Samuel*, "That was one side of the picture." There would be a downside soon to appear. At this point Saul's promise that the one who would kill Goliath would be given the hand of the king's daughter is not mentioned again. Evidently, the king had second thoughts about this. Though he liked David, he probably did not want his daughter to be married to a shepherd boy.

iv. Saul's jealousy and fear of David 18:6-30

6 When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.

7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"

9 And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

10 The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand

11 and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

12 Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul.

13 So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns.

14 In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him.

15 When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him.

16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

17 Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the Lord." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!"

18 But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?"

19 So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah.

20 Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased.

21 "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." So Saul said to David, "Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law."

22 Then Saul ordered his attendants: "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look, the king is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law.'"

23 They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known."

24 When Saul's servants told him what David had said,

25 Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

26 When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed,

27 David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented the full number to the king so that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

28 When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David,

29 Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

30 The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

We gather from these verses that David's rise to the top was less instantaneous than would appear from the previous record. Saul carefully fitted David's promotions in a plan that was actually meant for his destruction. It all began at the victory parade, immediately following the killing of Goliath. The women's chant "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" aroused the king's fierce jealousy. Samuel's words "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors — to one better than you,"¹ which must have haunted the king ever since they were spoken, came back to Saul's mind and appeared to become a reality in the appearance of David. Saul's disobedience, his resisting of the will of God, opened the door for this jealousy and the insanity of which he became a prey. It was against this background that Saul's promise about his daughter's marriage came up again; this time not as a reward, but as a trap.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about the celebration and its consequence: "The jingle was not meant to be derogatory to Saul in the process of celebrating the outstanding bravery of David, but, in the light of Samuel's rejection of Saul, the words seemed to point to David as his replacement. The suspicion that he had made the right deduction poisoned his relationship with David from that point onwards."

The New International Version states: "And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David." The Hebrew text simply reads: "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." The Hebrew word, rendered "eyed" is *avan*, meaning "to watch." It only occurs in this verse in Scripture.

Saul's jealousy triggered an attack of insanity, which again, is attributed to God. Saul's condition was rather the result of his disobedience, his break with God, than of God's direct intervention. Fellowship with God brings about healing of the mind, as we read in the case of the demon-possessed man who was healed by Jesus and of whom we read: "they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind."² It strikes us as strange that a demon would make Saul prophesy. *The Revised Standard Version* and some other versions render the phrase: "he raved within his house." *The*

1. I Sam. 15:28

2. Luke 8:35

Pulpit Commentary comments on this: “The conjugation employed here (*Hithpahel*) is never used of real, true prophecy (which is always the *Niphal*), but of a bastard imitation of it. Really Saul was in a state of frenzy, unable to master himself, speaking words of which he knew not the meaning, and acting like a man possessed. In all this there was something akin to the powerful emotions which agitated the true prophet, only it was not a holy influence, but one springing from violent passions and a disturbed state of the mind.”

Evidently, Saul’s attacks had become more frequent, because we read that David’s harp playing had become a usual event. Saul’s jealousy came to a boiling point and twice he tried to spear David to the wall and kill him. It is difficult to imagine how this could happen. We can understand that David was absorbed in his music as Saul threw his spear the first time. But at the second attempt Saul must have gotten up from his throne to retrieve his spear, unless he had two spears at hand. When David escaped unhurt Saul attributed this to God’s protection, and this increased his fear of David. *The Pulpit Commentary* describes the scene as follows: “Saul brandished the javelin, which he carried as a sort of scepter in his hand, with such violence that David twice had to escape from this threat of injury by flight. It is not certain that Saul actually threw the javelin. Had he done so it would be difficult to account for David escaping from it twice. After such an act of violence he would scarcely have trusted himself a second time in Saul’s presence.”

Based on *The King James Versions*’ rendering “he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul’s hand,” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “It is said that Saul prophesied in the midst of his house, that is, he prayed in his family, while David was playing on the harp; and then suddenly threw his javelin, intending to have killed David. Let it be observed that the word *wayitnabee*’ is the third person singular of the future *hithpael*; the sign of which is not only to do an action on or for one’s self, but also to feign or pretend to do it. The meaning seems to be, Saul pretended to be praying in his family, the better to conceal his murderous intentions, and render David unsuspecting; who was, probably, at this time performing the musical part of the family worship. This view of the subject makes the whole case natural and plain.” The alternate interpretation that Saul was raving, rather than prophesying, seems to be preferable. Bible scholars are divided as to the meaning of the Hebrew word *wayitnabee*’.

V.12 seems to indicate that Saul had recovered from the attack that made him rave, but that does not mean that he was no longer jealous of David and afraid. Giving David the command of a military detachment of one thousand men served several purposes. It removed David from Saul’s presence and alleviated his fear; it had the appearance of a reward in the public eye; but most of all, it exposed David to the dangers of war, which easily could have claimed his life. The latter was probably Saul’s foremost reason for the appointment. Unfortunately, the plan backfired. Instead of diminishing the king’s fear, it increased it. And David’s success and popularity fed the king’s jealousy even more.

There remained the publicly given promise that the one who defeated Goliath would have the right to marry the princess. It appears that Saul had gone back on this promised reward, since it was not mentioned again after David’s victory over the giant. But in view of David’s bravery in battle, Saul saw a possibility of getting David killed by the Philistines. The words “I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the Lord” constitute a break of promise. The official declaration given before had been “The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.”¹ Saul had conveniently forgotten this promise, although it was public knowledge. Now the king saw a possibility in it of ridding himself of David. The way in which Saul offers David the hand of his daughter Merab implies that there still was a price to be paid in fighting some more battles with the Philistines.

David does not refuse the offer because of the requirement, but because he felt that marrying the king’s daughter was too far above his social status in life. In saying to Saul “Who am I, and what is my family or my father’s clan in Israel,” David virtually repeated what Saul had said to Samuel when Samuel

1. I Sam. 17:25

told him he would be the future king of Israel: "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?"¹

Another opportunity presented itself when Saul heard that his daughter Michal had fallen in love with David. Saul intended to use his daughter as a snare to catch David and get him killed. The Hebrew word used is *mowqesh*, "a noose," about which *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The Hebrew word suggests the idea of the trigger of a trap with bait laid upon it. It is also used metaphorically, as here, of that which allures a person to destruction." Saul would be caught in his own snare, as Proverbs states: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."²

Saul involves his courtiers in the plan, ordering them to talk to David and persuade him to accept the king's offer. The general consensus seems to have been that payment of a dowry was a requirement, although that would make the offer of the princes' hand as a reward for killing Goliath an empty gesture. David had paid the price already and Saul owed it to him to fulfill his promise. David's reaction to the whispered proposal was "I'm only a poor man and little known." We do not know what David's financial circumstances were. It seems that his family would have been able to help him pay whatever Saul required as payment. But the idea that he was "little known" was euphemistic, to say the least. "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" proves the opposite.

Saul's requirement of "a hundred Philistine foreskins" as a bride price for his second daughter strikes us as too vulgar to look at in detail. The phrase may have been an idiom, standing for killing a man who was not part of God's covenant. There must have been a time limit given, since we read that David met the requirement within "the allotted time," paying double of what had been asked.

This time Saul had no choice but to give David permission to marry Michael. The result of the whole deal was that Saul's fear of David increased, since David was obviously under God's protection. From that time on Saul considered his son-in-law his archenemy. In all of this David was completely unaware of Saul's feeling about him. He must have attributed Saul's previous attack upon his life to an episode of temporary insanity.

v. Jonathan and Michael save David's life 19:1-17

1 Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there.

3 I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.

5 He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

6 Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death."

7 So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

8 Once more war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him.

1. I Sam. 9:21

2. Prov. 29:25

9 But an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp,

10 Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.

11 Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed."

12 So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped.

13 Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head.

14 When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill."

15 Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him."

16 But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair.

17 Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'"

Saul clothed his death wish for David in the form of an executive order to kill a traitor. His mistake was to communicate this to Jonathan. Saul must have been aware of Jonathan's affection of David and he may have thought that his parental authority over his son would be strong enough to overrule Jonathan's feelings. When Jonathan reminded his father of David's actual heroic behavior and of the good David's deeds had done to Saul's reign, the king had a moment of lucidity and declared, under oath, that the order to kill the traitor was rescinded. Saul also uttered a genuine prophecy, stating that David would not die.

David was informed by Jonathan, who took the threat to David's life seriously enough to tell him to go in hiding. After Jonathan's conversation with his father David returns to the palace and life seems to have taken up its normal course. But new war breaks out between Israel and the Philistines. We are not given any details as to who initiated the attack. David led the Israelite army to another astounding victory and after that returned to the royal palace to play his harp for Saul.

David's double role of army general and court musician reveals both flexibility and humility. He simply performed the tasks that were given to him as unto the Lord.

During his performance for Saul, who must have been suffering another attack of insanity, the devil in Saul got the better of him and he makes another attempt to kill David by throwing his spear at him. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The verb used here is not that rendered *cast* in ... 1 Samuel 18:11, where probably we had the record of a purpose threatened, but not carried out. Here Saul actually threw his javelin at David with such violence that it was fixed into the wall. But David, though playing some instrument of music at the time, was on his guard, and slipped away."

We do not know how much Satan knew about God's plan with David's life and of the role he would play in the history of salvation. The fact that David had been called "a man after God's heart" had aroused enough suspicion in the enemy's mind to try to have him killed. The tensions between Saul and David must be seen in the light of God's plan of salvation and Satan's efforts to thwart it.

David managed to reach his home, probably thinking that when out of Saul's sight, Saul would recover his sanity, but Saul was too bent on David's destruction to let him go. He sent a guard to David's house to have it watched with the order to kill David in the morning.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary describes the scene as follows: "Saul also sent messengers unto David's house. The fear of causing a commotion in the town (namely, Gibeah, which was then the capital), or favoring his escape in the darkness, seemed to have influenced the king in ordering them to patrol until the morning. They betrayed their presence and hostile intentions of seizing David as he went out, by loud cries and execrations against the young champion, who had been so recently the idol of public admiration, more like savage dogs than officers of a court, as is most graphically recorded in Ps 59, which, as the title in the Hebrew, Septuagint, and Vulgate indicates, was written on that occasion (see Ps 59:3,6-

7,12). This infatuation of the king's messengers was overruled by Providence to favor David's escape; because his wife, secretly apprised by Jonathan, who was privy to the design, or spying persons in court livery watching the gate, perceived their purpose to be the clandestine seizure of David's person, and she contrived to let him down through a window."

We copy the embedded reference to Psalm 59 to show David's emotional reaction to the event: "See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O Lord. They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. See what they spew from their mouths, they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, 'Who can hear us?' For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter." Without this poetic description of the incident we would not have known that the troops that were sent to kill David had actually turned against him. Among them were probably men who had served under his command and honored him as their leader. Now they are ready to kill him. They demonstrated the same mob spirit as those who shouted "Hosanna" one day and "crucify Him," the next.

Michael seems to have been more alert to the gravity of the situation than David was and she arranged for her husband to escape through a window at the side of the house that was not being watched.

In order to gain time and allow David to put some distance between himself and his home, Michael puts a life-size figure in David's bed. *The New International Version* calls it "an idol." *The Hebrew Interlinear Bible* uses "image" for the Hebrew word *teraphim*.

The Pulpit Commentary states about the word "image": "Literally, 'the teraphim,' a plural word, but used here as a singular. Probably, like the corresponding Latin word *penates*, it had no singular in common use. It was a wooden block with head and shoulders roughly shaped to represent a human figure. Laban's teraphim were so small that Rachel could hide them under the camel's furniture (... Genesis 31:34), but Michal's seems to have been large enough to pass in the bed for a man. Though the worship of them is described as iniquity (... 1 Samuel 15:23), yet the superstitious belief that they brought good luck to the house over which they presided, in return for kind treatment, seems to have been proof against the teaching of the prophets; and Hosea describes the absence of them as on the same level as the absence of the ephod (... Hosea 3:4)."

It seems strange to us that teraphim could be found in David's home. If it was really a household idol, as the general consensus of Bible scholars seems to be, we wonder if David was aware of its presence and use, or whether he had not yet been convicted about the incongruence between his worship of God and his family's idolatry. Ironically, it was the idol that saved his life. According to *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* "Josephus relates that Michal placed a still-moving goat's liver in the bed to make the messengers believe that there was a breathing invalid beneath."

We suppose that when David did not appear in the morning to go to work, the guards who were supposed to kill him when he left home, questioned Michal, who told them the lie that David was sick in bed. Evidently, the men went back to Saul and reported this, supposing that it would not be fair to kill a man who was sick in bed. But Saul orders them to bring David, bed and all, saying that he would kill David personally. At that time, the men enter the house and find the teraphim instead of David.

When Saul calls his daughter and questions her, she tells her second lie, saying that David threatened to kill her if she did not let him go. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes here: "The involvement of Saul's children in the conflict between him and David intensifies the love-hate relationship, and the story, inasmuch as it may be considered a mirror of the human conditions, gains immeasurably in intensity and sophistication."

c. David the outlaw 19:18 – 26:25

i. David takes refuge with Samuel 19:18-24

18 When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there.

19 Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah";

20 so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied.

21 Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied.

22 Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said.

23 So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth.

24 He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

David's escape from Saul made him into an outlaw, a person with a price on his head. It would be difficult for him to find a safe place where Saul would not be able to find him. And we will see that David had to run from place to place in order to remain out of Saul's reach. At some instances this would be neigh to impossible.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about the word Naioth: "Naioth means (dwellings), and may be the college or common residence of the society of prophets Samuel gathered round him at Ramah." What happened to the three groups of soldiers, and at the end to Saul himself at this "Bible College" throws an interesting light on the concept of prophesying that was practiced among the students.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Samuel's school and its practices: "Evidently after Saul had become king Samuel devoted his main energies to this noble effort to raise Israel from the barbarous depths into which it had sunk; and when the messengers arrive they enter some hall, where they find a regularly organized choir, consisting not of 'sons of the prophets,' young men still under training, but of *prophets*, men who had finished their preparatory studies, and arrived at a higher elevation. The Chaldee Paraphrast calls them *scribes*; and doubtless those educated in Samuel's schools held an analogous position to that of the scribes in later days. And *Samuel* himself was *standing* — not as *appointed over them*; he was the founder and originator of these schools, and all authority was derived from him. What the Hebrew says is that he was 'standing as chief over them,' and they, full of Divine enthusiasm, were chanting psalms to God's glory. So noble was the sight, that Saul's messengers on entering were seized with a like enthusiasm, and, laying aside their murderous purpose, joined in the hearty service of the prophetic sanctuary. Instead of *they saw* the Hebrew has 'he saw,' but as all the versions have the plural, it is probably a mere mistake. The Hebrew word for *company* is found only here. By transposing the letters we have the ordinary word for *congregation*, but possibly it was their own technical name for some peculiar arrangement of the choir."

It would seem strange to us, however, that Saul, when he arrived at the school with evil intent to kill David, would join the young prophets in chanting psalms, merely out of "Divine enthusiasm." That something "divine" prevented him from carrying out his murderous plan is obvious, but we do better to ascribe this to God's intervention in protecting David. Saul's demonic master allowed the king of Israel to make a fool of himself, to the point where he became the laughing stock of the nation. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was a saying used earlier of Saul which became a proverb that expressed incongruence and mockery. Joyce G. Baldwin, in 1 and 2 Samuel, comments: "Far from being a doublet of 1 Samuel 10:12, as has been suggested, the incident becomes an ironic comment on Saul's life story."

ii. David and Jonathan make a pact 20:1-42

1 Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?"

2 *"Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!"*

3 *But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."*

4 *Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."*

5 *So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow."*

6 *If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.'*

7 *If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me.*

8 *As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?"*

9 *"Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"*

10 *David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?"*

11 *"Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together.*

12 *Then Jonathan said to David: "By the Lord, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know?"*

13 *But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father.*

14 *But show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed,*

15 *and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family — not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."*

16 *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord call David's enemies to account."*

17 *And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.*

18 *Then Jonathan said to David: "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty."*

19 *The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel.*

20 *I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target.*

21 *Then I will send a boy and say, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to him, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,' then come, because, as surely as the Lord lives, you are safe; there is no danger.*

22 *But if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then you must go, because the Lord has sent you away.*

23 *And about the matter you and I discussed — remember, the Lord is witness between you and me forever."*

24 *So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat.*

25 *He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty.*

26 *Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean — surely he is unclean."*

27 *But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"*

28 Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem.

29 He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

30 Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"

31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"

32 "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father.

33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

34 Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

35 In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him,

36 and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

37 When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?"

38 Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master.

39 (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.)

40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."

41 After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side [of the stone] and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together — but David wept the most.

42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

Some Bible scholars believe that there is another chronological mix-up in the placement of this story and that it must be placed between David's escape through the window of his house and the incident at Ramah where Saul prophesied. It does seem strange that Jonathan would be so ignorant about his father's intent at this point in the story. There are several things that are difficult to explain in the course of events as they are given to us here. Evidently several pieces of information that would have helped to understand what went on have been withheld.

David escaped from Ramah and contacted Jonathan. *Barnes' Notes* believes that Samuel spoke with Saul, after the latter had come to his senses and, at least temporarily made him change his mind about David. The commentary states: "Nothing could be a better evidence of his innocence than thus putting himself in Jonathan's power. Perhaps something passed between Samuel and Saul on the subject, since it appears from 1 Sam 20:5,25,27, that Saul expected David at the feast of the new moon."

Those who were closest to Saul were under the impression that Saul's ill behavior towards David must be ascribed to his attacks of insanity and that David's life had never really been in danger. That was not David's interpretation of the episodes and David was correct. The fact that David was expected to attend the New Moon celebration at Saul's table must have been another trap the king set with the intent to kill him. Meanwhile, Jonathan was kept out of the loop, because Saul understood that Jonathan could never agree to participate in any plan to kill his best friend. It seems best to put the dialogue in this chapter against that background.

We wonder how much David remembered the unction he had received by the hand of Samuel. It must not have played an important role in his thinking at this point in his life. He could have understood that Saul saw him as the pretender to the throne of Israel and that this was the leading thought in Saul's animosity. David's fear for his life may have blurred his thinking and his trust in the Lord. God had given him enough assurance of safety, but David failed to rest in God's promise.

Jonathan, on the other hand, underestimated his father's evil intent. He must have thought that the attacks of insanity accounted for all that had happened and that Saul was less dangerous than he appeared to be. He interpreted Saul's behavior as passing episodes of a mental illness. In a way both friends were wrong. But David was more of a realist than his friend.

The New Moon festival was celebrated, obviously, on a monthly basis with the sounding of trumpets and the bringing of specific burnt offerings.¹ Ironically, Saul, who had not made a point of obeying the will of God, took these celebrations very seriously, using more than one day for the festivities.

The Hebrew text of this whole passage is complicated and incomplete and Bible scholars have struggled to come to a clear understanding by comparing several texts such as the Masoretic, Syriac and others to make sense of what occurred.

It appears that David asked Jonathan to tell his father a lie, unless he really intended to attend his family's celebration of the feast at Bethlehem. David's chair at the royal celebration would remain empty and Jonathan would wait for his father's questions and observe his reaction, which he would then pass on to David the next day.

Interestingly, Jonathan shows a clearer understanding of David's role as the future king of Israel than David evinces himself. This is clear from vv.13-15 where Jonathan says: "May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unflinching kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family — not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states about the location and the conversation between Jonathan and David: "The scene of this memorable conference was ... a shallow valley between Gibeah (Tell el-Fulil) and Nob, breaking down on the east in rocky declivities into Wady Suleim. Behind some of the rocks in it David could easily lie hid, and yet see Jonathan descending from the city above. The private dialogue which is here detailed at full length presents a most beautiful exhibition of these two amiable and noble-minded friends. Jonathan was led, in the circumstances, to be the chief speaker. The strength of his attachment, his pure disinterestedness, his warm piety, his invocation to God—consisting of a prayer and a solemn oath combined—the calm and full expression he gave of his conviction that his own family were, by the divine will, to be disinherited, and David elevated to the possession of the throne; the covenant entered into with David on behalf of his descendants, and the imprecation (1 Sam 20:16) denounced on any of them who should violate his part of the conditions; the reiteration of this covenant on both sides (1 Sam 20:17), to make it indissoluble—all this indicates such a power of mutual affection, such magnetic attractiveness in the character of David, such susceptibility and elevation of feeling in the heart of Jonathan, that this interview, for dramatic interest and moral beauty, stands unrivaled in the records of human friendship."

Jonathan was so sure that David was the future king of Israel that he pleaded in advance for his own life and that of his family. Apparently, it was the custom of the time that at the beginning of a new dynasty the old one would be exterminated. The Hebrew text of v.14 reads literally: "And not only while I yet live shall you show me the kindness of the Lord that I die not: but not [also] shall you cut off your kindness from my house forever: no not when the Lord has cut off everyone of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." The Hebrew word, rendered "kindness" is *chesed*, which is the word used for the covenant love of God. The Hebrew word for "cut off" is *karath*, which refers to the making of an alliance by cutting up animals and passing between the pieces. In this context it has the meaning of exterminate, but it also

1. Num. 10:10; 28:11-15

contains a powerful reminder of the pledge that leads to the making of a pact, such as the bond of friendship between the two. The covenant referred to here is described in detail in the covenant God made with Abraham when He promised the land of Canaan to him and his offspring.¹

Jonathan agrees to inform David of his findings after the New Moon celebration by an elaborate scheme in which the shooting of arrows would be used as a code to convey the message. Jonathan would shoot three arrows and tell his helper to go and collect them. If the boy would be told that the arrows were close by, it would mean that David was safe and could come out of hiding. If Jonathan would tell his boy that the arrows were farther away, it meant that David had to flee for his life.

During the feast David stayed in hiding, which means that he did not go to Bethlehem and that what Jonathan was telling his father about giving David permission to attend the family celebration was made up to deceive the king.

During the first day of the feast Saul did not think anything about David's absence, believing that he might be ritually impure and thus prevented to attend the celebration. The Levitical law stipulates the conditions which would keep a person to participate in certain sacred rituals.² When David did not show up the second day, Saul became suspicious and started to ask questions to which Jonathan answered with the pre-arranged lie. Saul reacted to this with an outburst of anger that was so intense that he lost control of himself. He called Jonathan "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!" not realizing that in doing so he not only insulted Jonathan's mother, his own wife, but also himself. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments here: "In the East it is the greatest possible insult to a man to call his mother names; but the word rendered *perverse*, instead of being a feminine adjective, is probably an abstract noun, and 'son of perversity of rebellion' would mean one who was thoroughly perverse in his resistance to his father's will." According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the Septuagint reads: "Son of the damsels who came of their own accord." The commentary states: "Were these the meaning of the Hebrew, then the bitter reflection must refer to some secret transaction between Saul and Jonathan's mother; which certainly reflects more dishonor on himself than on his brave son. Most sarcasms bear as hard upon the speaker as they do on him against whom they are spoken. Abusive language always reveals a mean, weak, and malevolent heart."

Jonathan's reply sounds rather naïve. After all, in his conversation with David, he had acknowledged that David was going to be the next king. If to his father he says: "What has he done?" he shows himself to be less transparent than a son could be expected to be with his father.

Bible scholars disagree about what happened next. Some believe that Saul threw his spear at Jonathan, others that David's empty chair was the target. Some think that the sentence refers to the previously described incidents in which Saul tried to pin David to the wall when the latter was playing the harp. The most logical explanation seems to be that Saul's spear hit David's empty seat. Whatever happened, Saul's gestures aroused Jonathan's fierce anger. He got up from the table without eating and left. That could be considered an insult to Saul. No one would ever leave the king's banquet without his permission.

The next morning the prearranged code is carried out and David learns that his life would be in danger if he would show himself again in Saul's presence. Coming out of his hiding place, David shows his respect to the crown prince by bowing down three times with his face to the ground. But then emotions got the best of both of them and they separated in tears. This was the last time the two friends would meet on earth. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes another Bible scholar, stating: "The scenes in this chapter are some of the most affecting presented to us in history, whether in old or modern times, and we may well wonder at the delicacy of feeling and the gentleness of the sentiments which these two men in those old rough times entertained for one another. No ancient writer has set before us so noble an example of a heart felt, unselfish,

1. See Gen. 15:7-21.

2. Lev. 15:2-16

and thoroughly human state of feeling, and none has described friendship with such entire truth in all its relations, and with such complete and profound knowledge of the human heart.”

iii. Ahimelech the priest helps David 21:1-9

1 David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.

3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."

4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here — provided the men have kept themselves from women."

5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!"

6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the Lord; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

8 David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent."

9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

This chapter describes the beginning of David's life as an outcast. From here on till the end of this book, David's main effort was to stay alive and out of reach of Saul, who relentlessly tried to kill David until the end of his own life.

Not knowing where to go, David turned to the place where the ark was kept at that time and where the Levitical priests kept the worship of Yahweh alive. Nob was a short distance from Jerusalem.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Nob means a *knoll* or *hill*, and apparently was situated a little to the north of Jerusalem on the road leading to Gath. The ark had evidently been removed thither by Saul early in his reign, after it had remained for twenty years in the house of Abinadab; and as eighty-five priests wearing an ephod were murdered there by Doeg at Saul's command (... 1 Samuel 22:18, 19), it is plain that the worship of Jehovah had been restored by him with something of its old splendor. And this agrees with Saul's character. At the commencement of his reign we find Ahiah with him as high priest, and even when he fell his excuse was the necessity for performing the public rites of religion (... 1 Samuel 15:15). But with him the king's will was first, the will of Jehovah second; and while he restores God's public worship as part of the glory of his reign, he ruthlessly puts the priests with their wives and families to death when he supposes that they have given aid to his enemy."

No reason is given for Ahimelech's trembling at the sight of David. The fact that David showed up alone was, obviously, unusual and the priest may have concluded that Saul had sent his son-in-law to administer some kind of discipline to the priest for acts that had aroused the king's displeasure. But we do not know this. It is obvious that Ahimelech was unaware of the problem between Saul and David. That conflict had been kept from the public. Some Bible scholars, however, believe that Ahimelech was aware of the clash and that he realized that helping David escape from Saul's wrath might make that wrath fall upon him. Fleeing for his life, David would probably make a disheveled impression. However urgent the king's

business may have been, David would have had time to get his own sword and provisions for himself and his men. Believing David would ease the priest's conscience.

What David told Ahimelech was an outright lie. This incident would haunt David for days afterwards, especially because it cost Ahimelech and his extended family their lives. In the dedication of one of his psalms David refers to it, by writing in the dedication: "For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: 'David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.'"¹ David's lie, like all lies told, betrays a lack of trust in God. It was not until the end of his life that David realized he had been under the Lord's protection from the moment Samuel anointed him.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about David's lie: "This pretence of a private commission from the king was a mere invention, but his 'appointing his servants to meet him at such and such a place' was probably the exact truth. After parting with Jonathan, David probably did not venture to show himself at home, but, while Saul still supposed him to be at Bethlehem, gave orders to some trusty officer to gather together a few of his most faithful men, and await him with them at some fit place. Meanwhile alone he sets out on his flight, and, having as yet no settled plan, goes to Nob, because it was out of the way of the road to Bethlehem, whither Saul would send to arrest him. Naturally such a visit would seem strange to Ahimelech; but David needed food and arms, and probably counsel; and, but for the chance of the presence of Doeg, no harm might have ensued. As it was, this visit of David completed the ruin of Eli's house."

When David asks for bread, Ahimelech tells him that the only bread available is the show bread that had been on the table in the holy place of the tabernacle and had been recently replaced by a new batch, so that the priest could eat it. The Levitical law stated: "This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire."² This meant that lay people were not allowed to eat it. In offering this bread to David and his men, under certain restrictions, Ahimelech actually broke the law. In Doeg's testimony about the event, he declared: "Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."³ Jesus would later refer to this incident, clearing David.⁴ Thus David was given the right to eat the consecrated food because of the unction he had received.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states about the presence of Doeg: "The information slipped in at this verse is significant for later developments in the story (1 Sam. 22:9). Saul had fought Edom (1 Sam. 14:47), and had taken *Doeg the Edomite* into his service, perhaps after his victory. *The chief of Saul's herdsmen* remains the preferred reading, despite the suggested emendation to 'runner,' in the light of relatively frequent mention of men to run before the king's chariot (1 Sam 8:11; 2 Sam. 15:1) or as messengers (1 Sam. 4:12; 10:23). The word translated 'chief' (Heb. *'abbir*) means 'mighty,' but is also used to mean 'violent' and 'obstinate'; the presence of this man was ominous, especially as he was *detained before the Lord* perhaps against his will, or at least as some kind of punishment. David later reveals that he had been uneasy at the presence of the Edomite at Nob (1 Sam. 22:22)."

David's last request of Ahimelech was for a sword. His excuse that he had no weapon on him "because the king's business was urgent" was the last lie he told the priest, unless David considered himself already to be the king and he was speaking about the urgency of his own business. He may have thought of Goliath's sword, since he knew it was kept in the sanctuary. When the priest gives that weapon to him, David was reminded of the greatest victory of his life, which ought to have given him the assurance that the God who had made him victorious then would keep and protect him throughout all of his life.

1. Ps. 52:1

2. Lev. 24:8,9

3. 1 Sam. 22:10

4. Matt. 12:3-5

iv. David in danger at Gath 21:10-15

- 10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.*
11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?'"
12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath.
13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.
14 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?"
15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

David must not have felt safe to remain at Nob because of the presence of Doeg, and after telling Ahimelech the lie about the urgent business he was on, he could not very well have remained there. His fleeing to Gath, the city of Goliath, armed with Goliath's sword, seems to be the dumbest thing he could have done. This act betrays his panic. Some suggest that David's going there may have been the advice Ahimelech gave him after consulting the Lord, but there is nothing to indicate this. Other Bible scholars suggest that David may have thought he could go to Gath incognito. The reception he receives at Gath disproves all of the above. David is immediately recognized as "the king of the land."

It seems doubtful that the people of Gath knew about David's unction. They may have had some information about Saul's lack of popularity, or they may simply have considered that Saul's general would make a better king of the country they were at war with than Saul. Anyhow, David realizes that he made a mistake in coming to Gath, a mistake so serious that it could cost him his life.

The solution he devises is clever, but we can hardly say that it demonstrates his faith in God's protection. Playing crazy is not something that glorifies the Lord.

After this incident, David wrote Psalm Thirty-four, which bears the heading: *When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.* We can say, though, that David certainly was not blameless when he wrote this psalm. When God saved him from the dangerous situation in which he found himself, it was not because he was innocent. God saved him because he was a sinner, not a saint. Nothing of what David had done could be classified as intentional sin. All of it was the result of the pressure of circumstances. David had not placed himself under God's protection, and that was the reason he found himself caught in the snares of the enemy. We cannot draw the lesson from this that it is not important to have a clear conscience, but we may conclude, and this is the important message of this psalm, that, if we fail morally, we have no reason to remain lying on the ground. We should never give in to the devil's declaration that all is lost when we fall. Surrendering to Satan's deception ought to be inconceivable to us. This psalm has to be read against this background of forgiveness and rehabilitation. It gives a deeper meaning to the word grace. David certainly did not deserve to be saved.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "It has been objected that nothing could be more improbable than that David, the conqueror of Goliath, should seek refuge with a Philistine lord, and that this is nothing more than a popular tale, which has grown out of the real fact recorded in ch. 27. But when men are in desperate straits they take wild resolutions, and this meeting with Doeg, just after he had broken down with grief (... 1 Samuel 20:41), evidently put David to his wits' end. As, moreover, Saul was degenerating into a cruel tyrant, desertions may have become not uncommon, and though only three or four years can have elapsed since the battle of Elah, as David was only about twenty-four years of age at Saul's death, yet the change from a boyish stripling to a bearded man was enough to make it possible that David might not be recognized. As for Goliath's sword, we have seen that it was not remarkable for its size, and was probably of the ordinary pattern imported from Greece. Even if recognized, Achish might welcome him as a deserter from Saul, the great enemy of the Philistines; for as a deserter never received pardon or mercy, he must now use his prowess to the very utmost against Saul. Finally, the historical truth of the narrative is vouched for by

Psalm 34., and the details are all different from those in ch. 27. David there is a powerful chieftain with a large following of trained soldiers, and feels so secure that he takes his wives with him; he asks for some place in which to reside, and occupies himself in continual forays. Here he is in the utmost distress, has no trained band of soldiers, and goes well nigh mad with mental anguish. And this is in exact keeping with that extreme excitement to which David was a prey in his last interview with Jonathan (... 1 Samuel 20:41); and only in his first grief at Saul's cruel bitterness would his mind have been so affected, and his conduct so rash."

We do not really know what kind of reception David expected to receive at King Achish court. In his panic he may not have considered the matter and he most likely never asked the Lord for guidance. From the way Achish's courtiers reacted, David must have felt that his life was in danger, so he faked insanity. He had probably seen enough of Saul's raving to know how to do this. Some Bible scholars believe that David may actually have suffered an attack of epilepsy brought on by pressure of circumstances.

Achish's reaction to David's raving sounds rather comical, unless, as some Bible scholars assume, there were cases of insanity in the king's family. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, for instance comments: "Jewish writers say that the wife and daughter of Achish were both mad; and this statement, assuming the fact to be so, gives an emphatic import to the question, 'Have I need of mad men ... shall this fellow come into my house?' David seems to have affected the appearance and sordid condition of a fool or a lunatic -- a man whose reason had been overturned by the many serve vicissitudes he had undergone. And in his defense it has been argued that self-preservation, the first law of nature, will justify the use of any stratagem for protecting life from threatened danger." I am more inclined to join Adam Clarke, who writes: "I confess I can neither feel the force nor the morality of this. Deceit and hypocrisy can never be pleasing in the sight of God."

v. David at Adullam and in Moab 22:1-5

1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there.

2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

3 From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?"

4 So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

5 But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments here: "Escaping from enemy territory, David made for the area he knew: Adullam (the name means 'refuge') in Judah, halfway between Gath and Bethlehem. It was a Canaanite city in patriarchal times (Gen. 38:1), and was captured by Joshua in the course of his occupation of the land (Josh. 12:15). Close by was a hill which was both fortified and known for its caves, which provided a natural shelter for the homeless David, though his movements did not go unnoticed. *His brothers and all his father's house*, under threat from King Saul because of their relationship to David, took advantage of the opportunity to escape from Bethlehem, which was too close for comfort to Gibeah. Others who resorted to him were men in *distress* (Heb. *mâ'ôq* suggests / oppressed), *in debt* and *discontented* or, more literally 'embittered,' and therefore passionate for change. It was from such raw material that David trained a loyal army, with its 'mighty men' who would do anything for him (cf. 2 Sam. 23:8-39). Thus his abilities as a leader were developed as he and his 'underground' force of *four hundred men* prepared for action. Not much later he was commanding six hundred men (1 Sam. 25:13). He appears to have accepted all comers. David's parents needed a safe place in which to make their home, hence the

journey to Moab, outside the territory of Saul, and suggested by family ties through Ruth, the Moabite grandmother of Jesse (Ruth 4:17)."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: "The whole clan apparently joined David in exile. In the East it is not uncommon for a whole family to be put to death for the fault of one member, and the massacre at Nob showed David's family what they might expect."

What David did in bringing his parents to Moab and asking for asylum for them is a beautiful object lesson for those who are called upon to wait for the Lord. It takes strength of heart to wait for God, as David expresses in one of his psalms: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."¹ And David did well in creating for himself and his family circumstances where he could allow himself to wait.

From v.5 we would get the impression that David returned to Adullam and that the prophet Gad told him not to stay there. But *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that David was in Moab and that Gad told him not to stay there. We read: "This sudden appearance of the prophet suggests [one scholar's] question, How came he among such people? But, in the first place, David's followers were not all of the sort described in ver. 2; and, next, this must be regarded as a declaration of the prophetic order in his favor. As we have a summary of David's proceedings in ver. 4, extending over some time, during which the massacre of the priests at Nob took place, we may well suppose that Saul had alienated from him the minds of all religious people, and that Gad, probably by Samuel's command, came to be David's counselor. The advice he gives is most important — Abide not in the hold. *I.e.* do not remain in the land of Moab. Had David done so he probably would never have become king. By remaining in Judah, and protecting the people from the Philistines, which Saul could no longer do, David grew in reputation and power, and from the list of those who joined him at Ziklag (... 1 Chronicles 12:1-22) it is evident not only that such was the case, but that there was a strong enthusiasm for him throughout not merely Judah, but all Israel. In the happier times which followed Gad became David's seer (... 2 Samuel 24:11), was God's messenger to punish David for numbering the people (*ibid.* ver. 13), and finally wrote a history of his life (... 1 Chronicles 29:29). As he thus survived David, he must have been a young man when he joined him, and possibly had been a companion of David in the prophetic schools at Naioth in Ramah."

vi. The price of helping David 22:6-23

6 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand, was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him.

7 Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?"

8 Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob.

10 Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king.

12 Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." "Yes, my lord," he answered.

1. Ps. 27:14

13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

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

15 Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

16 But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord.

18 The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.

19 He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David.

21 He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord.

22 Then David said to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family.

23 Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me."

The scene is an open-air council meeting in Gibeah. Whether this means that Saul had already set out in his pursuit of David, or whether a casual encounter with some of his soldiers turned into an official gathering, we do not know. Saul had been informed that David had been seen in Judah. There is no indication which Gibeah is meant here. There was a place by that name in Judah, but also in the territory of Benjamin. It was most likely "Gibeah of Saul" mentioned earlier in the book.¹ The fact that Saul addresses the people around him as "men of Benjamin" pleads for the latter.

About the fact that Saul was surrounded only by people of his own tribe *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Saul had evidently failed in blending the twelve tribes into one nation. He had begun well, and his great feat of delivering Jabesh Gilead by summoning the militia of all Israel together must have given them something of a corporate feeling, and taught them their power when united. Yet now we find him isolated, and this address to his officers seems to show that he had aggrandized his own tribe at the expense of the rest. Moreover, he appeals to the worst passions of these men, and asks whether they can expect David to continue this favoritism, which had given them riches and all posts of power. And then he turns upon them, and fiercely accuses them of banding together in a conspiracy against him, to conceal from him the private understanding which existed between his own son and his enemy."

The fact that Saul could only think in terms of conspiracy was an indication of his mental condition as well as of the fact that fellowship with God was nonexistent. God had rejected him as king and now he felt that his people were doing the same. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, remarks: "It is impossible not to feel sympathy for Saul in his isolation, yet it is of his own making. Neither his son nor David, whom he still regards as *his servant*, would have deserted him had Saul himself not driven them away by his attempts to murder them. Now he imagines that David is lying *in wait* to kill Saul, so attributing to David the motivation he himself would have had in similar circumstances."

Saul's speech seems to indicate that he had used his office as king to show favoritism to his own tribe at the expense of the rest of the country. Yet, the lack of response to this pep talk suggests that none of his kinsmen felt enough obligation to the king to give information about David and his whereabouts. Saul

1. I Sam. 11:4

seems to have managed to alienate his own people as well as the rest of the nation. Another strange feature in Saul's presentation of the facts is that he did learn about the role Jonathan had played in David's escape and yet, he is unwilling to do something against Jonathan.

Then Doeg speaks up and reports having seen David speaking with the priest Ahimelech at Nob and he tells that the priest consulted the Lord for David and gave him Goliath's sword and the showbread. When Saul calls Ahimelech and his whole family to Gibeah, the priest comes and hears that he is accused of high treason. Ahimelech pleads innocence to the charges of helping a conspirator and thus becoming a co-conspirator against the king. He knew nothing of the friction between David and Saul and had accepted David's lie about being on a secret mission as truth.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about this court hearing: "Ahimelech's answers are those of an innocent man who had supposed that what he did was a matter of course. But his enumeration of David's privileges of rank and station probably only embittered the king. In his eyes David was of all Saul's officers the most *faithful*, both trusty and trusted (... 1 Samuel 2:35). He was, moreover, the *king's son-in-law*; but the next words, he *goeth at thy bidding*, more probably mean, 'has admission to thy audience,' *i.e.* is thy privy councilor, with the right of entering unbidden the royal presence (comp. ... 2 Samuel 23:23, margin; ... 1 Chronicles 11:25). *Did I then begin to enquire of God for him?* Though the meaning of these words is disputed, yet there seems no sufficient reason for taking them in any other than their natural sense. It was probably usual to consult God by the Urim and Thummim on all matters of importance, and David, as a high officer of Saul's court, must often have done so before starting on such expeditions as are referred to in ... 1 Samuel 18:13. But the Bible is singularly reticent in such matters, and it is only incidentally that we learn how fully the Mosaic law entered into the daily life of the people. But for this frightful crime we should not even have known that Saul had brought the ark into his own neighborhood, and restored the services of the sanctuary. But just as he took care to have Ahiah in attendance upon him in war, so we cannot doubt but that his main object in placing the priests at Nob was to have the benefit of the Divine counsel in his wars. It would be quite unreasonable to suppose that such consultations required the king's personal attendance. *Thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.* Whatever Ahimelech had done had been in perfect good faith, and though David's conduct must have seemed to him suspicious, yet there was nothing that would have justified him in acting differently. Nevertheless, in spite of his transparent innocence, Saul orders the slaughter not only of God's high priest, but of the whole body of the priesthood whom he had placed at Nob, and now had summoned for this ferocious purpose into his presence."

Saul could have had no reason to believe that the whole country knew about his feud with David and he ought to reasonably have accepted Ahimelech's defense as proof of the priest's innocence. But the king's state of mind did not allow him to think other than in terms of conspiracy. He, therefore, pronounces the death sentence, not only upon Ahimelech, but upon the whole priestly family.

When Saul gives the order to execute the whole priestly clan to the guards who surround him, none of them dares to obey such a sacrilegious order. The Hebrew word used for guards is *raatsiyim*, "runner," a noun derived from the verb *ruwts*, "to run." They may have been the men who ran before Saul's chariot when he traveled.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary probably gives the best comment on Saul's criminal order to exterminate the whole priestly order. We read: "Never was the command of a prince more barbarously given: Turn and slay the priests of the Lord. This is spoken with such an air of impiety as can scarcely be paralleled. Had he seemed to forget their sacred office or relation to God, and taken no notice of that, he would thereby have intimated some regret that men of that character should fall under his displeasure; but to call them the priests of the Lord, when he ordered his footmen to cut their throats, looked as if, upon that very account, he hated them. God having rejected him, and ordered another to be anointed in his room, he seems well pleased with this opportunity of being revenged on the priests of the Lord, since God himself was out of his reach. What wickedness will not the evil spirit hurry men to, when he gets the dominion! He alleged, in his order that which was utterly false and unproved to him, that they knew when David fled; whereas they knew nothing of the matter. But malice and murder are commonly supported with lies. Never

was the command of a prince more honorably disobeyed. The footmen had more sense and grace than their master. Though they might expect to be turned out of their places, if not punished and put to death for their refusal, yet, come on them what would, they would not offer to fall upon the priests of the Lord, such a reverence had they for their office, and such a conviction of their innocence.”

It is true that Saul’s guards risked their lives in disobeying the king’s direct order. Evidently, Saul realized that he lacked the power to have his bodyguard executed as well; so he let them go. Turning to the Edomite Doeg, who had reported the incident at Nob, Saul ordered him to carry out the execution. It seems that Doeg went well beyond the limits of the order as it was given. He exterminated, with apparent glee, the whole priestly class, including women and children with everything they owned.

This earns him David’s blistering condemnation, as expressed in one of his psalms. In describing Doeg, David uses the Hebrew word *gibbowr*, “mighty man.” It is the word used to describe Nimrod, of whom we read: “Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, ‘Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.’”¹ David’s psalm reads: “For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’ Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth.”²

One of Ahimelech’s sons, Abiathar, escapes the massacre. We are not told how. Abiathar was probably not with the group of priests that went to have that fateful audience with Saul and by the time Doeg reached Nob to finish his work of extermination, he had a chance to flee. Evidently, it was from Abiathar that David heard about the killing of the priests, which makes him realize that he was responsible for their death. How this information must have affected David as he remembered his lying to Ahimelech, we can only imagine. It is true that David’s situation had been precarious after Saul had tried to pin him to the wall, but God could and would have delivered the man He had anointed to be king, had he put his trust in Him instead of telling lies. David’s confession to Abiathar, “I am responsible for the death of your father’s whole family” made him the priest’s debtor. It may also have been the reason Abiathar sided with the wrong pretender to the crown at the end of David’s life.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on this: “In the providence of God, Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, escaped the massacre, rescued the ephod (1 Sam. 23:6), and fled to join David, who thus had access to the priestly oracle, while Saul deprived himself of all such help. The only surviving priest and the king designate are together driven into hiding, each a support for the other, and their friendship continued right through David’s reign (but cf. 1 Kgs. 2:26-27). David became the protector of the priesthood.”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia has this to say about Abiathar: “Abiathar seems to have been at once recognized as David’s priest, the medium of consultation with Jehovah through the ephod (1 Sam 22:20-23; 23:6,9; 30:7-8). He was at the head of the priesthood, along with Zadok (1 Chron 15:11), when David, after his conquests (1 Chron 13:5; compare 2 Sam 6), brought the ark to Jerusalem. The two men are mentioned together as high priests eight times in the narrative of the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam 15:24 ff), and are so mentioned in the last list of David’s heads of departments (2 Sam 20:25). Abiathar joined with Adonijah in his attempt to seize the throne (1 Kings 1:7-42), and was for this deposed from the priesthood, though he was treated with consideration on account of his early comradeship with David (1 Kings 2:26-27). Possibly he remained high priest emeritus, as Zadok and Abiathar still appear as priests in the lists of the heads of departments for Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 4:4). Particularly apt is the passage in Ps 55:12-14, if one regards it as referring to the relations of David and Abiathar in the time of Adonijah. There

1. Gen. 10:8,9

2. Ps. 52:1-3

are two additional facts which, in view of the close relations between David and Abiathar, must be regarded as significant. One is that Zadok, Abiathar's junior, is uniformly mentioned first, in all the many passages in which the two are mentioned together, and is treated as the one who is especially responsible. Turn to the narrative, and see how marked this is. The other similarly significant fact is that in certain especially responsible matters (1 Chron 24; 18:16; 2 Sam 8:17) the interests of the line of Ithamar are represented, not by Abiathar, but by his son Ahimelech. There must have been something in the character of Abiathar to account for these facts, as well as for his deserting David for Adonijah. To sketch his character might be a work for the imagination rather than for critical inference; but it seems clear that though he was a man worthy of the friendship of David, he yet had weaknesses or misfortunes that partially incapacitated him."

vii. Saul hunts David 23:1-29

1 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,"

2 he inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The Lord answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

3 But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!"

4 Once again David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

5 So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah.

6 (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars."

8 And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod."

10 David said, "O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me.

11 Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will."

12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will."

13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

14 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

15 While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. 16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

18 The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

19 The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon?"

20 Now, O king, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for handing him over to the king."

21 Saul replied, "The Lord bless you for your concern for me.

22 Go and make further preparation. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty.

23 Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah."

24 So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon.

25 Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David.

26 Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them,

27 a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land."

28 Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth.

29 And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.

At this point David was in the forest of Hereth,¹ which was probably where the cave of Adullam was located. As Saul seems to have spent most of his time and energy to hunt down David instead of protecting his country, the Philistines took advantage of the situation and raided the city of Keilah, stealing the grain as it had been threshed.

The Pulpit Commentary describes the process of threshing: "As no rain falls in Palestine in the harvest season (... 1 Samuel 12:17), the corn is threshed out in the open air by a heavy wooden sledge made of two boards, and curved up in front, with pieces of basalt inserted for teeth, drawn over it by horses, or it is trampled out by cattle. [One Bible scholar] describes the threshing floor as 'a broad flat space on open ground, generally high. Sometimes the floor is on a flat rocky hill top, and occasionally it is in an open valley, down which there is a current of air; but it is always situated where most wind can be found, because at the threshing season high winds never occur, and the grain is safely stored before the autumn storms commence.' As the grain after winnowing is made into heaps until it can be carried home, there is always a period when the threshing floors have to be watched to guard them from depredation, and this was the time chosen by the Philistines for a foray in force."

This chapter is full of exciting features, showing the adventurous spirit of David, the reluctance of the men accompanying him, and the extraordinary way in which God led. It also shows the lack of gratitude the human heart reveals when help is given.

David's life, as well of the lives of the men with him, was in danger because of Saul's effort to capture and kill. The attitude of the men who wanted to play it safe seems to be the most reasonable and desirable. Safety is of the utmost importance when life is in danger. Somehow, the fact that the Philistines were able to take advantage of the tension between Saul and David irked David. So, instead of first thinking of himself and his own safety, David asked the Lord to guide him. This consultation was done by the priest Abiathar by means of the ephod (v.6), probably by using the Urim and Thummim. Amazingly, against all human logic, God answers "Go ahead. Attack the Philistines!" David's men object, reasoning that they had enough to do keeping themselves out of Saul's reach. So David consults the Lord for the second time and receives the clear answer that God would deliver the Philistines into David's hands.

Evidently, the Philistines had done more than merely stolen the grain off the threshing floor from the people of Keilah; they had raided the city and taken off with the people's livestock. We get the impression that the Philistines had actually occupied the city, for we read that David and his men took residence inside the town.

1. 1 Sam. 22:5

When word reaches Saul, he turns pious, praising the Lord for handing David over to him, since he had taken residence in Keilah. Saul, evidently, planned to sneak up on David, surround Keilah and besiege it so that David could not escape and the people of Keilah would turn him over to Saul or to starve in a prolonged siege.

But Saul's plan did not remain secret. There must have been people in Saul's court who were on David's side and who leaked the information to David. It may have been Jonathan, but this we are not told. So David consults God again and learns that Saul would come and that the people of Keilah would rather hand him over to Saul than be subjected to a siege.

The Hebrew word for "citizen" used in the phrase "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" is *ba'al*, for "master." *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states here: "All 'the inhabitants of Keilah' probably did not join in the treachery against David, only the Baalites, Hebrew: Baali for 'men' of Keilah (verses 11,12), i.e. the Canaanite portion, votaries of Baal, to whom David's devotion to Jehovah and the presence of the sacred ephod with the priest Abiathar were an offense. Ps 31:6,8,21 alludes, with the undesignedness which characterizes genuineness, to this: 'I have hated them that regard lying vanities (idols as Baal), but I trust in Jehovah.' 'Thou hast known my soul in adversities' (David's phrase in the independent history, 2 Sam 4:9). 'Thou hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy, Thou hast set my feet in a large room Blessed be Jehovah, for He hath shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city,' the very description of Keilah."

Whether the people of Keilah can be blamed for the lack of gratitude toward David, remains an open question. We could be amazed that Saul did not come to teach these people a lesson for having given asylum to his enemy. If he had not hesitated to kill the priests and wipe the town of Nob off the map, why did he spare Keilah?

V.14 seems to cover an extended period in which David and his men moved around between Adullam and Ziph during which Saul pursued them without success. At one point Jonathan came to meet with David for the last time.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments on Jonathan's visit: "It is probable that there was always a secret intercourse between David and Jonathan, and that by this most trusty friend he was apprized of the various designs of Saul to take away his life. Since Jonathan well knew that God had appointed David to the kingdom he came now to encourage him to trust in the Most High, and to assure him that the hand of Saul should not prevail against him; and at this interview they renewed their covenant of friendship. Now all this Jonathan could do, consistently with his duty to his father and his king. He knew that David had delivered the kingdom; he saw that his father was ruling unconstitutionally; and he knew that God had appointed David to succeed Saul. This he knew would come about in the order of Providence; and neither he nor David took one step to hasten the time. Jonathan, by his several interferences, prevented his father from imbruing his hands in innocent blood: a more filial and a more loyal part he could not have acted; and therefore, in his attachment to David, he is wholly free of blame."

When David and his men were in the desert of Ziph, some of the people of the area went to Saul to betray his presence there to Saul. Whether they did this because Saul had put a price on David's head or for another reason, we are not told. Ziph is about three miles southeast of Hebron and the area is mountainous with probably a number of caves in which it was easy for David and his men to hide.

Quoting some other source, *The Pulpit Commentary* calls it: "the dreary desert which extends between the Dead Sea and the Hebron mountains. It is called Jeshimon, or 'Solitude,' in the Old Testament, and 'wilderness of Judea' in the New (... Matthew 3:1). It is a plateau of white chalk, 2000 feet lower than the watershed, and terminated on the east by cliffs which rise vertically from the Dead Sea shore to a height of about 2000 feet. The scenery is barren and wild beyond all description. The chalky ridges are scored by innumerable torrents, and their narrow crests are separated by broad flat valleys. Peaks and knolls of fantastic forms rise suddenly from the swelling downs, and magnificent precipices of ruddy limestone stand up like fortress-walls above the sea. Not a tree nor a spring is visible in the waste, and only the desert partridge and the ibex are found ranging the solitude. It was in this pathless desert that David found refuge

from Saul's persecution, and the same has been a place of retreat from the days of Christ to the present time."

We are not told who informed David about Saul's approach, but David learned in time that staying in the desert of Ziph was not advisable, so he moved farther south to the desert of Maon. There, Saul came closest to capturing David. God intervened by allowing a Philistine invasion, which forced Saul to abandon his pursuit. David so narrowly escaped from Saul that he named the place Sela Hammahlekoth, which, according to a footnote in *The New International Version*, means "rock of parting." Some Bible scholars believe that the name indicates that Saul had divided his army into two in order to surround David. That strategy could have been successful, had it not been for the fact that the Philistine invasion forced Saul to give up.

From there David and his men moved to En-Gedi, at the border of the Dead Sea. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about that place: "The limestone borders rise so abruptly to a height of 2,000 ft. immediately on the West, that the place can be approached only by a rock-cut path. Two streams, Wady Sugeir and Wady el-Areyeh, descend on either side through precipitous rocky gorges from the uninhabitable wilderness separating it from Bethlehem and Hebron." It was in that area where Saul almost lost his battle with David, in the amusing incident told in the next chapter.

viii. David spares Saul 24:1-25:1a

*24:1 After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi."
2 So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.*

3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.

4 The men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.

6 He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."

7 With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

8 Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

9 He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?"

10 This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed.'

11 See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.

12 May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.

13 As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

14 "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?"

15 May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

16 When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud.

17 "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly."

18 You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me.

19 When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today.

20 I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. 21 Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

22 So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

25:1a Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, introduces this chapter with: "David had been well aware that he had only a temporary respite from Saul's pursuit, which began again once the Philistine threat had been dealt with. Saul with his three crack battalions should have been more than a match for the fugitive, and the king was closer than he realized to capturing him, but this time David had the upper hand, and the roles of the two men are reversed. That Saul should have chosen the very cave where David and his men had taken up occupation was a striking coincidence that had its funny side. But it was also an unexpected opportunity for David to snatch the initiative. So far as his men were concerned, this was his chance to kill the king, and David moved silently towards his victim as if to do so, but instead he *cut off the skirt* (Heb. *kânâp*) of Saul's robe, a very risky maneuver to accomplish without detection, and one which would take his men by surprise. David's explanation cleverly drew the sting of his men's aggression; his repentance for having taken advantage of the king's exposure made impossible any attempt on his life."

The incident described here demonstrates God's sense of humor as well as the magnanimity of David's character. Saul had to go to the place "where the emperor goes on foot." In God's providence, he chose the cave where David and his men were hiding. The Hebrew text uses an interesting euphemism, stating that "Saul went in a cave to cover his feet." Some Bible scholars interpret the expression to mean that Saul wanted to take a nap. The Vulgate's rendering that Saul went "to purge his stomach" is probably the most correct one.

Saul, being close to the entrance, was well visible to David and his men who were in the back of the cave where it was pitch dark and where Saul was unable to see them. David's men urge him to take advantage of the situation and kill Saul. That was obviously the intent of the words "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" There is no record of that divine promise and it is more likely that the men merely wanted to say that this was David's opportunity to do to Saul what Saul wanted to do to him.

Bible scholars differ in their opinion as to what David's actual motives were as he crept towards Saul. Some believe that initially he intended to kill Saul and that at the last moment his conscience kept him from doing so. Others believe that his intent never was to murder, but that he simply wanted to do something that would convince the king he had no reason to hunt him down. The Hebrew word *keen`ach`reey-* (afterward) that follows the act and introduces the statement about David's qualms, indicates that David felt that even this insult to Saul's dignity had been inappropriate. Having received the anointing himself, David had developed a clear understanding of what the unction meant in the sight of God. He believed that an insult to the person who had been anointed was an insult to God Himself. A comparison between Saul's handling of God's unction and David's makes David the hero and Saul a miserable failure. The oil that had been poured on David's head made him as humble as the Holy Spirit makes humble anybody of whom He takes possession.

Before being able to confront Saul, David had to deal with his men, who evidently wanted to do to Saul what David had not been willing to do. They believed David had acted out of weakness instead of in the power of the Holy Spirit.

David's speech to Saul outside the cave is a masterpiece of eloquence. As Saul walks away wearing his cloak, unaware of the missing scrap, David calls him with the piece of cloak in his hand, as if to say: "Your majesty, you lost something!" David prostrates himself before Saul, who could have rushed to him and kill him while David was lying on the ground. David does not say: "Why are you doing this to me?" He makes it appear as if Saul had been listening to the wrong counselors who said that David planned to kill Saul. The scrap of fabric proves that David had had a chance but didn't take advantage. Calling Saul his master and the LORD's anointed, reminded Saul painfully of his own unction and what he had done with it. The point David so powerfully makes is that Saul tried to kill David, but David did not try to kill Saul.

David's humility does not prevent him from reading Saul the riot act. The accusation is clear "I am not trying to kill you and never will, but you are trying to kill me." And David appeals to the highest court of justice: "May the LORD be our judge and decide between us." The fact that David honors Saul's unction as king does not mean that he accepts uncritically whatever the king does.

Regarding David's comparing himself to a dead dog or a flea, *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states: "And even if he should wish to attack the king, he did not possess the power. This thought introduces v. 14: 'After whom is the king of Israel gone out? After whom dost thou pursue? A dead dog, a single flea.' By these similes David meant to describe himself as a perfectly harmless and insignificant man, of whom Saul had no occasion to be afraid, and whom the king of Israel ought to think it beneath his dignity to pursue. A dead dog cannot bite or hurt, and is an object about which a king ought not to trouble himself (cf. 2 Sam 9:8 and 16:9, where the idea of something contemptible is included). The point of comparison with a flea is the insignificance of such an animal (cf. 1 Sam 26:20)." *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "In calling himself a *dead dog* he implies that he was at once despicable and powerless. Even more insignificant is a *flea*, Hebrew, 'one flea,' 'a single flea.' The point is lost by omitting the numeral. David means that it is unworthy of a king to go forth with 3000 men to hunt a single flea. As the king's conduct is thus both unjust and foolish, David *therefore* appeals to Jehovah to be judge and *plead his cause*, *i.e.* be his advocate, and state the proofs of his innocence. For *deliver me out of thy hand*, the Hebrew is, 'will judge me out of thy hand,' *i.e.* will judge me, and by doing so justly will deliver me from thy power."

In a moment of lucidity, Saul realizes that he just escaped death, not by his own agility but because of David's magnanimity. He breaks down emotionally and weeps out loud. The following confession is amazing. Saul understands that David will be the next king, according to Samuel's prophetic words, and he pleads with David to spare his family and keep the name of the house of Saul alive after his own death. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "The verb 'cut off' forms something of a recurring theme, a leitmotiv, in 1 Samuel 20 – 24. Jonathan had reiterated it when he and David exchanged oaths of loyalty (1 Sam. 20:14-17). 'When the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David,' Jonathan asks not to be among their number. In the present chapter David cuts off the corner of Saul's robe, and symbolically makes a bid for his status as king, for the royal robe stood for the royal office, and already the robe-tearing had been interpreted by Samuel as a symbol of the cutting off of Saul's dynasty (1 Sam. 15:28). Now David had 'grasped at' the kingship of Israel by cutting away part of Saul's robe, and by calling the king his 'father' he was preparing the way for a legitimate claim to the throne after Saul's death."

On the opening verse of the next chapter, Ms. Baldwin comments: "There is an appropriateness about the death of Samuel just at the point when Saul had been willing to accept the implications of Samuel's judgment on him, and to let it be known publicly that David is to be his successor. For Israel Samuel's death marked the end of an era, but his burial under the floor of his house at Ramah would discourage any tendency to venerate his tomb."

It would have been nice if the incident described in this chapter had actually ended the feud between Saul and David. As it is, Saul's paranoia returned shortly after this encounter and he kept on hunting down David till the end of his life.

ix. David wins Abigail 25:1b-44

1b Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon.

2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel.

3 His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep.

5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name.

6 Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!

7 "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing.

8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'"

9 When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited.

10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.

11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

12 David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word.

13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

14 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them.

15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing.

16 Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them.

17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

18 Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys.

19 Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them.

21 David had just said, "It's been useless — all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good.

22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.

24 She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say.

25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name — his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent.

26 "Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal.

27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you.

28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live.

29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling.

30 When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel,

31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant."

32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.

34 Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."

35 Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request."

36 When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak.

37 Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone.

38 About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head." Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife.

40 His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife."

41 She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants."

42 Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife.

43 David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives.

44 But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

The area in which this scene plays out, Maon, is the same area where Saul had almost closed in on David, but had been called away because of a Philistine invasion.¹ Obviously, Nabal, one of the two main characters in this narrative, had been informed of the details of Saul's campaign, which is clear from his answer to the men David had sent to ask for a donation.

David and his company were in need of supplies and since they had been helping Nabal by protecting the large flock and herd, they reasonably expected to be rewarded for their effort. Sheep shearing was celebrated in grandiose fashion, as it meant profit from the sale of wool. And with three thousand sheep, Nabal would end up with considerable earnings. The fact that David and his men not only had never stolen any of Nabal's animals but protected them from other raiders, both human and animal, would be reason enough for Nabal to generously recompense them. Nabal was rich, but like Scrooge, he kept a tightfisted hand at the grindstone.

1. See I Sam. 23:19,24,25.

The name Nabal means “foolish” or “wicked.” It is doubtful that this is the name his parents gave him at birth; it seems rather that it is a nickname given to the man because of his reputation of being stupid and dishonest. The name of Nabal’s wife Abigail, on the other hand, means “father of joy,” or maybe “father’s joy.” She was as intelligent and eloquent as her husband was dense and rude.

The message David sent Nabal was polished and polite, wishing Nabal well and asking for a donation, which was actually a payment due. When the ten men delivered David’s message, we read: “Then they waited,” which may mean that Nabal made them wait before giving an answer.

Nabal’s questions have nothing to do with a request for information. He knew very well who David was and which family he belonged to. He calls David Saul’s runaway slave and makes it sound as if running away had become epidemic among Hebrew slaves. He speaks euphemistically about his abundant provisions as “bread and water,” meant for his own shepherds and nobody else. David’s well-organized army, he calls “men coming from who knows where.”

When David receives Nabal’s message, which is reported to him word-for-word, he becomes furious and responds in anger. In planning to kill Nabal and all his male staff, David intended to take possession of Nabal’s whole herd instead of merely the token he had asked for.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on David’s reaction: “Here David did not act like himself. His resolution was bloody, to cut off all the males of Nabal’s house, and spare none, man nor man-child. The ratification of his resolution was passionate: So, and more also do to God (he was going to say to me, but that would better become Saul’s mouth, ch. 14:44, than David’s, and therefore he decently turns it off) to the enemies of David. Is this thy voice, O David? Can the man after God’s own heart speak thus unadvisedly with his lips? Has he been so long in the school of affliction, where he should have learned patience, and yet so passionate? Is this he who used to be dumb and deaf when he was reproached (Ps 38:13), who but the other day spared him who sought his life, and yet now will not spare any thing that belongs to him who has only put an affront upon his messengers? He who at other times used to be calm and considerate is now put into such a heat by a few hard words that nothing will atone for them but the blood of a whole family. Lord, what is man! What are the best of men, when God leaves them to themselves, to try them, that they may know what is in their hearts? From Saul David expected injuries, and against those he was prepared and stood upon his guard, and so kept his temper; but from Nabal he expected kindness, and therefore the affront he gave him was a surprise to him, found him off his guard, and, by a sudden and unexpected attack, put him for the present into disorder. What need have we to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation!”

David obviously did not like Nabal. Few people probably did. This lack of chemistry between the two characters may have been what triggered David’s overreaction. But what he planned was nothing short of murder and Abigail was right in saying that such an act would stain his character for the rest of his life and rob him from intimate fellowship with God.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “David’s determination was fierce and violent. No doubt Nabal’s insult irritated him, and possibly also the rude outlaws round him would have protested against any other course; but Nabal’s words, rude though they were, would not justify David in the rough vengeance which he meditated. Abigail throughout her speech argues that David was taking too violent a course, and one for which he would afterwards have been sorry.”

Nabal’s servant saves the day for David. He reports to Abigail what happened. Obviously, he understood that Nabal’s attitude could have disastrous consequences for his master as well as for the servants. This could mean that David’s delegation had told the servant what they thought David’s reaction would be. They may actually have influenced David in the way they reported the incident. The servant’s act also throws a light on the poor working relationship Nabal must have had with his underlings. They must have despised him.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes about Abigail’s action: “The prudence and address of his wife was the means of saving himself and family from utter destruction. She acknowledged the demand of her formidable neighbors; but, justly considering that to atone for the

insolence of her husband, a greater degree of liberality had become necessary, she collected a large amount of food, accompanying it with the most valued products of the country.”

When Abigail meets David he is still red hot with anger, swearing that he will exterminate Nabal and all his household. Abigail prostrates herself before David, asking him to listen to her before doing anything. Since she was a beautiful woman and intelligent, she had no trouble catching David’s attention. She begins by taking the blame for all that happened, which David must have understood, was not true. What she meant was that if she had been informed she could have avoided Nabal’s reaction by taking charge, as she had probably done before.

What Abigail is saying to David is that God has kept David from putting his plan to murder Nabal and all his men into action. The words “May your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal” could be interpreted to mean, Nabal is a dumb and harmless person; may all your enemies be as stupid and powerless to harm you. It is obvious that Abigail’s marriage to Nabal was not a happy one. She had not married this man out of love and the marriage had probably been prearranged against her will. Part of Nabal’s prosperity, if not all of it was probably the fruit of Abigail’s labor and sharp mind. She fits well the profile of the virtuous housewife Solomon would later compose in Proverbs 31.

Abigail shows a thorough knowledge of David’s life story. She knew that David was the future king of Israel. She refers to David’s words in his encounter with Goliath, speaking of the army of Israel as fighting the battles of the Lord. And her reference to David’s sling must not have failed to miss the mark.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the phrase as follows: “the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God”: “This saying has long been applied to life beyond the grave, and its initial Hebrew letters are today found on almost every Jewish tombstone. This beautiful metaphor is taken from the custom of binding up valuable things in a bundle to prevent their being injured. The figure is that of a precious jewel carefully tied up (Gen 42:35). The converse follows in the prayer that the lives of David’s enemies might be cast away like the stones from a sling.”

Her warning that killing Nabal and his men would be a “staggering burden of needless bloodshed” on David’s conscience for the rest of his life shows her deep psychological insight. Abigail’s apology for Nabal’s behavior is a masterpiece of eloquence.

David accepts Abigail’s words as proof of divine intervention, keeping him from committing a crime that would stain his character and mar his future. He accepts the gifts she brought and tells her to go home in peace.

When Abigail arrives home she finds her husband feasting and too drunk to be able to grasp the fact that he would have been dead if his wife had not stood in the breach for him earlier in the day. So Abigail had to wait until the morning of the next day to tell him. When it penetrates to Nabal what would have been the consequence of his rude behavior he suffers an apparent heart attack and dies about ten days later. Nabal’s death is also ascribed to divine intervention. *The Pulpit Commentary* believes that upon hearing Abigail’s report, he may have had “a fit of violent indignation, flying out possibly at her as he had at David’s messengers ... the result of which was an attack of apoplexy, and after lying in a state of insensibility for ten days, he died.” Although this is also conjecture, it is a possible one. When David hears about Nabal’s death he sent a message to Abigail, asking her to marry him. We do not know if there was any lapse of time involved. Where in Western culture a speedy remarriage would be frowned upon, that would not necessarily be the case in other cultures. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “By his marriage with Abigail, it is probable that he was able to take possession of all Nabal’s property in Carmel and Maon.”

Saul had taken David’s wife Michal and had given her to Paltiel and David had remarried by taking Ahinoam of Jezreel. When Abigail receives the proposal to become David’s second wife she tells David’s servants that she consents to become David’s slave, “ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master’s servants.”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, makes this observation about David’s proposal to Abigail: “While David’s wooing of Abigail is not unexpected, surely it is going too far to suggest that David picked a quarrel with Nabal with just such a marriage in mind. His first concern had to be to feed his troops, and it

was in that connection that the incident occurred. Nevertheless, the chapter does provide a proleptic glimpse, within David's ascent, of his fall from grace. He could be very susceptible to feminine charms. His passionate nature had great potential, both for good and for evil, and this incident should have been a warning for his life as king."

x. David spares Saul a second time 26:1-25

1 The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?"

2 So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David.

3 Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he saw that Saul had followed him there,

4 he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived.

5 Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.

6 David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?" "I'll go with you," said Abishai.

7 So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

8 Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

9 But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"

10 As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

11 But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

12 So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the Lord had put them into a deep sleep.

13 Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them.

14 He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?" Abner replied, "Who are you who calls to the king?"

15 David said, "You're a man, aren't you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king.

16 What you have done is not good. As surely as the Lord lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?"

17 Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, David my son?" David replied, "Yes it is, my lord the king."

18 And he added, "Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of?"

19 Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the Lord has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the Lord! They have now driven me from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.'

20 Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea — as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."

21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly."

22 "Here is the king's spear," David answered. "Let one of your young men come over and get it."

23 The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed.

24 As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble."

25 Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph." So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

This is the second time the Ziphites betray David's presence to Saul.¹ Ziph was in the same region where Nabal had resided and it is quite possible, as Adam Clarke suggests, that David had taken up residence there after his marriage to Abigail.

Some Bible scholars believe that this story is another version of the previous incident in which Saul searched for David in the same area. Apart from the fact that there are similarities it would be difficult to believe that the same author or his subsequent editor would tell the same story twice and get so many points wrong the second time.

After the previous incident, David may have believed that Saul would leave him alone as he had promised. Saul's mental instability, as well as his profound fear and hatred of David, must have tipped the king's scale and when Saul received word from the Ziphites he set out again to find and destroy his enemy.

When David's scouts confirm Saul's arrival David sets out at night, probably with two of his men, Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states: "*Ahimelech the Hittite* is not to be confused with either of the other Ahimelechs who come into David's life (1 Sam. 21:1; 2 Sam. 8:17). *Abishai the son of Zeruiah* was a nephew of David's (1 Chr. 2:13-16). His sister Zeruiah had three sons (her husband is never named), all of them valiant in David's entourage. Abishai is positively eager to accompany David on his dangerous mission."

From the top of the hill David sees Saul's army camped for the night. Abishai volunteers to accompany David down to the camp. They find the whole army fast asleep, including the watchmen. Saul lay in the middle surrounded by his general Abner and some of his lifeguard. Abishai considered the fact that Saul was fast asleep proof of a God-given opportunity to commit regicide. The conversation between the two must have been carried on in a very low whisper in the other's ear. David refuses, arguing that the crime would amount to treason. He had committed his case to the Lord and he believed that the Lord would make good on the unction Samuel had given him earlier.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "The ferocious vehemence of the speaker is sufficiently apparent from his language; but David's magnanimity soared far above the notions of his followers. Though Saul's cruelty and perfidy, and general want of right principle, had sunk him to a low pitch of degradation, yet that was no reason for David imitating him in doing wrong. Besides, he was the sovereign: David was a subject; and though God had rejected him from the kingdom, it was every way the best and most dutiful course, instead of precipitating his fall by imbruing their hands in his blood, and thereby contracting the guilt of a great crime, to await the awards of that retributive Providence which sooner or later would take him off by some sudden and mortal blow. He who with impetuous haste was going to exterminate Nabal, meekly spared Saul. But Nabal refused to give a tribute to which justice and gratitude, no less than custom, entitled David. Saul was under the judicial infatuation of heaven. Thus David withheld the hand of Abishai; but at the same time directed him to carry off some things which would show where they had been, and what they had done. Thus, he obtained the best of victories over him, by heaping coals of fire on his head."

So the two "borrow" Saul's spear and water jug and climb back up the hill. The amazing fact that David could pull off this dangerous stunt is ascribed to God's intervention in putting the whole army asleep.

1. 1 Sam. 23:19

The following scene is filled with the thickest irony. From a safe distance, David shouts down to Abner, whose responsibility it was to defend his monarch. David calls the general to task for sleeping on his watch. In the question “You’re a man, aren’t you?” the Hebrew word used is *’iysh*, “man”, which in this context may have the added meaning of “hero.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “This incidental testimony to Abner’s great eminence as a warrior is fully borne out by David’s dirge at Abner’s death (2 Sam 3:31-34,38), as well as by his whole history. At the same time David’s bantering tone in regard to Abner, coupled with what he says in 1 Sam 26:19, makes it probable that David attributed Saul’s persecution of him in some degree to Abner.”

Abner could have been killed because of his neglect; his obligation was to guard the king with his life. David’s shouts wake up Saul, who tenderly addresses David as “my son.” David in answer addresses Saul as “my lord the king.” Again David avoids holding Saul personally responsible for his efforts to kill him, suggesting that Saul may have been receiving the wrong kind of information from his counselors. David even allows for the possibility that Saul may be thinking he was doing the Lord’s work. All this was meant to prick Saul’s conscience in realizing that there had been a divine call upon his life and that the unction he had received, although God had revoked it, was still the reason why David had not killed his nemesis.

David’s allusion to serving other gods sounds as if he believed God to be merely a local deity, whose dominion would be limited to the confines of the land of Canaan. Although this may not have been what David had in mind, the words make us realize how, in the Jewish mind, the worship of YHWH was linked to the place of God’s revelation on earth, which was above the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman: “A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth,”¹ indicates how strong that concept was still in Jesus’ day.

On the words “Go, serve other gods,” *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “The meaning is this: They have carried it so far now, that I am obliged to separate from the people of God, to flee from the land of the Lord, and, because far away from His sanctuary, to serve other gods. The idea implied in the closing words was, that Jehovah could only be worshipped in Canaan, at the sanctuary consecrated to Him, because it was only there that He manifested himself to His people, and revealed His face or gracious presence (vid., Ps 42:2-3 Ps 84:11 Ps 143:6 ff.). ‘We are not to understand that the enemies of David were actually accustomed to use these very words, but David was thinking of deeds rather than words’ (Calvin).”

However strange the concept may be to us, we must bear in mind that God’s revelation in the Old Testament was localized. A New Testament equivalent is expressed in Jesus’ words: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”² Although there is of course a great difference between a geographic place on earth and a person, the principle that God can only be met in one way is the same. The core dogma of Christian faith is that salvation and fellowship with God can only be found in Jesus Christ. To state that all ways lead to God is as contradictory to us as worshipping God outside the boundaries of the Promised Land was to David. It was not until the time of the Babylonian captivity that Daniel and Ezekiel discovered that God revealed Himself abroad also. By then the temple had been destroyed and the ark had disappeared.

In his reaction to David’s address, Saul makes the most complete confession we have heard him make so far: “I have sinned. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly.” Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on this: “Saul had learnt by this time to admit to his faults (1 Sam. 15:24-25; 24:17), but never before had he gone so far as to say, *I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly*. In this contrite frame of mind, Saul wants David to return, but David ignores this request. He has given up all

1. John 4:21-24

2. John 14:6

hope of being able to trust Saul's gestures towards reconciliation, so he submits Saul to the indignity of having to send a soldier to fetch his spear, and commits himself to the Lord, rather than to Saul, for protection and deliverance. Unlike Nabal, Saul had not collapsed on hearing that he might have lost his life at David's hand, but his is a sorry figure, nonetheless, as he pronounces his blessing on David and foresees his many successes, which presuppose Saul's death. These last words to David were worthy of Saul, and such as David could cherish in his memory of 'the Lord's anointed' in days to come. Apart from that, nothing had changed. David continued his wanderings, and Saul went back to his court. We are not told whether he recovered his spear, the symbol of his kingship." As far as we know this was the last time Saul tried to capture David.

d. David resorts to the Philistines 27:1 – 31:13

i. With Achish, king of Gath 27:1-28:2

27:1 But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

2 So David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maach king of Gath.

3 David and his men settled in Gath with Achish. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal.

4 When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

5 Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?"

6 So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since.

7 David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.

8 Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Gîrzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.)

9 Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

10 When Achish asked, "Where did you go raiding today?" David would say, "Against the Negev of Judah" or "Against the Negev of Jerahmeel" or "Against the Negev of the Kenites."

11 He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, "They might inform on us and say, 'This is what David did.'" And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory.

12 Achish trusted David and said to himself, "He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant forever."

28:1 In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army."

2 David said, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do." Achish replied, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes this about David's request for asylum among the Philistines: "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul expressed the human fear David had, living like a hunted animal. Though he knew that he had been anointed to be king, and had seen the Lord's providential ordering of his life, he could not bear indefinitely the hide-and-seek existence in Judah's barren wilderness, especially now that he had his wives to provide for. The hospitality of Achish at Gath, in welcoming not only an army of six hundred but also wives and children, was remarkable, and demonstrates David's power to charm even an enemy king. David's ruse succeeded and Saul *sought for him no more.*"

The Pulpit Commentary states: "It was the second treachery of the Ziphites which made David feel that, surrounded as he was by spies, there was no safety for him but in taking that course to which, as he so sorrowfully complained to Saul, his enemies were driving him (... 1 Samuel 26:19). His words there show that the thought of quitting Judaea was already in his mind, so that this chapter follows naturally on ch. 26., and not, as some have argued, upon ch. 24."

It is quite understandable that David did not trust Saul and did not return to the king's court. It is also clear, as *The Pulpit Commentary* points out, that he could not trust the Ziphites, but what is objectionable is that he did not trust the Lord.

It seems that in leaving the place of God's revelation, David did in fact surrender to the influence of the "other gods" of the Philistines. As in the first instance when he fled to Achish and escaped with his life in faking insanity, David this time also resorted to deception. After David escaped from Achish's court the first time, he wrote Psalm 34, ascribing his deliverance to God's intervention; we find no record of praise for the time David and his men spent in Philistine country during this period.

In conferring with Achish David and his men end up in Ziklag, which originally had been assigned to the tribe of Simeon, but had been captured by the Philistines. In Ziklag David was out of sight of Achish, which allowed him to raid the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "David directed his attacks against the plunderers who despoiled Judean as well as Philistine towns. His policy of extermination protected him from informers who might have told Achish that David was playing a double game. David would report that he had fought against Judah or Judah's allies, the *Jerahmeelites* (1 Chr. 2:9), whom David had protected together with the *Kenites* (1 Sam. 30:29). The latter tribe had entered the wilderness of Judah near Arad, to the east of Beersheba, and settled in that region. In fact he fought only against their common enemies, but Achish trusted David, believing that David was alienating himself from his own people out of loyalty to the Philistines, whose vassal he appeared to be: *my servant always* (cf. Deut 15:17). This was the situation when Achish was preparing for war to gain supremacy of Israel. David found himself in a tight corner when Achish committed his army to fighting against Saul, and David to becoming chief bodyguard to Achish. David's answer, designed to avoid a straight reply, satisfied Achish but left David wondering how he would escape this dilemma."

ii. Saul consults a medium 28:3-25

3 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.

4 The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa.

5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.

6 He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

7 Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.

8 So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name."

9 But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"

10 Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As surely as the Lord lives, you will not be punished for this."

11 Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said.

12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"

13 The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground."

14 "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

16 Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has turned away from you and become your enemy?"

17 The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors — to David.

18 Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today.

19 The Lord will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines."

20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and night.

21 When the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken, she said, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do.

22 Now please listen to your servant and let me give you some food so you may eat and have the strength to go on your way."

23 He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his men joined the woman in urging him, and he listened to them. He got up from the ground and sat on the couch.

24 The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast.

25 Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.

Both Saul and David are out of God's will at this point of their lives. God had not spoken to David because David had not asked; He did not speak to Saul because Saul had not obeyed. Both men are in a bind, not knowing what to do in connection with the upcoming Philistine attack on Israel.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the war that provides the background for this story: "This was, as Josephus has observed, a war upon a much larger scale than any that had been carried on since the defeat of the Philistines in the valley of Elah; for we find that the invasion was made from the north, and the decisive battle fought not in the usual field of operations, but in the territory of the tribe of Issachar, in the neighborhood of Jezreel. We are not indeed to suppose from this that the Philistines had conquered all the central districts of the land, and, driving Saul before them, at last brought him to bay, and slew him in the north; for though Ishbosheth was compelled to withdraw to Mahanaim, a city on the eastern side of the Jordan, yet Abner is said to have made him king there not only over the trans-Jordanic tribes, but also "over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin" (... 2 Samuel 2:9). It may be said, however, that these were but titular claims; but the philistine conquests, as described in ... 1 Samuel 31:7, if not confined to the valley of Esdraelon, as in ... 1 Chronicles 10:7, were nevertheless all of them to the north of Mount Gilboa, thus leaving Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah untouched. Nor do we find the Philistines encamped between David at Hebron and Ishbosheth at Mahanaim, or interfering in their contests; and it is only when David was made king over the whole of Israel that they again assembled their forces to dispute the empire with him, and twice suffered defeat (... 2 Samuel 5:20, 25). More probably, therefore, they marched northward through their own territory, raising the whole of the military population as they went, and then, turning eastward, broke into the Israelite territory by the valley of Jezreel. It was probably the rapid decline of Saul's power which encouraged the Philistines to attempt once again to place their yoke upon the neck of Israel; and Saul, conscious that God's blessing had departed from him, in pitiable agony sought for unholy aid, but finally, with his sons, made a last brave defense, and died a soldier's death."

For David the problem was that he had led Achish to believe that he had been raiding cities in Israel, which made Achish believe that David would have no qualms joining him in this campaign against Saul. When Achish informs David about his plans to use him in the upcoming battle, David answers: "Surely you shall know what your servant can do." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "David's reply was ambiguous. The words, what thy servant will (AV, can) do, contained no distinct promise of faithful assistance in the war with the Israelites. The expression thy servant was simply the ordinary form for speaking of oneself to a superior." Achish believed this to mean that he could count on David's assistance and David's intent was that God would give him the opportunity to turn against the Philistines and bring about victory for Israel. There may have been a spark of faith in God in David's heart when he said this, there was, however, no spark of honesty in this diplomatic answer.

The problem for Saul was quite different and more desperate. Saul had cut himself off from communion with God by direct acts of disobedience. He knew that he was no longer God's representative of Israel's theocracy. God had told him that he was no longer king. He knew who the new pretender to the throne of Israel was and he had tried to kill his nemesis several times. He also knew that David had openly joined the Philistines who were now attacking him. The solution would have been for Saul to step down and crown David as the new monarch. It would have saved his life. In his moment of despair Saul tries to reestablish contact with God. But God remains silent. The proverb comes to mind, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint."¹ God's revelation of Himself means life for man; when God no longer speaks man dies. None of the ways in which God had revealed Himself in the past appeared to be open: no supernatural dream, no prophetic word, and no knowledge of priests by means of Urim or Thummim, which, incidentally, were in David's camp. Saul panicked when he saw the Philistine army line up.

In the language of Charles Dickens, we could say: "Samuel was dead. There was not doubt whatever about it. He was as dead as a doornail." That statement provides the décor for the events of this chapter. Not only was Samuel dead, but all clairvoyants were supposed to be dead also. Saul had outlawed all spiritualism from the country in accordance with Moses' instructions.² As Saul suspected, his executive order had not been carried out to the letter and spiritualism was still being practiced.

Having heard that there is a practicing medium in Endor, Saul proceeds to go there and consult her. *The Pulpit Commentary*, quoting an outside source, states: "The adventurous character of Saul's night journey is very striking when we consider that the Philistines pitched in Shunem on the southern slopes of the mountain, and that Saul's army was at Jezreel; thus, to arrive at Endor he had to pass the hostile camp, and would probably creep round the eastern shoulder of the hill, hidden by the undulations of the plain, as an Arab will often now advance unseen close by you in a fold of the ground."

Before entering into any discussion about the following events, we conclude that Saul's fear, which turned into terror, was probably caused by the demonic spirit that had plagued him in the last several years. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that Samuel's apparent appearance was anything more than a demonic manifestation.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments here: "Despite the finality of Saul's last confrontation with Samuel (1 Sam. 15:10-35), Saul still longed for the word of the Lord which he had received through the prophet who first anointed him and proclaimed him king. He must have hoped that Samuel would somehow reverse the judgment which he had pronounced, in much the same way as some of our contemporaries refuse to take seriously the dark side of the word of God."

Bible scholars disagree about the meaning of the incident described in these verses. The problem is the statement: "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!'" *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The question whether the

1. Prov. 29:18

2. See Deut. 18:10,11.

woman really possessed the power of communion with the spirits of the dead, or had deluded herself into believing that she had such power, or was simply a deliberate impostor, is answered differently by different writers. That the spirit of Samuel actually appeared was the view of the ancient rabbis. This is attested in the LXX translation of 1 Chron 10:13 b – ‘And Samuel the prophet made answer to him’; and by Ecclus 46:20. The same view was held by Justin Martyr, Origen, and Augustine. Tertullian and Jerome maintained that the appearance of Samuel was a diabolical delusion.”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments: “These words imply most unquestionably that the woman saw an apparition which she did not anticipate, and therefore that she was not really able to conjure up departed spirits or persons who had died, but that she either merely pretended to do so, or if her witchcraft was not mere trickery and delusion, but had a certain demoniacal background, that the appearance of Samuel differed essentially from everything she had experienced and effected before, and therefore filled her with alarm and horror. The very fact, however, that she recognized Saul as soon as Samuel appeared, precludes us from declaring her art to have been nothing more than jugglery and deception; for she said to him, ‘Why hast thou cheated me, as thou art certainly Saul?’ i.e., why hast thou deceived me as to thy person? why didst thou not tell me that thou wast king Saul? Her recognition of Saul when Samuel appeared may be easily explained, if we assume that the woman had fallen into a state of clairvoyance, in which she recognized persons who, like Saul in his disguise, were unknown to her by face.”

The Pulpit Commentary, however, believing that all necromancy is faked, states: “Evidently the last thing that she had expected was that anything else should happen than the usual illusion by which she imposed upon her victims; nor is it certain that anything else did happen. Her assertion that she saw Samuel was probably false; and it was in feigned excitement that she cried out, *Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.* She could not but have noticed the tall stature, the dignified manner, and also the intense excitement of her strange visitor; and when he bade her call up the spirit of Samuel, she must have been dull indeed not to know who the stranger was.”

The story actually does not give us any indication about the reality or unreality of necromancy. The text states clearly that the woman recognized Saul when she saw Samuel. None of this makes sense unless we allow for a supernatural communication given to the woman. It is my conviction that the souls of the dead cannot be called upon to communicate with the living. I believe it is possible that Satan or any demon may appear in a spiritualist séance, imitating the person called for. In practicing this kind of “art” humans open themselves up for demonic influences, which is the reason why God so strongly forbids it.

Although I doubt very much that it was Samuel who appeared to the woman, it is quite possible that the demon impersonating Samuel told her that her client was no one but Saul himself.

The New International Version renders the woman’s words as “I see a spirit coming up out of the ground.” *The King James Version* reads: “I saw gods ascending out of the earth.” The Hebrew uses the word *Elohim*.

Her description of Samuel as “an old man wearing a robe” could not be any vaguer. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on this: “the key word may be robe, the prophetic *robe*, the tearing of which had become the symbol of Saul’s downfall as king (1 Sam. 15:27-28).”

The apparition sounds like a grouchy old man, whom Saul concludes to be Samuel. If this is a demon speaking, he was well informed about what had transpired between Samuel and Saul during their last meeting. No gift of prophecy is demonstrated in the words “The Lord will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “The more modern orthodox commentators are almost unanimous in the opinion that the departed prophet did really appear and announce the coming destruction of Saul and his army. They hold, however, that Samuel was brought up not by the magical arts of the witch, but through a miracle wrought by the omnipotence of God. Earlier orthodoxy looked upon this appearance as a spectre, an apparition or delusion.”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, obviously believing the real Samuel appeared to Saul, states: “Saul is asking for guidance when his course of action is obvious: he has to fight the Philistines. What he really wants is reassurance that all will be well and that he will win the battle. Is this not the whole purpose of prophets and counselors, to give a reassuring message? Samuel, however, does not in any way change the message he had spoken to Saul when he lived at Ramah. He is still the prophet of the Lord, and he speaks in the name of the Lord, reiterating that name seven times over in these four verses. Whereas Saul had said, ‘*God* has turned away from me,’ Samuel uses the covenant name, ‘*the Lord* has turned from you.’ Far from reversing that judgment, Samuel can only reinforce it, for the word he had spoken (1 Sam. 15:28) is about to be fulfilled, and the name of the neighbor who will inherit the kingdom can now be given. The message of 1 Samuel 15:18-19 has not been repealed, but is still in force to *this day*. The Philistines, who in Saul’s early days as king had defied the armies of Israel and had terrified Saul, are about to defeat Saul and his sons, who will *tomorrow* be with Samuel, in the mysterious world beyond the grave. *The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines*, for the people and their army are bound up with their king, they too will suffer defeat as the result of Saul’s disobedience.”

Commenting on the phrase “The Lord has done what he predicted through me,” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “See ... 1 Samuel 15:28. Saul’s rebellion is there said, in ver. 23, to be a crime as great as the witchcraft which he was at that time so zealously punishing; here, where the sentence is being carried into execution, Saul has himself become guilty of what in his better hours he so abominated. *Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee*. Rather, ‘will deliver Israel also with thee,’ *i.e.* the nation is to share thy punishment. *Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me*. *I.e.* shall be dead. Whence this voice came it is difficult to say. St. Augustine thought that the woman really conjured up a demon, who took the form of Samuel. Maimonides treats the whole as the effect of Saul’s diseased imagination; while many modern commentators regard it as a well played piece of jugglery on the part of the woman, who recognized Saul at once on his entrance, but professed not to know him till his name was revealed to her by the pretended apparition, in whose name she reproached him for his crimes, announced to him, what now all were convinced of, that David was to be his successor, and foretold his defeat and death. In the face of such a passage as ... Deuteronomy 18:10-12 we cannot believe that the Bible would set before us an instance of witchcraft employed with the Divine sanction for holy purposes; but we can easily believe that the woman would gladly take a bitter revenge on the man who had cruelly put to death all persons reputed to have such powers as those to which she laid claim. The object of the narrative is plainly to set before us the completeness of Saul’s moral downfall and debasement. Here is the man endowed with so many and so great gifts of genius, and who in so many things started so well and behaved so nobly, the victim of a despairing melancholy; his conscience is blackened with the wholesale massacre of the priesthood, his imagination is ever brooding over the sick fancy of treason plotted by his son-in-law, whom now he supposes to be in the Philistine camp; his enemies have invaded his territory in extraordinary numbers and upon new ground; to him it seems as if they have come to dethrone him and place his crown on David’s head. In this dire extremity his one wish is to pry into futurity and learn his fate. There is no submission to God, no sorrow for disobedience, no sign of even a wish for amendment; it is to unholy arts that he looks, simply that he may know what a few more hours will make known to all. Neglecting his duties as a general and king, instead of making wise preparation for the coming fight, he disguises himself, takes a dangerous and wearisome journey round the enemies’ camp, arrives at his destination by night, and, exhausted with hunger and mental agitation, seeks there for the knowledge unattainable in any upright manner from a reputed witch. He has rejected God, lost all the strength and comfort of true religion, and is become the victim of abject superstition. Whether he were the victim also of the woman’s arts, or of his own sick fantasy, is not a matter of much consequence; the interest of the narrative lies in the revelation it makes to us of Saul’s mental and moral state; and scarcely is there in the whole of Scripture anything more tragic than this narrative, or any more intense picture of the depth of degradation to which a noble but perverse intellect is capable of falling.”

I would still allow for a demonic part played in this whole scene. The words spoken by the apparition created an atmosphere of fear and panic that would eventually lead to Saul's suicide, which was as demonically inspired as this spiritualistic séance. The woman's concern about Saul's physical condition does not agree too well with her deceptive performance *The Pulpit Commentary* suspects of her. If she really intended to avenge herself for the king's killing of her colleagues, she would not have killed her fatted calf for him.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary concludes its comments on this section by giving the opinion of Luther and Calvin, saying: "Thus Luther says (in his work upon the abuses of the Mass, 1522): 'The raising of Samuel by a soothsayer or witch, in 1 Sam 28:11-12, was certainly merely a specter of the devil; not only because the Scriptures state that it was effected by a woman who was full of devils (for who could believe that the souls of believers, who are in the hand of God, Ecclus 3:1, and in the bosom of Abraham, Luke 16:32, were under the power of the devil, and of simple men?), but also because it was evidently in opposition to the command of God that Saul and the woman inquired of the dead. The Holy Ghost cannot do anything against this himself, nor can He help those who act in opposition to it.' Calvin also regards the apparition as only a specter (Hom. 100 in 1 Sam.): 'It is certain,' he says, 'that it was not really Samuel, for God would never have allowed His prophets to be subjected to such diabolical conjuring. For here is a sorceress calling up the dead from the grave. Does any one imagine that God wished His prophet to be exposed to such ignominy; as if the devil had power over the bodies and souls of the saints which are in His keeping? The souls of the saints are said to rest and live in God, waiting for their happy resurrection. Besides, are we to believe that Samuel took his cloak with him into the grave? For all these reasons, it appears evident that the apparition was nothing more than a spectre, and that the senses of the woman herself were so deceived, that she thought she saw Samuel, whereas it really was not he.' The earlier orthodox theologians also disputed the reality of the appearance of the departed Samuel on just the same grounds."

The chapter ends with a description of Saul's reaction to Samuel's message. He falls to the ground and swoons. The explanation given is that his fainting was caused by a combination of fear and hunger. Saul seems to have believed in the power of fasting in connection with fighting battles. The oath he made his army swear in earlier years almost cost Jonathan his life.¹ It took the woman and Saul's aids all their power of persuasion to make him change his mind. What follows was probably Saul's last meal in life. Like someone who is led to the gallows, he is given a meal "fit for a king." The fatted calf does not perform the same function here as in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Saul did not return home to confess that he had sinned against heaven and mankind.

iii. David's providential rejection from the Philistine army 29:1-11

1 The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel.

2 As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish.

3 The commanders of the Philistines asked, 'What about these Hebrews?' Achish replied, 'Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.'

4 But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, 'Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men?'

5 Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"?''

1. I Sam. 14:24-30, 38-45

6 So Achish called David and said to him, 'As surely as the Lord lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you.'

7 Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers.'

8 'But what have I done?' asked David. 'What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?'

9 Achish answered, 'I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, 'He must not go up with us into battle.'

10 Now get up early, along with your master's servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light.'

11 So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

Introducing this section, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "In the meantime, for Saul's visit to Endor belongs a little later though it is recorded first, David and his men had been preparing to fight their own Israelite kith and kin because there appeared to be no way of avoiding involvement with Achish in the fateful battle. *Now the Philistines gathered all their forces*: these words pick up the subject from 1 Samuel 28:1, where Achish was presumably in Gath. Here the Philistines are some thirty miles further north at Aphek, well on their way to the Valley of Jezreel, but still about forty miles short of Shunem (1 Sam. 28:4). At that time the Israelite forces were in Jezreel, a meeting place of routes, before being deployed on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 28:4) for the battle. The Fountain, the source of the river Harod, at the foot of Mount Gilboa is now part of a public park."

As the Philistine army sets out in a well organized manner the officers march up front and king Achish forms the rear with his body, which happened to be David and his men. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* clarifies as follows: "The lords of the Philistines were the supreme civil authorities, but they were not army commanders. This division of civil and military authority predates the Roman system of government division of power."

An argument ensues about the presence of David and his men. The Hebrew text states cryptically: "What these Hebrew?" which, according to *The Pulpit Commentary* was a term of contempt among the Philistines. Achish tries to defend David, but the Philistine commanders insist that David be ordered to leave. They correctly assume that David and his men would turn against them as soon as they face the Israelite army. It sounds as if David had been almost more popular and better known among the Philistines than among his own people.

David fakes indignation at being dismissed. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on Achish' oath and what follows: "*As the Lord lives* is unexpected in a Philistine oath; can it be that Achish has committed himself to David's Lord, or is he being courteous to David in not swearing by Philistine gods? The latter is perhaps more likely. *I have found nothing wrong* (Heb. *râ'â*, 'evil') *in you*; already he has said *to me it seems right* (Heb. *tôb*, 'good'), so the 'good' and 'evil' theme continues, but with a twist, for Achish fails to appreciate that David is playing a double game. It is providential for Achish as well as for David that the Philistine 'lords' are discerning and insist that David be far removed from military operations. As Achish saw the situation, however, it was embarrassing to have to dismiss the man he had appointed as his bodyguard, and he was at pains not to offend him. *Go peaceably* implies that David had the right to protest against his sudden reversal, and protest he did, as though he were suffering an injustice, whereas he was inwardly relieved to be out of the battle. Or was David so double-faced that when he objected that *I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king*, he had in mind the enemies of King Saul, and was 'truly reluctant to quit the march and lose a chance to be 'an adversary in [the Philistine] camp'? This may well have been David's veiled meaning; he could turn any situation, however daunting, to his advantage."

Neither David's turning to the Philistines for protection from Saul, nor the covert expeditions he carried out while in their country demonstrate evidence of trust in God or divine guidance in his life. One

wonders if David would have had less trouble ascending the throne of all of Israel had he put his life more totally in God's hand.

All we can say that Achish had been extremely naïf in trusting David without any investigation into his behavior while enjoying Philistine asylum.

iv. David and the Amalekites 30:1-31

1 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it,

2 and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

3 When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.

4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.

5 David's two wives had been captured — Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him,

8 and David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

9 David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind,

10 for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit.

11 They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat—

12 part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.

13 David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago.

14 We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag."

15 David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them."

16 He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.

17 David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled.

18 David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives.

19 Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.

20 He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder."

21 Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. As David and his men approached, he greeted them.

22 But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go."

23 David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the Lord has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us."

24 Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."

25 David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.

26 When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the plunder of the Lord's enemies."

27 He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir;

28 to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa

29 and Racal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites;

30 to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach

31 and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "*On the third day* indicates that David and his men covered about twenty five miles a day on the march south from Aphek to Ziklag, where they would arrive tired, hungry and expecting all the comforts of a welcome home. The sight of a burnt-out, totally deserted town was more than the troops could bear. The Amalekites, whom Saul failed to exterminate (1 Sam. 15:17-34), had taken advantage of the departure of the fighting men to wreak havoc, but at least their wives and families had not been killed. Instead the Amalekites had taken them all captive, regarding them as part of the spoil to be enjoyed or sold (v. 16), but there was at least some hope of recovering them from the enemy. David had suffered in exactly the same way as everyone else, losing his two wives, but he was held responsible for the disaster, all the pent-up anger and indignation being laid at his door, *for the people spoke of stoning him*. Never since his flight from Gibeah and Saul had David stood so alone, though he had often been in danger of death, *but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God*. Far from blaming God for allowing the destruction of the city, David took the reprisal of the Amalekites as one of life's hazards, in which he could draw on the resources of a faithful covenant Lord. As the psalms attributed to David assert over and over again, David poured out his feeling freely in prayer: 'I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress' (Ps. 25:16-17) could have been composed in a situation like this."

The Pulpit Commentary takes issue with the above and with most other commentators, believing that David did not cover the distance from Aphek to Ziklag in three days. We read: "David evidently could not have gone with the Philistines as far as to Shunem; for, as noticed in the previous chapter, it would have been impossible to march back to Ziklag in so short a time. But as he had gone first to Gath, where no doubt Achish collected his vassals, and then marched northwards with the army for two days, he must altogether have been absent from Ziklag for some little time." No doubt the Amalekites had sufficient time to carry out their raid in the absence of David and his men from Ziklag.

The difference between David and his men in the reaction to the disaster they find upon their return is worth considering. No one blames God, asking Him why He allowed this to happen to them. The men did not, probably, because God did not play any important role in their daily life. David did not because he realized that his being in Philistine country and the double-faced role he had played toward Achish had not been what God wanted. It took this disaster to bring David back to God and to himself.

There must have been some friction between David and his troops before this incident. Although we do not read about this, they must have doubted the wisdom of David's being in Philistia and doing what he had been doing. They saw the disaster as a result of an unwise policy. In a way they were right about this. But killing David would not have remedied their condition.

The Hebrew of v.4 gives a powerful rendering of the emotional reaction of David and his men: “Then David and the people who [were] with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no [more] power to weep.” V.6 reads literally: “And David was greatly distressed for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, for his sons and daughters: but David encouraged himself in Yahweh his Elohim.”

The Hebrew word rendered “encouraged” is *chazaq*, which means: “to fasten upon,” “to seize,” “to be strong,” or “to conquer.” We could interpret it in the sense of getting a firm grip, as in the verse: “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.’ So Moses reached out and *took hold* of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.”¹ Ironically, the word is also used to describe Pharaoh’s reaction to God’s order to let the Israelites go, as in the verse: “But I will *harden* his heart so that he will not let the people go.”² David found strength by getting a hold of God. Some of this is expressed in Jacob’s answer to the angel that wrestled with him: “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”³

David and his men had lost all they had, all that made life worthy of living. The men turned to David, planning to kill him; David turned to God who was the source of his life.

At this point David did what he ought to have done one year earlier when he went to seek asylum with Achish; he decided to inquire of the Lord. Humanly speaking, pursuing the Amalekites and trying to recover the women and children seemed to be the logical course of action. But David no longer counted on human logic; he sought the will of God. And God answered.

There can be no doubt about it that David’s pursuit of the Amalekites was hazardous. Not only did David not know how large the raiders’ party was, but his troops were near exhaustion. Under any other circumstance, if it were not for their desperate loss, David’s chase would be considered ill-matched.

The Pulpit Commentary makes this observation about David’s consultation of God: “Looking only to Jehovah for aid, David sends for *Abiathar*, who seems to have remained constantly with him, and bids him consult Jehovah by the Urim. In strong contrast to the silence which surrounds Saul (... 1 Samuel 28:6), the answer is most encouraging. Literally it is, ‘Pursue; for overtaking thou shalt overtake, and delivering thou shalt deliver.’”

David starts out with six hundred men, but on crossing the Besor Ravine, God reduces David’s army by another two hundred in the same way as He had decimated Gideon’s band to the point where victory could only be attributed to divine intervention. We read that the two hundred were too faint. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The warriors were ‘dead beat.’ (The word faint is used here and in verse 21 with a noun meaning ‘a corpse.’)” We will see later that the stronger ones, who went on, did not get the point and failed to attribute their success to the Lord, giving all credit to themselves.

Their first lead was the finding of an abandoned Egyptian slave, who was in worse condition than they were. He had been left behind in the desert to die.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, notes: “Travel in the unpopulated desert of the south had special hazards; in particular there was rarely anyone to ask for direction, and there was no way of knowing where the Amalekite raiders were to be found, until David’s men happened upon a half-dead Egyptian, whom they coaxed back to life. As it turned out, he had accompanied his Amalekite master on a series of raids until he had to be left by the roadside because of illness. ... Thanks to their guide, David and his men found the camp of the Amalekites, and observed from some vantage-point the unrestrained merrymaking spread out as far as the eye could see. *And David smote them from twilight*: The Hebrew *nešep*, translated ‘dawn’ in Job 7:4 and Psalm 119:147, has this sense here, so JB, NEB, GNB. Having noted the situation, David and his men took some rest and attacked at first light, when the Amalekites would be suffering from the soporific effects of the feast, and least able to defend themselves. Operations lasted *till the evening* (Heb.

1. Ex. 4:4

2. Ex. 4:21

3. Gen. 32:26

ereb) of the following day, that is the period of the day we call ‘afternoon,’ when the sun is declining. David completely overwhelms the Amalekites, killing all except the four hundred who escape on camels, and recovering all the spoil, but more importantly the human captives. The honor belongs to David now, just as earlier he had been obliged to take the blame. The verbs reiterate his prowess: *David smote them ... David recovered all ... David rescued ... David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds.* Whereas the odds had been stacked against him, now that he has won the day everyone understands that *This is David’s spoil.*”

This is the first time we find mention of the Kerethites in Scripture. This is of interest since we will see later that David made the Kerethites and Pelethites his royal bodyguards. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The interest in this people arises from David’s bodyguard having been composed of foreigners bearing the name of Cherethim and Pelethim. We here find the Cherethim inhabiting the southern portion of the land of the Philistines, and such was still the case in the days of Zephaniah (... Zephaniah 2:5, and compare ... Ezekiel 25:16). As David retained Ziklag (... 1 Samuel 27:6), he appears to have chosen the men who were to guard his person from this neighbourhood, having probably been struck by their stature and martial bearing when dwelling among them. Hence it is probable that the Pelethim were also a Philistine race. Whether the Cherethim and the Philistines generally came from Crete to Palestine is a very disputed question, but they were certainly not indigenous, but immigrants into Canaan.”

Another interesting feature in the story is the Egyptian’s insistence that David swear by the name of *Elohiym* that he will not be killed or returned to his former master. Although this does not necessarily prove that this man had a personal relationship with the God of Israel, he knew enough about the Creator of the universe and His relationship to Israel to make this request.

The Egyptian was as good as his word and led David and his men to the Amalekite camp and we trust that David kept his word to him also, making him a member of his troops.

The booty taken consisted of a considerable herd, which was taken back to Israel territory. The interesting part of v.20 is the mention of part of the herd of which it was said “This is David’s plunder.” Whether David made this statement himself, or whether the animals were assigned to him by acclamation, is not clear from the text. The reference may be to the fact that David used the animals to buy himself some influence among the elders of Judah (v.26).

When the men get back to those who had been left behind because they were too exhausted to follow, some trouble began brewing because those who had done the fighting declared themselves to be unwilling to share the booty with those who had stayed behind. Commenting on a similar incident in Numbers,¹ *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “The booty obtained from a fallen town or a devastated country was not, according to the rules of ancient war, retained by the first captor. It was thrown into a general stock, and then, at a time of respite, a division of the collected treasure was made in certain established proportions, a large share being allotted to the king or ruler. In order to insure a fair distribution of the spoil, an accurate account of it was taken by eunuch scribes, who attended to register, on rolls of papyrus or leather, every article as it was brought in.”

So the suggestion, made by some of David’s men who are called “evil men and troublemakers,” was not according to the accepted custom. The Hebrew words used are *iysh ra`* and *uwb^aliya’al*, “immoral men” and “sons of Belial.” David had regained enough support among his men to be able to overrule the troublemakers.

There must have been a certain amount of supplies that David and his men carried around with them as they traveled, which had been left behind to be guarded by those who had been too tired to fight. The rule David established, which would be the guideline for all to follow, was that the share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.” This principle has been given a spiritual application in situations where some go overseas as

1. Num. 31:12

missionaries and some from the home front, giving prayer and financial support. One term, when my wife and I went back to the mission field, we put I Samuel 30:24 as a text on our prayer cards.

David used some of the booty to gain political influence among his own tribe by sending a few presents to those who could later vote him into office. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments: "Though the spoil technically belonged to David, his men had reserved the right to express an opinion as to the way in which it should be used, and David had no intention merely of enriching himself with it. For one thing, it was right that those who had been raided should receive some compensation, for another, David no doubt had an eye to the future, and intended to make the spoil work on his behalf."

v. Saul's last battle 31:1-13

1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

2 The Philistines pressed hard after Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua.

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

4 Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

5 When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him.

6 So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

7 When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.

8 The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

9 They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people.

10 They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

11 When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul,

12 all their valiant men journeyed through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them.

13 Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

This chapter picks up the thread of history where it was left off in chapter twenty-nine. The battle must have begun the day after Saul's visit to the witch at Endor.

There are some famous battlefields in the history of the world. Waterloo, Stalingrad and Normandy are among the landmarks of the last two centuries. Armageddon will be the scene of the world's last battle. For Israel, Gilboa was the battlefield on which historic battles were fought. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "Four memorable battles were fought in this area:

- a. The battle of Kishon, in which Deborah and Barak defeated the hosts of Sisera (Judg 4:15; 5:21)
- b. The battle of Jezreel, in which Gideon's three hundred defeated the vast hordes of the Midianites.
- c. The battle of Mount Gilboa, recorded here.
- d. The battle of Megiddo, in which Josiah, king of Israel, lost his life fighting against Pharaoh."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: "Now the Philistines fought against Israel - in a regular engagement, in which the two armies met (1 Sam 28:1-4). The battle probably began upon the great plain, the southeastern extremity of which is bisected by the low range of mount Gilboa; but in the course of the conflict the scene was shifted to the hill. The fortune of the day was decided by the great

superiority of the Philistines in one species of military weapons, which could be used at a distance, namely, archery; because although incidental notices in the sacred history prove the Hebrews were familiar with the bow from a very early period, it does not appear to have been hitherto used as a regular part of their offensive armor in war. In this memorable contest the Israelites were forced to give way, being annoyed by the arrows of the enemy, which, destroying them at a distance, before they came to close combat, threw them into panic and disorder. Taking advantage of the heights of mount Gilboa, they attempted to rally, but in vain. Saul and his men, though hotly pursued, fought like heroes; but the onset of the Philistines being at length mainly directed against the quarter where the king and his bodyguard were maintaining the combat, Jonathan and his two brothers, Abinadab or Ishui (1 Sam 14:49), and Melchi-shua, overpowered by numbers, were killed on the spot.”

There is some doubt about whether Saul was actually physically wounded or merely panicked. The Hebrew word used is *chuwl*, which literally means “to twist or whirl,” or “to writhe in pain or fear.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on *they wounded him critically*: “Rather, ‘he was sore distressed.’ In ... Deuteronomy 2:25 the verb is rendered ‘be in anguish.’ The meaning is that Saul, finding himself surrounded by these archers, and that he could neither escape nor come to close quarters with them, and die fighting, ordered his armor bearer to kill him, that he might be spared the degradation of being slain by ‘uncircumcised’ heathen.” Had Saul been in his right mind and had his relationship with God existed, he might have fought himself out of his situation. As it was, the demon within him drove him to commit suicide. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “There are only four examples of suicide in the Bible, those of Ahithophel (2 Sam 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18), Judas (Matt 27:5), and Saul, here.”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, sounding as if she approves of Saul’s desperate act, writes: “Saul heroically fell upon his own sword rather than have the uncircumcised Philistines *make sport of him*, as they had done with Samson (Judg. 16:25); there was no telling what indignity they might inflict on him, so death was preferable to capture.” We do not have the right to judge those who decide to take their own life, but that does not mean that we must justify it under any condition either.

Initially, Saul did not have the courage to kill himself, so he asked his armor bearer to do it. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The Jewish tradition says that he was Doeg the Edomite, and that the sword on which Saul fell was that with which he had massacred the priests. This is not very probable; but whoever he was, his horror on being asked to slay his master, and his devotion to him, are deserving of admiration.”

There is some question as to which sword was used in both killings. Some Bible scholars believe that Saul and his armor bearer used the same sword, which would have been the armor bearer’s to take their own life. If the armor bearer were, in fact, Doeg, the suggestion is that it was the sword that had killed the priest of Nob that was used for this final act of Saul’s reign. But although this would add considerable drama to the script, it is mere conjecture.

Barnes’ Notes comments on the statement in v.7: *When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled*: “This must mean to the north of the plain of Jezreel, and would comprise the tribe of Naphtali, and Zebulun, and probably Issachar. But the text of 1 Chron 10:7 has ‘that were in the valley,’ limiting the statement to the inhabitants of the plain of Jezreel.”

We do not know what time of the day it was that Saul and his armor bearer killed themselves. It could be that the battle continued through the better part of the evening, so that the Philistines could not have assessed the enormity of their victory until the break of the next day. When they did discover the bodies of Saul and his two sons, they submitted the corpses to an indignity that is beyond description. All three corpses were decapitated and the mutilated bodies were hung naked on the city wall of Beth Shan. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “This was probably done not simply in retaliation for what had happened to their champion Goliath, but in accordance with the customs of ancient warfare. The fierce joy of the Philistines over the fallen Saul proves how great had been their fear of him, and how successful he had been in breaking their yoke off Israel’s neck.” The captured royal armor was dedicated to their idols to which they attributed their victory.

The book of First Samuel ends on a positive note of gratitude by the inhabitants of Jabesh. They remembered how Saul had saved them from the indignity of the claims of the Ammonite king Nahash, who intended to gouge out the right eye of all the men in the city some forty years earlier.¹ They risked their lives in traveling into Philistine country, taking down the bodies of Saul and his sons and giving them an honorable funeral.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the cremation of the bodies: “Cremation, though highly honorable among classical nations, is here mentioned for the first time in Holy Scripture, and was probably resorted to on this occasion to insure the bodies of Saul and his sons against further maltreatment, as, if buried, the Philistines might have made the attempt to get them again into their power. Some suppose that the burning of the dead was afterwards practiced by the Jews, and quote in its favor ... 2 Chronicles 16:14; ... Isaiah 33:12; ... Jeremiah 31:40; 34:5; ... Amos 6:10, but these passages bear a different interpretation. After the exile, interment was the sole method of disposing of the dead among the Jews, and in the Talmud cremation is condemned as a heathen practice. The burial of the bones of Saul and his sons proves that their bodies here were really burnt. *Under a tree*. Hebrew, ‘under the tamarisk,’ the famous tree of that species at Jabesh. It was under one tamarisk that Saul commanded the massacre of the priests (... 1 Samuel 22:6), and now his bones are placed in rest beneath another. Perhaps the people remembered the king’s fondness for trees. For the final fate of these relics see ... 2 Samuel 21:12-14. They *fasted seven days* ... The time of mourning was thirty days for Aaron (... Numbers 20:29) and for Moses (... Deuteronomy 34:8). The Talmudic rule is strict mourning for seven days, less strict for the next twenty-three, in all thirty; and for a father or mother mourning was continued for a year. The fasting was mourning of the strictest kind, and proves that the people of Jabesh-Gilead honored to the utmost their deliverer.”

In concluding this book it seems proper to have a last look at Saul’s life and performance as the first king of Israel. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* reflects on Saul’s failings and virtues, stating: “Like everyone else, Saul had his virtues and his failings. His chief weakness seems to have been want of decision of character. He was easily swayed by events and by people. The praises of David (1 Sam 18:7 f) at once set his jealousy on fire. His persecution of David was largely due to the instigation of mischievous courtiers (24:9). Upon remonstrance his repentance was as deep as it was short-lived (24:16; 26:21). His impulsiveness was such that he did not know where to stop. His interdict (14:24 ff) was quite as uncalled for as his religious zeal (15:9) was out of place. He was always at one extreme. His hatred of David was only equal to his affection for him at first (18:2). His pusillanimity led him to commit crimes which his own judgment would have forbidden (22:17). Like most beaten persons, he became suspicious of everyone (22:7 f), and, like those who are easily led, he soon found his evil genius (22:9,18,22). Saul’s inability to act alone appears from the fact that he never engaged in single combat, so far as we know. Before he could act at all his fury or his pity had to be roused to boiling-point (11:6). His mind was peculiarly subject to external influences, so that he was now respectable man of the world, now a prophet (10:11; 19:24). On the other hand, Saul possessed many high qualities. His dread of office (10:22) was only equaled by the coolness with which he accepted it (11:5). To the first call to action he responded with promptitude (11:6 ff). His timely aid excited the lasting gratitude of the citizens of Jabesh-gilead (31:11 ff) If we remember that Saul was openly disowned by Samuel (15:30), and believed himself cast off by Yahweh, we cannot but admire the way in which he fought on to the last. Moreover, the fact that he retained not only his own sons, but a sufficient body of fighting men to engage a large army of Philistines, shows that there must have been something in him to excite confidence and loyalty.”

Toccoa Falls, GA February 13, 2010

1. I Sam. 11:1-11