

## Chapter Eleven

**Vs. 1: Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.”**

“Then” or the connective *w-*, so common and noted frequently, shows continuous action which here is between Saul’s choice as king and the first threat he would encounter in that new position.

Note that this is the first and only time the full name Jabesh-Gilead is used. For the remainder of the story generally the “abbreviated” Jabesh is preferred.

Nahash is recounted in 1Chron 19.1 as having died a natural death and who had become an ally of King David though nothing of the sort is intimated here. While the Ammonites were a threat to Israel, they were not as troublesome nor as pervasive as the Philistines. Still, they had to be dealt with and done so immediately. *Chanah* is the verb for “besieged” and fundamentally means to set oneself down as to make camp. It is found last in 4.1 but not mentioned there, “they encamped at Ebenezer.” In the that verse as well as the one at hand, *chanah* is used with the preposition *hal* which means literally “on.”

While *chanah* intimates a siege, we have no details. However, it must have been effective because the inhabitants of the city begged *Nahash* for a treaty. This is expressed by two words: the verb *karath* and the noun *beryth* (cf. 2.33 and 4.3). The city’s inhabitants made a hasty decision to lift the siege and failed to estimate the determination of Nahash.

**Vs. 2: But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel.”**

Here the verb *karath* alone is used, literally, to cut. It can intimate the real intent of Nahash, to cut out the right eyes of the Israelites, a frightening prospect, yet one that discloses the long-simmering tension between the Ammonites and Israel. In other words, the *karath* Nahash has in mind will put “disgrace” or *cherpah* on Israel, this noun also meaning scorn and contempt. “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel” [17.26]?

**Vs. 3: The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you.”**

The city elders certainly had some courage to come up with a statement like this which amounted to a request for an extended time-out in order to send for reinforcements. And so Nahash agreed; why, we don’t know, but it seemed a foolish thing to do. The “respite” requested and granted consists of the verb *raphah* which means to cast down, to leave off. “Refrain from anger and forsake wrath” [Ps 37.8]! During the seven days...and the number seven is significant for many reasons as with the fall of Jericho, Josh 6...the elders sent word out to the “territory” of Israel, *gevul* being noted last in 7.14 and refers more to a boundary. The idea thus is that the messengers went to all the borders of Israel to rouse support to their cause. The memory of Jericho was not that distant, and for Nahash to be ignorant of its fall to Israel would prove his undoing.

*Yashah* is the verb for “save” as in 10.27. Perhaps Nahash tolerated the request for a seven day reprieve both out of personal pride and contempt for Israel. That is, he could defeat any army the Israelites could throw against him which shortly would prove to be disastrous for him.

**Vs. 4: When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people; and all the people wept aloud.**

Gibeah is noted last in 10.26 as being the home of Saul, the first stop of the “messengers” (*mal’ak*, cf. 6.21) as they fanned out through all Israel. In the verse at hand Gibeah is called “of Saul” which can be attributed to it as already being associated as the birth place of Israel’s first king.

Note that the messengers first encountered the people, not Saul, who wasn’t present. The first thought one might have, was Saul hiding somewhere as he had done among the baggage when chosen king? The verb *davar* is used for “reported” along with the noun *davar* for “matter;” literally, “they spoke the word.” The directness and urgency of this *davar-davar* is portrayed vividly by “in the ears (plural) of the people (singular).”

“All the people wept aloud” is rendered literally as “raised all the people their voice and wept.” First comes the raising of their voices which shows the impact of what Nahash demanded followed by their reaction.

**Vs. 5: Now Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen; and Saul said, “What ails the people, that they are weeping?” So they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.**

To our relief, Saul was not hiding somewhere attempting to avoid responsibility but was engaged in work that had been familiar to him. Actually this image of being out in the field plowing is one of a citizen-soldier, of not living apart from the people in a far-off palace. As for returning home, it could have been during the midday break or evening..

*Saphar* is the verb for “told” which fundamentally means to inscribe or to write down. Ps 9.1 gives a good idea of *saphar* as more than just a telling; it’s more along the lines of recounting: “I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.” In the verse at hand, the object of *saphar* by the messengers is “tidings” or that familiar *davar* or “matter” of vs. 4.

**Vs. 6: And the spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.**

Two verbs happen almost simultaneously: first Saul hearing (*shamah*, cf. 9.27) the *davar* followed by *tsalach*, cf. 10.10) of the divine *ruach* (cf. 10.10). In brief, hearing produces wind but wind which is not gentle but quite violent. This violence spills over, if you will, into Saul’s anger (‘*aph*: cf. 1.5 with its alternate meaning as ‘face’) being “kindled” or *charah*, a verb used for expressing anger as well as pertaining to being earnest. “And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night” [15.11]. In the verse at hand, the adverb *me’od* is used as last in 5.11 and connotes excess.

**Vs. 7: He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!” Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man.**

*Natach* means “cut in pieces” and occurs eight other times in the Bible thereby intimating it is primarily a verb related to sacrifice. With the rush of the divine *ruach* upon Saul noted in vs. 6, *natach* fittingly matches the violence of *tsalach* in that verse. In sum, there is little distinction between Saul’s hearing, the divine spirit and Saul cutting the oxen. As for *natach*, cf. 1Kg 18.23: “Let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood.”

Saul entrusted the pieces of the recently slain oxen to the messengers. They were to convey another message just as dramatic and draconian as the one issued by Nahash, that is, about him cutting out the right eye of each person. “Hand” lends a further drama to the situation, that each messenger is to carry a piece in one and anything written down about Nahash’s threat. Just like that original message, the one by Saul is to reach the

“territory” or *gevul* of Israel, that noun being found in vs. 3 with its connotation of border or limit of territory.

Saul all gave the messengers words about each man’s duty to follow him as well as Samuel. A shrewd gesture because Samuel recently had been judge in Israel and was respected highly.

Upon hearing these perhaps unexpectedly harsh words from newly anointed Saul, they experienced a “dread” or *pachad* which means a trembling. “There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous” [14.5]. This *pachad* “fell” upon the people, this common verb here being not dissimilar to *tsalach* of vs. 6, the spirit violently coming upon Saul. Such actions have a way of spontaneously creating unity which happened here, for the people “came out as one man.” More precisely, the adjective is placed after the noun making it as “man one,” even more dramatic.

**Vs. 8: When he mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel were three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand.**

*Paqad* is the verb for “mustered” noted last in 2.21 as “visited” and has many different applications. Here it is a direct result of the messengers having spread throughout Israel with the added threat by Saul.

Three hundred thousand men is not so much an exaggeration but indicative that Israel was capable of fielding a substantial force. As for Bezek, it is mentioned in Judg 1.4, site of a victory against the Canaanites and Perizzites. In other words, Saul’s choice of Bezek was deliberate and intended as a rallying point.

**Vs. 9: And they said to the messengers who had come, “Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-Gilead: ‘Tomorrow by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance.’” When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad.**

The messengers must have had considerable stamina to spread out so quickly and over such hilly (and hot) terrain all the while mindful of the burden they were carrying and what would happen to them if they did not accomplish their mission. Those who had been assembled at Bezek by Saul informed the messengers to return to Jabesh-Gilead saying that relief was at hand. This was conveyed to the besieged town rapidly, “tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot.” This couldn’t have come quickly enough because by now the seven days period granted by Nahash the Ammonite was about up.

*Teshuhah* is the noun for “deliverance” (from the verbal root *yashah*) and found next in vs. 13. Such deliverance was slated to come during the least expected time for a military attack, the heat of the day. That would catch Nahash off guard completely and defeat him in his arrogance. As noted above, probably Nahash consented to the seven day period of grace to allow Israel time to muster. Once all its forces were gathered, he figured that at last he had the opportunity to deliver a final crushing blow.

*Samach* is the verb for “were glad” noted last in 6.13.

**Vs. 10: Therefore the men of Jabesh said, “Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you.”**

This verse begins immediately with the inhabitants of Jabesh addressing Nahash, that is, without further ado. The words “whatever seems good to you” read literally “as all good in your eyes.” Mention of eyes is significant here, for Nahash wants to blind the right eye of each Israelite. To speak like this was a considerable gamble even though relief was on the way. Thus that night must have been the longest ever experienced for the inhabitants of Jabesh.

**Vs. 11: And on the morrow Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and cut down the Ammonites until the heat of the day; and those who survived were scattered so that no two of them were left together.**

Saul and those under his command knew full well that they had just twenty-four hours to reach Jabesh and plan their assault on Nahash whose army was facing the city yet, as noted above, was expecting Israelites to come as relief. In other words, Nahash was confident he could fight on two fronts at once. In the meanwhile, Saul's army underwent a forced march all night but were determined to assist their fellow countrymen.

The three companies of Israelite soldiers made their assault directly "in the midst of" (*betok* as in 10.23) of the Ammonite camp, that is, converging from three sides simultaneously. The Ammonites did fight back vigorously because the battle lasted until the heat of the day or around high noon. Nothing is said about the inhabitants of Jabesh, but surely they left their fortified city and joined in the battle with special ferocity, having in mind Nahash's threat to blind each one of them. The success of this, Saul's first military venture, is indicated by the fact that not even two Ammonites were left together. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, we have no record of Nahash himself as having suffered death. 1Chron 19.1 says that he had become an ally of David.

**Vs. 12: Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men that we may put them to death."**

Despite Saul being newly anointed as king over Israel, Samuel continues to enjoy popular support which is why the people approach him. In other words, he retained sufficient wisdom from his many years of judging Israel, and they weren't afraid to vent their anger. They demanded that anyone who was against Saul be put to death after the liberation of Jabesh-Gilead which means that he would consent to the death of such perceived traitors.

**Vs. 13: But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has wrought deliverance in Israel."**

Fortunately for Samuel, Saul was present when the people made their demand in vs. 12. Although we don't know exactly what Samuel thought, presumably he was of the same mind as Saul. *Teshuhah* (cf. vs. 9) is the noun for "deliverance" which was effected in (*b-*) Israel, that is, in her very essence as a nation.

**Vs. 14: Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom."**

Samuel speaks wisely as he had done on many occasion when he had been judge and continues to act as the most important person in Saul's retinue, that is, for consultation and guidance. He chooses Gilgal or where Samuel has made burnt offerings and peace offerings (cf. 10.8). As a footnote to the **RSV** says, this perhaps is an editorial statement because "Saul's kingship had not previously been publically proclaimed."

*Chadash* is the verb for "renew" which probably consisted in Samuel again reading the rights and duties of a king as he had done at Mizpah (cf. 10.25). "And you renew the face of the earth" [Ps 104.30].

**Vs. 15: So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.**

This moving from one place to another so often recounted in the text involves a huge migration of people, no small matter, and is not done without other such as the Philistines taking notice.

*Zavach* is the verb for "sacrificed" (cf. 2.13) which pertains to those offerings of "peace" or *shelem* (cf. 10.8).

While such offerings were made “before the Lord,” it should be kept in mind that technically speaking, the Lord continued to reside in the ark at Kiriath-Jearim. Surely the participants must have recalled the temple at Shiloh which the Philistines destroyed and wished to bring together in one place and in one act their desire to make these offerings before the Lord in his ark.

*Samach* is the verb for “rejoiced” (cf. vs. 9) which here is “exceedingly” or *me’od* (cf. vs. 6) which is prefaced with the preposition *hal*, literally as “upon exceedingly.”

## Chapter Twelve

**Vs. 1: And Samuel said to all Israel, “Behold, I have hearkened to your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you.**

Chapter Twelve begins where Eleven leaves off, namely, the people assembled at Gilgal with Samuel and Saul, and uses the occasion for a farewell address. The time has come for everyone to realize that they have opted for a king instead of a judge, all this instigated by the wicked behavior of Samuel’s two sons, Joel and Abijah, who had functioned as judges.

*Shamah* (‘hearkened’) is the common verb to hear and is used with the preposition *b-* (in), literally as “have hearkened in your voice” meaning that Samuel paid close attention to what the people wanted regardless of what he thought personally. And so Samuel concurs with the people of Israel in their desire for a king, something both parties would have to live with the rest of their lives. While this took place at Gilgal where “they made Saul king before the Lord” [11.15], Chapter Twelve presumes that Saul is present listening to Samuel. Although Samuel is simply conveying what the Lord told him, it must have been embarrassing to Saul having been anointed king under these circumstances.

**Vs. 2: And now, behold, the king walks before you; and I am old and gray and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my youth until this day.**

*Hineh* or “behold” (cf. 10.8) is Samuel’s way of saying to the people, here is your king. You’re stuck with him now. This walking before the people means that their new king (he’s not mentioned, which is significant) is about to assume full leadership and lead them regardless of their wishes.

Samuel also speaks of his two sons, apparently present, who’ve brought on this crisis of having a king instead of a judge. Perhaps they had been open to correction and reformed themselves but haven’t assumed the same leadership role as their illustrious father. It must have been difficult for them to listen to their father’s address with all eyes upon them as having been the reason why Israel chose a king. Also the people felt uncomfortable in their presence but didn’t say or do anything to them out of respect for Samuel.

When Samuel speaks of having walked before the people, he is referring to all those years when as judge he made a circuit throughout Israel (cf. 7.16).

**Vs. 3: Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.”**

After mentioning his two sons Samuel is quick to say that “Here I am:” say what you wish, I have nothing to defend after all these years and take responsibility for not having corrected my sons earlier.

*Hanah* is the verb for “testify” (cf. 9.17) which fundamentally means to answer, to respond and is used with regard to the Lord and his “anointed” or *mashyach* (cf. 9.16). Here’s yet another instance where Samuel speaks

of the new king while not mentioning his name. Saul was present, of course, perhaps seated on some temporarily erected dias with Samuel in full view of the people.

Samuel asks rhetorically about whose ass he has stolen, perhaps in reference to what had brought Saul to him in the first place, a less than flattering statement which everyone present picked up on. He adds three more questions in the same rhetorical manner knowing full well that he has executed the function of judge over Israel as best he could. Thus these three questions were directed in part to his two sons, Joel and Abijah with all Israel listening in. Again Samuel uses the word “testify” or *hanah* which is greeted by a welcomed silence.

**Vs. 4: They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.”**

The people respond immediately and with some embarrassment to Samuel. His two sons, Joel and Abijah, didn't respond but agreed, simply due to their guilt. One wonders about Saul's reaction as well.

**Vs. 5: And he said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.”**

Samuel uses the term “witness” twice, *hed* (cf. 6.18). The first is with respect to (*b-*, in) the Lord or literally “in the Lord” whereas the second or pertaining to the “anointed” (*mashyach*, cf. vs. 3) lacks this specificity. Samuel knew that Saul was dependent upon him because of having been anointed as king and all that followed up to this point. However, he didn't manipulate Saul but cooperated his best to establish him as king even though it was against the Lord's wishes. Awareness of that fact must have weighed upon Saul from the very beginning and increased in weight, as it were, when things started to deteriorate.

**Vs. 6: And Samuel said to the people, “The Lord is witness who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.”**

This verse begins with Samuel speaking to the people even though he had been doing so since the beginning of Chapter Twelve. However, they serve to recap Israel's history and go through vs. 17 as well as a reproach for the people who had chosen a king, a fact that Samuel never could swallow. Many times in both the Old and New Testaments we find this summary in various forms. For Israel to forget it is to forget her identity.

Within this recap of history, certainly not flattering, and that gives it objective validity and integrity, the Hebrew text lacks the word “witness.” Actually, there was no need for a witness during the time of Moses and Aaron due to their special relationship with the Lord and, of course, leaders who rescued Israel from Egypt. Both men effected that miracle without the need for either becoming a king. The Israelites don't seem to have demanded a king at the time but were content with Moses and Aaron as well as later successors such as Joshua. So in light of this history, Samuel intimates Israel had one last chance to opt out of having a king even though Saul had been anointed.

**Vs. 7: Now therefore stand still, that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the saving deeds of the Lord which he performed for you and for your fathers.**

Samuel's command for the people to “stand still” or *yatsav* is noted last in 10.19 as presenting oneself, of coming forth and awaiting further instructions. Samuel must have had in mind that *yatsav* or when Israel demanded a king be appointed over them.

*Shaphat* is the verb for “plead” (cf. 8.20) and applies more to judging, a task familiar to Samuel for so many years. The verb *shaphat* fits in well with the sense behind “saving deeds” or *tsadaqah* which more precisely means righteousness. “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness” [26.23].



Because *shaphat* and *tsadaqah* pertain to law and therefore judging, Moses and Aaron were such to Israel just as Samuel had been until very recently.

**Vs. 8: When Jacob went into Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried to the Lord and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought forth your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place.**

The Hebrew text lacks “and the Egyptians oppressed them.”

*Zahaq* (‘cried’) is noted last in 8.18 when the people demanded a king; Samuel seems to be drawing a parallel between that crying out and the present one which was uttered in very different circumstances. Here *zahaq* results not in a king but in the Lord giving Israel Moses and Aaron as leaders. Some of the people may have reconsidered their demand in light of that critical time in Israel’s history prior to the four hundred years of having lived in Egypt. Then patriarchs ruled in circumstances not entirely unlike the present one (‘in this place’). That is to say, in both cases the twelve tribes were occupying the same land as non-Israelites with the constant threat of warfare present and hence, annihilation. Their current enemies, the Philistines, must have had knowledge of Israel’s intrusion into Canaan and were determined not to let these foreigners repeat their claim. They had their own tradition of struggles enshrined in songs and poetry though we have nothing of them. Still, Israel remained in Canaan against all odds. The story of her departure from Egypt had been known equally among the Philistines and acted as a restraint from them taking full and decisive action against them.

**Vs. 9: But they forgot the Lord their God; and he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Jabin king of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them.**

“Forgot” or *shakach* (cf. 1.11) is the reason why this summary of Israel’s redemption and all those other ones in the Bible is given. What would happen, then, if Israel remembered her history while the issue of choosing a king was debated? Probably some brave person stood up but was shouted down. Indeed, Israel would end up in a way unlike “all the nations” [8.5] and be unique among them all.

Surely the people were familiar with Sisera, earlier strife with the Philistines and Moab. “And they fought against them” reads literally as “and they fought in (*b-*) them,” the preposition *b-* being indicative of long, drawn-out struggles.

**Vs. 10: And they cried to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you.’**

Another example of *zahaq* (‘cried’) noted two verses above which here is followed by repentance, an acknowledgment of sin (*chata’*, the verb; cf. 7.6).

Instead of the deliberate forgetting of the previous verse we have Israel having “forsaken” the Lord, *hazav* connoting desertion as noted in 8.8. It is one thing to forget the Lord but another to *hazav* him, an active form of forgetting, if you will. This forsaking is made worse by a recent incident, Samuel’s rebuke in 7.3-4 to abandon the Baals and Ashtaroth after Israel’s victory or the recapture of the ark of the Lord.

*Natsal* is the verb for “deliver” (cf. 10.8) and implies a sudden snatching. As long as the Philistine remain in the same territory as the Israelites this threat of adopting their gods as well as others remains.

**Vs. 11: And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety.**

Here three people are singled out as having preceded Samuel: Jerubbaal is a surname of the judge Gideon because he had destroyed the altar of Baal (cf. Judg 2, etc.), Barak or a warrior summoned by Deborah, the only female among the judges (cf. Judg 4.6). The Hebrew text has instead of Barak the name Bedan which is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Finally we have Jephthah who sacrifices his only daughter because of a vow he had made with regard to his defeat of the Ammonites (cf. Judg 11.31+).

Although Samuel is speaking prophetically in these verses, he speaks of himself objectively, as the last of this illustrious line of judges. All four “delivered” or snatched Israel (*natsal*, cf. vs. 10) from their foes. Note that these enemies are “on every side” or *savyv* with the preposition *min* prefaced to it (as *m—*), literally, “from every side.” “Even though they turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan” [14.21]. Here “to be with” is rendered literally as “round about.” Surely the people listening to Samuel knew of these predecessors to Samuel yet needed reminding. Samuel was speaking like this to compare them (he being included) with newly anointed Saul. Saul, too, must have felt embarrassed at being compared with these people.

The noun *betach* is used for “in safety,” the only occurrence in First Samuel. But he who listens to me will dwell secure” [Prov 1.33].

**Vs. 12: And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, `No, but a king shall reign over us' when the Lord your God was your king.**

Samuel brings the Lord’s argument against the kingship with the most recent clash they experienced, Nahash the Ammonite who made the dire threat of blinding the right eye of each inhabitant of Jabesh-Gilead (cf. 11.1+). Saul, of course, rallied Israel against Nahash yet can’t bring himself to mention his name. Although Samuel was a prophet like the three famous predecessors noted in the previous verse, he may have felt rejected and his pride hurt for not having acted as they did to save the people. In other words, Samuel was jealous of Saul but could never admit it. Yet, he was acting here as God’s spokesperson. Chances are that some of the people picked this up but would never discuss it with Samuel present.

**Vs. 13: And now behold the king whom you have chosen for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you.**

*Hineh* translates as “behold” (cf. vs. 2), a way of saying to the Israelites, “now you’re stuck with your decision despite my vehement disapproval.” Although Samuel continues to speak prophetically, he must have taken a certain delight in saying that the Lord is responsible for concurring with the people to chose a king. When Samuel uttered *hineh*, some of those present must have glanced over at Saul who did his best to look kingly and not be singled out as potentially being rejected by the Lord.

**Vs. 14: If you will fear the Lord and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well;**

The Lord changes the tone of his address to a positive note, much to the relief of those listening to Samuel as a divine mouthpiece, though not for long. *Yare’* is the verb for “fear” and is found last in 4.20 though not noted there. In many biblical commentaries this word is explained as pertaining to reverence, to have respect yet the genuine element of human fear is included. It is similar to many other biblical references, that is, with the verb “serve” and “hearken” (*havad* and *shamah*; cf. 8.8 & vs. 1) with regard to the divine “voice” (*qol*, cf. 8.22). In



the verse at hand, this fear/respect involves not rebelling against the Lord's "commandment" or *py* which means mouth. As for the verb *marah*. "For they have rebelled against you" [Ps 5.10].

The Hebrew text lacks "it will be well."

**Vs. 15: but if you will not hearken to the voice of the Lord but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.**

Despite the positive note in the previous verse, the Lord is intent upon warning Israel about its relationship with him. Again he puts it in terms of not hearkening (*shamah*, cf. vs. 14) to the "voice" of the Lord (*qol* prefaced with *b-* or *in*, vs. 14). This emphasis upon hearing is very frequent throughout the Bible as in this case when Israel insisted upon having a king. Its opposite, as noted in vs. 4, is rebellion (*marah*) concerning the Lord's "mouth" or *py*. In other words, there's a close connection between the divine *py* and the human response of *shamah*. The smaller the interval between the two, if you will, the greater will be the relationship between the Lord and Israel.

The Hebrew text has "fathers" in place of "king." Failure to hear or *shamah* will result in the divine hand being "in" (*b-*) both the people and their king. As for Saul, these words must have been encouraging after the rather negative tone of the Lord's words to Israel.

**Vs. 16: Now, therefore, stand still and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes.**

*Yatsav* is the verb for "stand still" noted last in vs. 7 when the Lord began his address to the people through the mediation of Samuel. Presumably the people did stand still throughout his address until now and had every intention of remaining so. Now *yatsav* is used with regard to a miracle about to be performed to show that the Lord remains in charge of Israel's fate.

*Davar* is the noun for "thing" noted last in 11.6 and derives from the verbal root meaning to speak. In the verse at hand, there is a direct connection between *davar* and what the Lord will do.

**Vs. 17: Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord that he may send thunder and rain; and you shall know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord in asking for yourselves a king."**

The Lord addresses the people through the mediation of Samuel beginning in vs. 6 through this verse. Because it is at the end, Samuel gets the last word in, if you will, by speaking.

Upon hearing these words, the people must have recalled the plagues Moses inflicted upon Israel fearing that they would be afflicted in the same way. For rain to come during the wheat harvest was unheard of, a sign that Samuel, now at the end of his service as judge, could invoke the Lord (*qara'*, cf. 10.17) and obtain whatever he wishes.

The purpose of this disaster is that the people may "know" or *yadah* (cf. 10.8), this verb meaning intimate or first hand knowledge. It is used with the verb *ra'ah* (cf. 9.17) or "see" where both are one and the same. It is with regard to the people's "wickedness" or *rahah* (cf. 8.6 for the verb as 'displeased'). Here at the conclusion of the Lord speaking to Israel he comes right out and puts their demand for a king in the strongest terms possible. Again with Saul in the audience, this must have more than embarrassed him. However, at this point he had no way out.

**Vs. 18: So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people**

**greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.**

Without further delay, Samuel again “called upon” the Lord (*qara'*, cf. vs. 17) who immediately responded by sending thunder and rain on the wheat crop which destroyed it. Surely the people considered Samuel to be like Moses calling down a plague on the Egyptians, reason to fear him in case eleven more were to follow. One gets the sense that Samuel took a certain pleasure in this. He was demonstrating before all the people that they have rejected him. While this may be true, Samuel retained miraculous power and was in favor with the Lord.

**Vs. 19: And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.”**

So after this plague and with the possibility of more to follow, the people address Samuel, that is, they beseech him to “pray” for them, *palal* (cf. 8.7), which pertains to making intercession. By calling themselves servants, the people put themselves at Samuel’s service. Keep in mind that this is being done in the presence of Saul who hasn’t uttered a word. Now he is king and the one to whom the people should owe their obeisance. Thus it must have been disconcerting when Saul heard these words between the people and Samuel. How, then, could he even begin to exercise legitimate authority? He is called outright an “evil” or *raha* (cf. vs. 17).

**Vs. 20: And Samuel said to the people, “Fear not; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart;**

Surely during this prolonged exchange Samuel must have thought of the original impulse that made the people opt for a king, that is, the improper behavior of Samuel’s two sons. That should never be forgotten as the motive which puts the blame, if you will, equally upon Samuel. He turned out to be just as negligent as Eli with his two sons.

*Sur* is the verb for “turn aside” noted last in 7.4 and used here with the preposition “after” which is prefaced with another preposition, *min-* (from). The counter point of *sur* is to “serve” the Lord, *havad* (cf. vs. 14) literally “in (*b-*) all your heart.” In sum, the challenge Samuel offers to the people is contained in the use of two prepositions, *min-* and *b-* or from and in.

**Vs. 21: and do not turn aside after vain things which cannot profit or save, for they are vain.**

*Sur* is the verb for “turn aside,” the first being with regard to the Lord in the previous verse. In other words, Samuel sees them as pretty much one and the same. Here *sur* refers to “vain things” *tohu* more properly referring to that which is empty or wasted. It is used twice in this verse. For the best known use of *tohu*, see Gn 1.2: “The earth was without form and void.”

In the verse at hand, *tohu* applies to two things: what cannot “profit” and what cannot “save,” *yahal* and *natsal*. The former fundamentally means to ascend on high, so anything of profit has its roots there. “Treasures of wickedness profit nothing” [Prov 10.2]. As for *natsal*, the last reference is vs. 11.

**Vs. 22: For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.**

Again we should keep in mind Saul being present in the audience listening to these far from encouraging words. After all, he did not seek the kingship but had it thrust upon him, all in that search for his father’s lost asses.

*Natash* is the verb for “cast away” noted last in 4.2 with respect to Israel whom Samuel is addressing at the moment. The Lord doesn’t do this for them but “for his great name’s sake,” “name” (*shem*) being equivalent to one’s reputation. After all, the new king (regardless of who he is) is intended to make Israel like all other

nations (cf. 8.5).

*Ya'al* means “pleased” and fundamentally applies to being before or first as well as to wish. It is found next in 17.39: “and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them.” As for the verse at hand, the Lord indicates that he isn’t finished with Israel but has much more in store, all positive, despite the people having gone against his wishes. Surely Israel as well as Saul must have been relieved to hear those words.

**Vs. 23: Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.**

Samuel doesn’t wish to offend the Lord by praying for the people, *palal* being the verb which means more to intercede as in vs. 19. He is painfully aware, of course, of his two sons Joel and Abijah who had brought about this crisis in the first place.

Despite the shift of power that has taken place, from judge (Samuel) to king (Saul), Samuel still freely exercises power over Israel by instructing them. The verb here is *yarah* noted last in 1.8 with regard to *derek* (cf. 9.8) or “way” which is both good and right. Although this *yarah* isn’t spelled out—Samuel may have in mind some future assembly—it may be summed up in the concluding two verses of this chapter. Again, we have to keep in mind Saul’s presence. If he had objected, chances are it would be recorded.

**Vs. 24: Only fear the Lord, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you.**

Here we have the second mention of “fear” (*yare'*; cf. vs. 20) which means to have respect for as well as to acknowledge.

Note the two uses of the preposition *b-* (in): prefaced to “faithfully” or the noun *'emeth* (truth) and to “heart” (*lev*, cf. 10.9).

The verb *ra'ah* (‘consider’) means to see as noted last in vs. 17. Such great things seem to apply grudgingly to Saul being made king as well as the recent victory over the Ammonites.

**Vs. 25: But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”**

Samuel ends with a renewed warning to the people to remain faithful to the Lord. If they fail—and that would be the equivalent of doing wickedly—they “shall be swept away” or *saphah*, a verb which connotes being consumed. “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” [27.1; also in 26.10 as niphal]. Samuel can’t resist a final dig, if you will, by including “your king” instead of mentioning Saul outright.

The noun *rahah* (evil) is used along with the verb *rahah* for “do wickedly:” “I have done wrong; return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm” [26.21]. The verb *yasaph* (cf. 3.21) is used for “still” and has the overall idea of increase.

## Chapter Thirteen

**Vs. 1: Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . .and two years over Israel.**

A sentence which is incomplete and in two parts: the age of Saul as well as “two years” concerning his reign. While obviously a gap in the text, we could take this deficiency as a sign of embarrassment with him as king. *Malak* is the verb for “to reign” which occurs twice in this verse and noted last in 8.11. The first instance has

the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to it and can be rendered as “became king” whereas the second has the preposition *hal-* (on) with respect to Israel and can be put as “reigned.” In other words, one verb with two expressions.

After the fairly harsh address of the previous chapter through the mouthpiece of Samuel, Saul is more or less left out of the scene for the time being but not for long. Samuel makes his appearance in vs. 8 to rebuke Saul, pretty much bringing to fruition the assessment of him which he had from the beginning.

**Vs. 2: Saul chose three thousand men of Israel; two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin; the rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent.**

This verse serves to introduce Saul’s ongoing conflict with the Philistines who must have kept a close eye on the developments of the last chapter. They were keenly aware of Samuel’s attitude towards Saul and Israel’s desire to have a king, so now Saul rivalled their own ruler and appeared a greater threat since his earlier victory over the Ammonites.

Jonathan is introduced as Saul’s son for the first time as a grown man. To date we have heard nothing about him.

Later in Is 10.28 Michmash is mentioned with regard to an invasion by the Assyrians, not far from Jerusalem, but the Lord will stop them there. Gibeah is mentioned in 11.4 as “Gibeah of Saul,” that is, his birthplace.

Saul is hoping to repeat his earlier victory over Nahash the Ammonite but in more dramatic fashion, that is, with a limited amount of soldiers who most likely were highly trained and loyal to him. That’s why he sent the rest home. “Every man to his tent” is more specific than “sent home.” It suggests a kind of confinement until the impending battle is over and the outcome has been known. In the meanwhile, everyone was on edge in the confinement of their tents.

**Vs. 3: Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines which was at Geba; and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.”**

Geba is mentioned first in Josh 18.24 as belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Apparently the Philistines were stationed there more or less permanently, hence a “garrison” or *netsyv*. It is noted last in 10.5 as Gibeath-Elohim “where there is a garrison of the Philistines,” the town where Saul met the band of prophets and prophesied with them. Note that it was Jonathan who led the attack, not Saul. Surely he gave strict orders to his son to avoid civilian casualties, especially the prophets who must have rejoiced at Saul’s son having come to their rescue. Apparently this garrison was important and a constant threat to the security of Israel.

“And the Philistines heard of it.” These are somewhat ominous words meaning that despite the defeat, the Philistines were incensed and prepared to mobilize in order to crush the new upstart king of Israel.

*Shophar* is the noun for “trumpet” most likely made from an animal’s (sheep, ram) horn. “So Joab blew the trumpet; and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more” [2Sam 2.28]. In the verse at hand one *shophar*, not more, was sufficient to resound throughout Israel, such being the power of this special instrument. Although neither he nor anyone else could do this physically, people were positioned everywhere in Israel to take up the first blow and pass it along. Thus in a very short period of time everyone heard the trumpet. Chances are Saul picked a special note or the like on the *shophar* reserved for the king alone and designed to grab everyone’s attention at once.

**Vs. 4: And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had**

**become odious to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.**

These words follow on the heels of the previous verse, “Let the Hebrews hear” (*shamah*, cf. 12.15). All Israel heard the report of Saul’s defeat of the Philistine garrison chiefly through the blowing of that trumpet, a note so piercing and singular that every Israelite couldn’t help but pay attention. However, the Philistines and others were unable to pick up on it.

*Ba’ash* is the verb for “had become odious” which means to stink as well as to abhor. “He has made himself utterly abhorred by his people Israel” [27.12]. For *ba’ash* to reach all the Philistines at once (the inverse of that trumpet just noted) indicates just how important was the garrison at Geba. If that falls, their grip on territory under their control is in jeopardy.

*Tsahaq* means “were called out” noted last in 10.17 and implies urgency in the sense of coming to one’s assistance. Although the trumpet of vs. 3 isn’t mentioned, chances are it was used here a second time.

**Vs. 5: And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude; they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-Aven.**

Despite the defeat of their garrison, this verse intimates that the Philistines retained more than sufficient military power (‘like sand on the seashore’) to muster troops against Israel. They were endowed with a certain mettle, if you will, made manifest in their first engagement when the Israelites had brought the ark of the Lord into their midst: “Take courage and acquit yourselves like men, O Philistines” [4.9].

The verb for “mustered” is *’asaph* means to gather together, to assemble and found first in 5.8 though not noted there. Michmash is noted last noted in vs. 2 with regard to the defeat of the Assyrians. It’s difficult or impossible to know whether such past events influenced present actions. If so, the Philistines would be on guard as to what might happen to them in this instance. As for Beth-Aven, the only time it’s mentioned earlier than here is Josh 7.2: “Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai which is near Beth-Aven, east of Bethel.”

**Vs. 6: When the men of Israel saw that they were in straits (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns,**

As it had been pointed out several times earlier, the Philistines and Israelites pretty much shared the same territory. That is, both people, antagonistic for centuries, lived in a confined area which must have made life difficult for them both even when there was no war. That couldn’t be called a real peace, more like constant warfare punctuated by interludes of its suspension.

*Tsarar* is the verb for “were in straits” and fundamentally means to press, to bind up. It is found next in 25.29.

The words in parentheses (not in the Hebrew text) are a kind of commentary or notation on *tsarar*, the verb being *nagas* meaning to impel, to urge. “And the men of Israel were distressed that day” [14.24]. This distress is emphasized by such vivid images of hiding in underground places, away from the sight of the Philistines.

**Vs. 7: or crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.**

While some Israelites hid in various places underground, others crossed the Jordan River. They were better off in the sense of actually getting away from the Philistines, not being stuck in a given place with the distinct possibility of being found and then put to death.

It is a tribute to Saul that he didn't flee but showed courage, a trait he demonstrated immediately after having assumed the kingship when combatting the Ammonites. Obviously he set an example because "all the people followed him." There is no verb here though we have *charad* for "trembling" with the idea that both are one and the same. The elders of the city came to meet him (Samuel) trembling" [16.4]. This is reminiscent of Saul having chopped up his yoke of oxen and sending pieces throughout Israel as a means of getting the people behind him to fight the Ammonites. Chances are that most people recalled that event and were so struck by Saul's leadership that automatically they went after him.

**Vs. 8: He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him.**

Reference to the seven days wait hearkens back to 10.8: "Seven days you shall wait until I come to you and show you what you shall do." Chances are that time period doesn't refer to when Saul was at Gibeah because too much had happened in between. The number "seven" is considered sacred and had its most notable recent occurrence in 11.3: "Give us seven days respite." It was Samuel who came up with this number, also representative of the six days of creation followed by one day of rest. That gives credence to the words "the time appointed by Samuel."

*Yachal* is the verb for "waited" found in 10.8 just mentioned which must have been the seven longest days in Saul's life with the entire nation of Israel at its wit's end. The object of this interminable waiting was the "time appointed or *mohed* (cf. 9.24). Chances are Saul thought that the Philistines could have either killed or captured Samuel. Regardless, it was the absence of news that ate at him.

In the meantime the people "were scattering" or *puts*, a verb which also means to break into pieces and noted last in 11.11. This *puts* didn't take place wholesale but gradually until Saul was left with his most faithful followers. Besides, he was powerless to do anything about this, not even attempt to threaten the people as he had done when summoning them to fight against Nahash the Ammonite.

The two prepositions *min-* and *hal-* jammed together, if you will (*mehlayu*, literally as 'from on him') serve to make this scattering all the more dramatic and leaving Saul almost on his own.

**Vs. 9: So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.**

This verse begins with "so" or the conjunctive *w-* usually translated as "and." As noted several times earlier, *w-* serves to connect most sentences in First Samuel giving the text a continuity of action. Here *w-* stands out in a special manner because Saul had waited seven days for Samuel and leads him to take action on his own. However, Samuel makes his appearance suddenly in vs. 10.

*Nagash* is the verb for "bring" and is noted last in 9.18. Saul makes this request...demand...with some impatience in his voice. Being king, he figured that there would be no problem to make a sacrifice without Samuel being present. He has a point, for the Israelites had fled in fear of the Philistines and was left in a fairly desperate situation. Also the seven day interval gave the Philistines time to press their offensive. Though nothing is said of that certainly it's implied.

The "burnt offering" or *holah* is noted last in 7.9 with regard to being made by Samuel. *Shelem* is the noun for "peace offering" (cf. 11.15), especially important now with the Philistines threatening to destroy Israel. Apparently the *shelem* were not offered but left in tact, perhaps just in case Samuel were to show up. Then he could perform the necessary sacrifice.



Apparently neither rules nor guidelines existed as to make these sacrifices except by previous observation. Thus Saul muddled through it as best he could with the assistance of people more knowledgeable in such matters.

**Vs. 10: As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and salute him.**

Two other uses of the connective *w-* which show the continuity of action in this crisis, intimating beforehand that Saul had done something out of bounds: “as soon as” and one untranslated but associated with *hineh* or “behold” (cf. 12.13). In this instance *hineh* indicates surprise on both the part of Saul and Samuel. He had finished making the sacrifice and perhaps was at the temporary altar or just leaving it.

It seems that Samuel had not entered the area of sacrifice but waited in a place apart. The verb “went out” (*yatsa’* as in 8.20 but not mentioned there) doesn’t necessarily apply to leaving a building and going outside. Perhaps Samuel waited some distance so as not to interfere, all the while trying to conceal his surprise and anger. Saul did make his way toward Samuel most likely with some embarrassment at having just completed the offering on his own. Now he had to do some quick explanation. So when Saul saluted Samuel he did so with the hope that he would approve of his action, given the dire situation at hand. The verb *barak* is used (cf. 9.13) which fundamentally means to bless. At this point we can pick up the tension in the air and feel that things will go downhill from this point.

**Vs. 11: Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash,**

The connective *w-* which begins this sentence is, like the ones noted above, is especially poignant in that it serve to heighten the tension between the two men. Immediately Samuel blurts out without responding to the *barak* by Saul, “What have you done?” Naturally this puts Saul on the defensive yet gives an accurate account of his actions.

Saul gives his response in the form of three short explanations: 1), namely, that the people “were scattering” or *puts* in vs. 8. 2) Saul puts the blame on Samuel for not having come on “day appointed,” *mohed* being used for the latter and noted last in vs. 8. 3) The Philistines “mustered” at Michmash, the verb being *’asaph* found last in vs. 3.

**Vs. 12: I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favor of the Lord’; so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.”**

One has to admire the straight-forwardness of Saul here, especially by admitting that he did not entreat the Lord’s “favor” or *chalah*, a verb meaning to make supplication as well as to be sick. The idea seems to be that when a person is not well, he begs the Lord for healing. “And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, ‘He is sick’” [19.14]. In the verse at hand, *chalah* is used with *peny* (cf. 2.11 or *panym*) which literally means “face.” To Saul’s mind, this failure resulted from the emergency which confronted him.

*’Aphaq* is the verb for “forced” and means to restrain or to be strong. Saul is attempting to convey to Samuel his desperation and lack of anyone qualified to make offerings, that is, a priest. He figured that since he was king, he could do this in an emergency. “For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself” [Is 42.14].

**Vs. 13: And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you; for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel for ever.**

Now come the words Saul was expecting all along, having had a sentiment Samuel felt this way from the day they met. Samuel said that Saul has “done foolishly,” the verb being *sakal* which also has a hint of wickedness. “Then Saul said, ‘I have done wrong...behold, I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly’ [26.21].

In the verse at hand, the more precise definition of *sakal* is a failure of *shamar* (cf. 9.24), that is, with regard to the divine “commandment” or *misvah*, the first biblical mention being Gen 26.5: “Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept (*shamar*) my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.” As for the commandment of the Lord, he “commanded” Saul to follow them, *tsavah* (found in 2.29), this being the verbal root for *misvah*. Samuel has in mind his injunction in 10.7 for Saul to wait seven days in Gilgal. However, there is not specific mention of a divine commandment in that regard.

Indeed, Samuel holds Saul to a close to impossible agreement, given the immanent threat of the Philistines. Perhaps laying behind Samuel’s rather harsh attitude towards Saul is what had precipitated all this, namely, the bad behavior of his two sons. On top of this was the persistent yet painful memory from his youth, namely, Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Also Samuel harbored some jealousy about him being the last judge of Israel, that this newcomer named Saul would succeed him as that nation’s first king.

*Kun* the verb for “established” also meaning to stand upright, to erect. Thus *kun* implies a linear, continuous direction without swerving to the left or to the right (cf. 23.33). In the verse at hand this verb is used with the preposition ‘*el-*’ or literally “to Israel.”

**Vs. 14: But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”**

Just when you think Saul has heard enough bad news Samuel piles on more by saying that his kingdom will not “continue” or *qum* which fundamentally means to rise (cf. 9.3). By all accounts, it looks that way right now with the Philistines pressing in on all sides. In other words, the opposite of *qum* is, as it were, deflation or collapse.

Now for the very first time Samuel says that someone else will succeed Saul though he (David) doesn’t come on the scene until Chapter Sixteen. This didn’t seem to bother Saul who had more immediate problems on his mind. It is the Lord himself who has “sought out” a yet to be identified man, *baqash* (cf. 9.3). In contrast to the choice of Saul as king—done at the people’s request—this new person will be in accord with the Lord’s “own heart” or *lev* (cf. 12.24).

*Tsavah* translates as “has appointed” and more properly means “commanded” as found in vs. 13 and here is used with respect to the yet-to-be-revealed chosen man as “prince” or *nagyd*, the same term being found in 10.1 with respect to Saul. In Samuel’s eyes, Saul failed to keep (*shamar*, cf. vs. 13) what the Lord had commanded him.

**Vs. 15: And Samuel arose, and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.**

After Samuel said that Saul’s kingdom will not continue (*qum*) in vs. 14, he “arose” or *qum* to Gibeah noted last in vs. 2.

It is to Saul's credit that he did not respond harshly to Samuel's condemnation but focussed on the pressing task at hand, namely, to number those who remained with him or those who neither chose to hide nor to flee. The remaining six hundred men had to face thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen of the Philistines (cf. vs. 5). The verb for "numbered" is *paqad* which means more to muster or to prepare for battle (cf. 11.8).

**Vs. 16: And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin; but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.**

Jonathan represented a bright spot in all this gloom, having defeated the Philistine garrison at Geba (cf. vs. 3). It was certainly a relief and joy for Saul to meet up with his son who encouraged his father after Samuel's condemnation. What Jonathan thought about Samuel isn't recorded, but it must have been less than flattering. At Geba Saul could consult those prophets with whom he fell in and prophesied (cf. 10.10). Surely they reminded him Gideon who defeated Midian with half the number at Saul's disposal, three hundred men (cf. Judg 7.7). In the meanwhile, the Philistine troops noted in vs. 15 were not far away in Michmash noted last in vs. 11. Surely the Philistines kept a close eye on Saul and Samuel, especially since both were at Geba, scene of their recent defeat.

**Vs. 17: And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies; one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual,**

Use of the connective *w-* stands out here in that it makes an immediate connection between the Israelite condition and the Philistine's use of raiders. In other words, the action in these verses is particularly fast paced.

*Shachat* is the verb used as a participle for "raiders" which means to destroy or more fundamentally, to corrupt. "And there was a panic in the camp, in the field and among all the people; the garrison and even the raiders trembled" [14.15]. Such troops were more or less auxiliaries or irregulars, perhaps mercenaries, who did dirty work for the Philistines. They made three attacks more or less to distract the small number of Israelites under Saul and Jonathan after which the Philistine army would make a frontal assault.

If the Philistine raiders were familiar with Israelite history, they would have second thoughts about attacking Ophrah. That is the place where the angel of the Lord met Gideon (cf. Judg 6.11). As for Shual, it is mentioned in one other place, 1Chron 7.36 but as a person listed among numerous others with regard to the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Vs. 18: another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border that looks down upon the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.**

This verse continues directly from the previous one and mentions two places the raiders attacked: like Ophrah of the previous verse, Beth-horon was noted for a great Israelite defeat by Gideon of five kings (cf. Josh 10.10). The other place is Zeboim which has one other biblical reference (Neh 11.34), part of the census done by Nehemiah. That makes two of five places of special significance of Israel of which the raiders were ignorant. As perhaps being foreigners or mercenaries, they didn't know Israel's history, another reason why the Philistines may have taken advantage of them to engage in marauding expeditions. These raiders were interested in simply to get as much booty as they could and leave it at that.

**Vs. 19: Now there was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears;"**

As a footnote in the **RSV** says, "The age of iron was just beginning in Palestine; the Philistines were superior to the Israelites in material culture." That explains the lack of "smith" or *charash*, a word usually applicable to an

engraver or carpenter. “To the carpenters and to the builders and to the masons as well as for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house” [2Kg 22.6].

As the same **RSV** note says, the Philistines knew of their advantage in fashioning weapons. However, given the recent defeat at the hands of Jonathan as well as the earlier one (technically a military victory) when they returned the ark of the Lord, they were well away of what they were up against.

**Vs. 20: but every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe or his sickle;**

An unusual statement insofar as the Israelites and Philistines were at war...not just now but have been for many years. You’d think the Philistines would take this opportunity to seize their enemy’s weapons. However, they seemed more intent on charging them for it and must have raised the price for this service considerably. In that way they could attempt to bankrupt Israel’s shaky economy.

The noun for “plowshare” is *macharesheth* which here is used for “sickle.” This term doesn’t appear elsewhere in the Bible.

**Vs. 21: and the charge was a pim for the plowshares and for the mattocks and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads.**

The idea behind this verse is that the Philistines charged the Israelites an exorbitant price for preparing implements for war. They were shrewd enough, however, not to refuse outright their requests which could have undermined the Philistine plan to do away with Israel once and for all. One can just imagine a whole bunch of Israelites approaching Philistine smiths and the like with formidable weapons. Perhaps if they had done this more discreetly...in stages, if you will...they could have succeeded in arming themselves. But that would take too much time. The threat of annihilation was all too real.

**Vs. 22: So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan; but Saul and Jonathan his son had them.**

“Day of battle” suggests a prearranged date, almost a formal agreement of sorts between the two warring parties. After the Israelites had been frustrated at their inability to have their weapons sharpened, they were left facing the enemy empty-handed. Still, they came out to join Saul and his son which shows their determination to make good of the situation. They trusted Saul’s proven boldness to effect a victory.

This verse is clear about Saul and Jonathan having swords and spears in their possession. We don’t know where or how they obtained them, but the weapons were enough to arm everyone. Perhaps Saul wished to test the Israelites by sending them to the Philistines as recounted in the last verse. Those who were discouraged and decided that defeat was inevitable weren’t suited to join the army. Those who mustered under Saul’s command did so with some misgivings but were delighted upon finding that they had weapons. This must have energized the soldiers in a way that otherwise wouldn’t have been possible.

**Vs. 23: And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.**

*Matsav* is the word for “garrison” compared with *netsyv* of 10.5, both being from the same verbal root. The former occurs several times in the next chapter. “In the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood” [Josh 4.9].

Michmash is noted last in vs. 16, here with respect to a pass which would prove crucial in Chapter Fourteen (cf.

vs. 4) when Jonathan sneaked into the Philistine camp.

## Chapter Fourteen

**Vs. 1: One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on yonder side.” But he did not tell his father.**

Earlier we were introduced to Saul along with a servant or *nahar* (cf. 9.3), both having gone on an extended search for the asses belonging to Saul’s father. In the verse at hand, *nahar* is used with the verb “bore” and the noun “armor” or *kely* noted last in 10.22 as “baggage.” It was not uncommon for a man of distinction to go out on an expedition or trip in the company of a servant or slave which here is called a *nahar* or young man. One wonders what the two talked about during the long hours of walking and sleeping under the stars. Some fairly strict code must have kept the two apart even though both were together over a long period of time. In the case at hand, Jonathan had sufficient trust in his *nahar* to keep a secret: “But he did not tell his father.”

*Matsav* is the noun for “garrison” noted last in 13.23. The Philistines had taken up position there in anticipation for a battle they were confident of winning, especially since they refused to sharpen or repair any weapons belonging to the Israelites.

**Vs. 2: Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is at Migron; the people who were with him were about six hundred men,**

*Qatseh* is the noun for “outskirts” (cf. 9.27) with respect to Gibeah noted last in 13.15 where Saul had been with six hundred men. In the former reference Saul had been rejected by Samuel and must have been nursing his wounded pride. This is all the more poignant by mention of the “pomegranate tree” or *rimon* under which Saul was resting. Judging by most references, such a tree was valued for its fruit. This detail conveys a sense of peace and control so essential for the six hundred troops with Saul. “They brought also some pomegranates and figs” [Num 13.23].

As for Migron, the only other biblical references is Is 10.28: “He has come to Aiath; he has passed through Migron, at Michmash he stores his baggage” (cf. 13.2 for this same verse).

**Vs. 3: and Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the Lord in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.**

Interestingly we have Ahijah who traces his lineage to Phinehas, one of the notorious two sons of Eli who had defrauded the Israelites at the temple in Shiloh. Apparently Ahijah carried on the priestly lineage at Shiloh. Although Samuel has passed off the scene and won’t reappear until the next chapter, he must have gotten wind of Ahijah’s presence with Saul and was considerably troubled by this association. It was not uncommon that guilt associated with Phinehas as well as Hophni was transferred to future generations, for example, to Ahijah who then transmitted it to Saul.

According to a note in the **RSV**, “ephod” (*‘ephod*) here is not the same linen garment as in 2.18 but “a box containing Urim and Thummim, the sacred objects for determining the divine will by lot.” The verb *nasa’* (cf. 4.4) translates as “wearing” and fundamentally means to raise, to bear. We could take *nasa’* literally in this instance, of Ahijah bearing the *‘ephod*.

Prior to sneaking away into the Philistine camp Jonathan must have come up with a ruse to trick the Israelites, that is, someone making excuses for him as having been sent on a mission by his father.

**Vs. 4: In the pass by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side; the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.**

The noun “pass” (*mahbarah*) is derived from the verbal root *havar*, here as “to go over.” “They have crossed over the pass, at Geba they lodge for the night” [Is 10.29]. The verse at hand reads literally “between the passes.”

As for “rocky crag,” the latter is *shen* which literally means a tooth. And so Jonathan and his armor bearer had to cross between two “teeth,” symbolic of entering the very mouth of the Philistine army. This is made all the more dramatic by the words “on one side” and “on the other side.”

Bozez means something like Shining and Seneh, Crag. Regardless, the proper names serve to heighten the danger confronted by Jonathan in the dead of night even before he reached the Philistine camp.

**Vs. 5: The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash and the other on the south in front of Geba.**

*Matsug* is the noun for “crag” and has one other biblical reference, 2.8 as “pillars.” Both crags/pillars were before both Michmash and Geba. These positions give the impression that they are helping to conceal Jonathan and his armor bearer.

**Vs. 6: And Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us; for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.”**

This is the first time since vs. 1 that Jonathan speaks, that is, to his *nahar* or “young man.” The description of both Saul and Ahijah along with the formidable obstacles confronting him can’t help but add to the drama and suspense.

Jonathan uses “uncircumcised” or *harel* in a derogatory manner, almost as a curse, as in 17.26: “For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

*Ulay* is a way of saying “it may be,” suggestive of possibility. “Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive” [1Kg 18.5]. Even though Jonathan is risking everything by having come thus far, still he has doubt. But judging by this used of *‘ulay*, he is resigned to his fate as coming from God whether it be good or otherwise. The verb *hasah* (‘will work,’ cf. 8.8) is used with the preposition *l-* or literally, “will work to us.”

*Mahtsor* is a noun for “can hinder,” the only one in the Bible, and derives from the verbal root *hatsar* noted last in 9.17. It is used with regard to the saving power of the Lord, *yashah* (cf. 11.3) being the verb with the preposition *b-* (in): “in many” and “in few.”

**Vs. 7: And his armor bearer said to him, “Do all that your mind inclines to; behold, I am with you, as is your mind so is mine.”**

This is the first time the anonymous *nahar* of Jonathan speaks, in full agreement with his plan as would be expected from someone in a subservient role. The last time such an anonymous person appeared was the servant (also a *nahar* as in 9.3) who had accompanied Saul in search of the lost asses. Jonathan’s *nahar* must have had a tough time of it. Being an armor bearer he had to carry his master’s weapons as they made their way stealthily through the pass, all the while being careful that these weapons didn’t clang against the rocks, a task all the more difficult in the middle of the night.



*Lev* is the noun for “heart” (cf. 14.14) which in this instance applies to Jonathan’s ability to make the correct decision under intense pressure. *Natah* is the verb for “inclines” as noted last in 8.8 and means to incline. Here it suggests a gentle assent to a decision about to be made. The anonymous *nahar* was in a good position to know Jonathan well, for as his armor bearer, he saw plenty of occasions when his master had commanded soldiers and experienced battle first hand. In other words, he saw Jonathan under pressure.

The *nahar* said that he is with his master in this particularly difficult situation as he had been many times before. Again, *lev* is used for “mind.” These words read literally, behold (*hineh*, cf. 14.10) “behold, with you as (is) your heart.”

**Vs. 8: Then said Jonathan, “Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them.**

What was in Jonathan’s heart as noted in vs. 7 he now reveals which was a certain boldness colored by recklessness even though as of yet he hadn’t an accurate assessment of the Philistines. Obviously Jonathan and his armor bearer couldn’t attack the Philistines, let alone make a decisive raid. Instead, he decides to “show ourselves,” the verb being *galah* (cf. 9.15) which means to reveal as to uncover. While the two men were making their way, Jonathan figured that this *galah* would take place under the cover of night. In other words, already Jonathan had hatched a plan he was about to make known. The anonymous armor bearer had experience of Jonathan’s prowess before in military affairs and trusted him completely.

**Vs. 9: If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them.**

The first of two options which Jonathan thinks the Philistines will give. He knew his venture would be reduced to these two, given the display of confidence in vs. 6 and encouragement by his armor bearer. Of course, this is taking place at night with only the stars and possibly some moonlight for illumination.

*Damam* is the verb for “wait” noted last in 2.9 with a different meaning, “shall be cut off.” *Nagah* is the verb for “come” (cf. 10.26) which suggests a touching. That sense isn’t far off the mark, given that it is the dead of night.

“Stand still in our place” consists of the verb *hamad* (cf. 6.20) and the preposition *tachat* (under) rendering it literally as “stand under.” This option of waiting for the Philistines was risky, but at least Jonathan and his servant were protected by the night and rough terrain.

**Vs. 10: But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up; for the Lord has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.”**

The second of two options is the one Jonathan hopes that will happen. Should the first come true, he and his armor bearer could make good their escape without alerting the Philistines about the larger Israelite force in waiting.

*Oth* is the noun for “sign” noted last in 10.9. It is for this second option that Jonathan has risked everything, even the possibility that the Philistines might crush the six hundred soldiers under Saul’s command.

**Vs. 11: So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines; and the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hid themselves.”**

*Galah* is the verb for “showed” as in vs. 8. Because it was in the dead of night, this showing could be by two means: speaking or making noise or with a torch, neither being specified. First the Philistine watchmen caught

a glimpse of Jonathan and his armor bearer after which immediately then informed everyone else in the camp in case an attack was close at hand. However, the response from the Philistines was more one of contempt than alarm. *Hineh* or “look” conveys this disdain (cf. vs. 7). They figured that the two men were cowards who had cringed at the appearance of their army (cf. 13.6). Also the Philistines thought they were surrendering and possibly more Israelites might make themselves known. Never did it enter their minds that it was highly unusual...even suspicious...for people to approach a military garrison in the middle of the night.

**Vs. 12: And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.” And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, “Come up after me; for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.”**

At last, the answer to Jonathan’s prayers after which there was no turning back. *Hanah* is the verb for “hailed” noted last in 12.3 and fundamentally means to answer, to respond. All this, of course, was done in the direction of the voices because it was the dead of night. Immediately after having made the demand to come up, the Philistines added that they would “show” Jonathan and his armor bearer “a thing.” The verb is *yadah* (to know, cf. 12.17) and the noun is *davar* as in 12.16 with this same meaning, with *davar* meaning literally a word. Obviously the Philistine were taunting Jonathan, for they though he and his servant were just two cowardly Israelites who had hid themselves in the ground (cf. vs. 11).

If Jonathan responded to the Philistine’s taunt, it isn’t recorded. Perhaps he decided to keep silence and make the Philistines more curious and thus more exposed to attack. At this point Jonathan doesn’t identify himself as a courageous (even foolish) individual but as Israel, the nation as a whole. With this confidence he knew victory was already his.

**Vs. 13: Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him;**

This difficult, arduous climb up to the Philistine camp shows just how vulnerable had been Jonathan’s position. We don’t know how many soldiers he encountered, most likely night guards and those who had been roused from sleep at the commotion. The picture we have is of Jonathan and his servant suddenly appearing from a ravine below or the like while the Philistines were looking over unaware of the two men just beneath. Vs. 13 has Jonathan making the first strike followed by his armor bearer who took care of any Philistine who was lurking in the dark. At this juncture only torches and the quick glint of swords were visible.

**Vs. 14: and that first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made was of about twenty men within, as it were, half a furrow's length in an acre of land.**

*Makah* is the noun for “slaughter” noted last in 6.19; also 4.8 has it as a plague. In other words, *makah* means a striking of any sort. The verse at hand points out that this was first *makah* of the Philistine garrison by Jonathan though we have no specific information about any subsequent actions by him. Mention of a furrow suggests a straight line, as though the Philistines had approached Jonathan and his armor bearer one after another. That could have been true, given the rugged terrain and night. One gets the impression that the first of the twenty Philistine soldiers encountered Jonathan and his servant, was killed after which came another until the last one was dispatched.

**Vs. 15: And there was a panic in the camp, in the field and among all the people; the garrison and even the raiders trembled; the earth quaked; and it became a very great panic.**

*Charadah* means “panic” or more properly anything which causes terror or fear. “Then Isaac trembled violently” [Gen 27.33]. Note the use of *machaneh* (cf. 4.5) which refers to the Philistine *matsav* (‘garrison,’ cf.

vs. 1). Usually the former is temporary whereas the latter is less so, a contingent of soldiers within a city to provide security, etc.

The panic at hand takes place in the field as well as in the camp, that is, “among all the people” which implies that a sizable group of Philistine non-combatants was present, most likely as support or even some onlookers wanting to see their army annihilate the Israelites once and for all.

“Raiders” or the participle *shachat* is found last in 13.17, and for these men to tremble is a sign that Jonathan and his armor bearer are causing serious damage. As noted earlier, perhaps they were mercenaries and less inclined to show allegiance. If they give way, the Philistine troops will collapse just as quickly. It seemed no one was courageous enough to rally them as they had done in 4.9: “Take courage and acquit yourselves like men.”

*Ragaz* is the verb for “quaked” which also means to be moved or disturbed as well as to be angry. “The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble” [Ps 99.1]! The *ragaz* at hand can mean an earthquake in the physical sense or more to the point, the earth trembling beneath the panic taking place.

The words “it became a very great panic” read literally “and it was to a panic of God.” In other words, Jonathan began the assault and the Lord finished it.

**Vs. 16: And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and behold, the multitude was surging hither and thither.**

*Tsaphah* is a verb used for “watchmen” noted last in 4.13 who were looking or *ra’ah* (cf. 12.24), the common verb for to see. Jonathan and his armor bearer made their assault at night. However, the commotion it caused among the Philistines must have lasted into the next day, hence the reason why Saul’s watchmen could see it. They are located in Gibeah, the place where Saul had pitched his tent under the pomegranate tree (cf. vs. 2).

As pointed out several times earlier, *hineh* or “behold” (cf. vs. 11) suggests a shift in attention, usually suddenly, as is the case here regarding the Philistine “multitude” or *hamon* (cf. 4.14) which connotes an uproar or confusion. The verb *mug* applies to this multitude (‘was surging’) which usually means to melt away. The following from Is 14.31 fits in neatly here: “Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you!”

**Vs. 17: Then Saul said to the people who were with him, “Number and see who has gone from us.” And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor bearer were not there.**

Saul speaks only when he is certain of a favorable report from the watchmen who got notice of the commotion among the Philistines. He gives the order to “number” the people, *paqad* being the verb which commonly means to muster in the military sense (cf. 13.15). In other words, the people lined up in formation, most likely by tribe, so a census could be taken. Because Jonathan was Saul’s son, his absence was discovered quickly though to be sure, Saul waited until the head count was done.

The verse at hand has another use of *hineh* or “behold” to show astonishment (cf. vs. 16).

**Vs. 18: And Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring hither the ark of God.” For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel.**

As noted in vs. 3, Ahijah was descended from the notorious Phinehas. Although Saul knew this, he was in desperate straits and knew, as many of those with him, of the ignominious defeat of Israel by the Philistines when the ark had been captured. Actually this is the first mention of the “ark” (*aron*) of God since 6.8 when it resided at Kiriath-Jearim while nothing is said about it accompanying Israel. The verse at hand says more

accurately, “with the sons of Israel.” That means the ark had been present with Saul since the beginning of his kingship. We don’t know if it accompanied Samuel “all the days of his life” [7.15], but if it did and later changed hands into Saul’s guardianship, we can understand better Samuel’s hostility toward the new king. To make matters worse, the ark with in the care of Ahijah. He may have not had hostility toward Samuel but surely Samuel must have hated Ahijah. Obviously some jealousy on Samuel’s part plays a role here, but you would never hear about it openly.

**Vs. 19: And while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more; and Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.”**

The discussion between Saul and Ahijah was how to best utilize the ark of the Lord against the Philistines. Surely they had in mind the above mentioned disaster depicted in Chapter Four. Then Israel had a considerably larger army whereas now some six hundred men faced the Philistines. Perhaps that sober and painful lesson would modify Israel. As their discussion continued, both heard the rising noise in the distance among the Philistines. They weren’t sure what was going on; perhaps the Philistines were attempting to cower Israel into submission by making such noise, even trick them. Nevertheless, the noise is a “tumult” or *hamon* noted in vs. 16, this word usually applicable to confusion and difficult to feign.

The literally way of saying “increased more and more” is “and went and went and increased.” This made Saul order Ahijah to “withdraw” (*asaph*, cf. 13.11) his *hand*. As the **RSV** comments, Ahijah was about to cast the Urim and Thummim. However, the *hamon* to which Saul listened attentively convinced him there was no need for this. Victory was almost theirs.

**Vs. 20: Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle; and behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion.**

It seemed the *hamon* within the Philistine camp (whose source had yet to be detected) was sufficient reason for Saul to rally the people, *zahaq* being the verb as in 12.10 which means to cry out.

The noun for “fellow” is *reah* which fundamentally means neighbor or friend and found last in 10.11 though not noted there.

*Mehumah* means “confusion” and found last in 5.11, being similar to *hamon* though of a different verbal root. The adverb *me’od* (cf. 11.15) is used which implies excessiveness. And so when Israel engaged the Philistines they didn’t quite know what to make of the situation. In many instances they must have stood back and watched, allowing and almost encouraging the Philistines to slaughter each other. The Philistines themselves were so caught up in their confusion that they failed to recognize the Israelites which reveals the intensity of deception begun by Jonathan who by now rejoined his own troops.

**Vs. 21: Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.**

In a footnote the **RSV** clarifies the distinction between Hebrews and Israelites: “(They) are not necessarily identical peoples here. Perhaps we can say that not all Hebrews were Israelites since the former was the broader term.” Regardless, this verse intimates the close proximity in which the Hebrews and Philistines lived, a fact noted several times earlier.

*Savav* is the verb for “turned” noted last in 7.16 and fundamentally means to go around. Surely the excitement of a new king attracted people to Saul, for at last a king will “govern us like all the nations” [8.5].

**Vs. 22: Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hid themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle.**

The image here is of people squirrelled away in caves and holes in the ground who got word suddenly that the dreaded Philistines were fleeing and came out after them. The verb *davaq* ("followed hard") is a vivid one meaning to cleave after. It must have been a great relief to hear this news, energizing people to renew the struggle. The situation, however, is reversed in 31.2: "And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons."

**Vs. 23: So the Lord delivered Israel that day; and the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.**

*Yashah* is the verb for "delivered" (cf. vs. 6) with the words that read literally, "in (b-) that day." Put like this, the victory over the Philistines is presented as a great event, a day to be remembered. However, it would be overshadowed by the Philistines' defeat of Israel and the death of Saul and Jonathan.

Beth-aven is mentioned in 13.5 as the place where the Philistines had mustered to attack Israel which means that they were pushed back. Despite the victory, it was not decisive as would be the case for most engagements.

**Vs. 24: And the men of Israel were distressed that day; for Saul laid an oath on the people saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food.**

The fast which Saul imposes upon Israel is very stringent considering the fact that he had just six hundred men which swelled considerably by people who had hid themselves in caves and the like. This action reflects his fierce determination first noted in 11.7: "He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel." While necessary in some circumstances, here it was not and showed a certain insensitivity and even imbalance under pressure. There is no indication when Saul had made this decision.

"Men of Israel:" the singular "man" is used which can be taken as symbolic of Israel united as one person against the Philistines. *Nagas* is the verb for "distressed" (cf. vs. 6) and refers to hearing about Saul's decision after having overcome the Philistines in difficult circumstances.

*'Alah* is the verb for "laid an oath" and has five other biblical references. For an alternate meaning, see Judg 17.2: "The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you about which you uttered a curse."

Bound up with this oath was a curse with respect to eating before sunset which most likely followed the same pattern of observing Passover or the onset of twilight. The verb for "cursed" is *'arar* as in 26.19: "But if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord."

*Naqam* means "avenged" and connotes anger and is found in 18.25: "that he may be avenged of the king's enemies." When this verse states rather blandly that the people didn't taste food, they were simply terrified of Saul, almost more than the Philistines. Many questioned, Is this the type of king we chose? Undoubtedly Samuel was watching this at a distance and took a certain satisfaction at being justified; i.e., an "I told you so" attitude can't be ruled out.

**Vs. 25: And all the people came into the forest; and there was honey on the ground.**

The noun *'erets* or earth is used for "people," a word which almost can be interchanged because of the close connection between the two. *Yahar* or "forest" can also apply to any thicket of trees which here perhaps offered temporary shelter both from the sun as well as from the Philistines...and perhaps Saul himself. "So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth" [22.5].

*Sadeh* means “ground” and more often refers to a field and is first mentioned in 4.2 though not noted there. Upon it the people found honey which suggests that bees had their hives not so much upon the ground but scattered throughout a field.

**Vs. 26: And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no man put his hand to his mouth; for the people feared the oath.**

Here the people find the honey dripping presumably from a tree or shrub. It doesn’t conflict with the previous verse where *sadeh* translates as “ground” while referring more to a field. *Hineh* or “behold” (cf. vs. 17) reveals both their delight and surprise unfortunately tempered by Saul’s draconian order not to eat until evening. The way this is expressed—“no man put his hand to his mouth”—reflects in a poignant way the fear they had of disobeying Saul and the oath he forced upon them.

**Vs. 27: But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; so he put forth the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes became bright.**

*Shavah* is the verb for “charge with the oath” noted last in 3.14 which suggests that Saul imposed it either during the evening hours when Jonathan and his armor bearer left the camp or early the next day. One wonders what Jonathan would have thought if he hadn’t slithered away but remained in camp. He would have had a rather serious disagreement with his father. If the people got wind of it, they might rebel and follow Jonathan due to his popularity, thus changing the course of their early experience with having a king. That means David may never have appeared on the scene.

It seems that Jonathan was with the people in the forest but apparently not with them, hence his ignorance of his father’s oath. His act of putting “his hand to his mouth” increases the tension noted in the previous verse thereby making his situation all the more precarious.

*’Or* is the verb for “became bright” which also means to shine and is found next in vs. 29. “As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their asses” [Gen 44.3]. In other words, Jonathan knew he had violated the oath not so much by tasting the honey but from the gasps of those around him as indicated by the next verse. Although he was the king’s son, Jonathan was doomed.

**Vs. 28: Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food this day.’” And the people were faint.**

“Strictly charged” is rendered by use of the verb *shavah* two times. As found last in vs. 24, *’arar* is the verb for “cursed.” As soon as this person near Jonathan reminds him of Saul’s oath we have another sentence in this same verse which heightens the tension already existing, “And the people were faint.” The verb here is *yahaph* also as to be weary. “Behold, it is not from the Lord of hosts that people labor only for fire and nations weary themselves for nought” [Hab 2.24]?

**Vs. 29: Then Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land; see how my eyes have become bright, because I tasted a little of this honey.**

A disturbing statement, really, this early in Saul’s kingship by his son who was loved by all. *Hakar* means “has troubled” and connotes a stirring-up. “And Joshua said, ‘Why did you bring trouble on us’” [Josh 7.25]? Jonathan applies it to *’erets* (‘land’) which vs. 25 has as “people.” Use of *’erets* involves not just the Israelites but the physical landscape itself which suddenly changed into a cowering mood, afraid and even paralysed to do anything. Jonathan may have said these words to himself or spontaneously to the person in vs. 28 who



mentioned the oath.

Although it does not pertain directly to the verse at hand, we can say that Jonathan first tastes (*taham*) and then sees (*ra'ah*), the former often applied to making a discernment or distinction. It is reminiscent of Ps 34.8: "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" Perhaps King David, later to become Jonathan's close friend, had this experience in mind when he composed that particular psalm.

**Vs. 30: How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found; for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great."**

Jonathan was so upset with his father's oath that he could care less who heard him and who might report back to Saul. Here he refers to the "spoil" or *shalal* of the Philistines or the weapons and other material they abandoned. However, Jonathan may be referring to foodstuffs laying on the ground and livestock as intimated in vs. 32.

*Makah* is the noun for "slaughter" (cf. vs. 14) which Jonathan had determined was not as great as it should have been due to the Israelites being weakened by Saul's oath not to eat until evening. Judging by these words of frustration, Jonathan was determined to confront his father as soon as possible regardless of what anyone else may think. This incomplete victory set the stage later for Saul's demise when the Philistines slew him as well as Jonathan.

**Vs. 31: They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint;**

*Nakah* (cf. 7.11) is used with what literally reads "in (*b-*) that day" and conveys the sense of an important incident being recounted and to be recalled by future generations. Surely the Israelites were mindful of Joshua's victory over the five kings when he commanded the moon and sun to stand still in order to continue the battle: "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and you, moon, in the valley of Aijalon" [Josh 10.2]. That memory was sufficient to sustain them in their weakened condition due to Saul's oath.

While engaged in this battle, the Israelites "were very faint," the verb being *yahaph* as in vs. 28 with the adverb *me'od* (cf. vs. 20) which suggests excessiveness. It is to their credit that the people effected this victory despite Saul's ban and without him apparently not being among them.

**Vs. 32: the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood.**

This verse contains five instances of the conjunctive *w-* ('and') which shows the rapid sequence of events in a short period of time, indicative of the strain to which the people were subjected.

*Hyt* is a vivid word, even more so in this circumstance, for it means a seizing as a bird of prey. Only two other biblical references exist, two in First Samuel (15.19 and 25.14), the former being quoted here: "Why did you swoop on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" Obviously *hyt* reflects the extreme hunger of the people who not only engaged the Philistines but pursued them as from Michmash to Aijalon. In the verse at hand, it is used with the preposition *'el* thereby reading literally, "to the spoil."

*Shachat* means "slew" (cf. vs. 15) which the people did to the animals that had been in possession of the Philistines. Note that they did this "on the ground" which intimates haste due to their extreme hunger. Another indicator of their famished condition: the people ate the meat "with the blood," a prohibition found in Lev 19.26: "You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it." Most Israelites knew this, but being almost starved to death took precedence.

**Vs. 33: Then they told Saul, “Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood.” And he said, “You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here.”**

“They” are not identified but most likely Israelites who kept Saul’s strict fast and refrained from eating the captured livestock. The number must have been small and very observant, squealing, if you will, by informing Saul and labelling their action as sin (the verb *chata’*, cf. 12.10). Their indignation is shown further by the preposition *l-* (to) prefaced to *YHWH*, literally as “to the Lord.”

The response of Saul is that of someone already present, for he addresses the people right away. Perhaps there’s an interval between when he was informed and when he met the people who violated his oath. Then again, emphasis is upon the stringency of the oath and Saul’s fierce determination to enforce it. To him the people “dealt treacherously” or *bagad* which means doing something behind one’s back. “My brethren are as treacherous as a torrent bed, as freshets that pass away” [Job 6.15].

Possibly Saul was outraged further by the way the people slew the livestock on the ground which was a kind of pollution, the reason why he order a “great stone” to be rolled to him. The Hebrew text has instead of “here” “this day” which conveys a sense of immediacy. The people were terrified at this, not knowing exactly what Saul would do, even slay some Israelites upon the stone to set an example.

**Vs. 34: And Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, ‘Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slay them here, and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.’” So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and slew them there.**

Saul’s words must have brought some relief, for the people knew they would be spared. He seems to have realized the pain his oath caused the people and relented once he had them assembled before him, a ragged bunch who nevertheless routed the Philistines. Those whom he is addressing are the ones who brought the complaint. Saul orders them to “disperse” themselves” or *puts* (cf. 13.11) among the people which implies a sufficiently large number who did the squealing. These religious zealots are to order the people to bring the livestock or booty from the Philistines to Saul for slaying on that great stone. The people obeyed though many already have slaughtered the animals and had eaten them, a sign of their desperation. Nevertheless, they obeyed. Note that each man brought his ox to Saul. The other animals aren’t mentioned. It was done at night when torchlights were used, giving a very dramatic scene.

**Vs. 35: And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord.**

One reason for Saul’s relative mercy toward the people was awareness that he had trespassed the command of Samuel by making burnt offerings after an earlier victory against the Philistines (cf. 13.9-15). He must have been affected deeply knowing that as Israel’s first king he was doomed even before he could consolidate his power. Even with this weighing upon him, Saul goes ahead and builds an altar. Samuel is nowhere around nor does Saul feel the need to consult him again. Perhaps by now he was starting to turn against Samuel and everything he stood for.

The altar Saul builds is adjacent to the stone on which the Israelites were slaughtering the captured livestock. If the people hadn’t done this on the ground (cf. vs. 32), there might be no need for this altar. Thus Saul perceived the situation correctly and took appropriate action though we hear nothing of any sacrifice offered upon the altar. As for any future altars which Saul erected we have no information.

**Vs. 36: Then Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night and despoil them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them.” And they said, “Do whatever seems good to you.” But the priest said, “Let us draw near hither to God.”**

This verse reveals a descent from divine favor that began shortly after Saul's inauguration as Israel's king, a descent that now picks up steam right to the end. In his impatience Saul wishes to press the advantage Israel had over the Philistines and attack them at night. The people who had not eaten due to the oath had to prepare themselves immediately for yet another attack. Amazingly, the people concurred. "Do whatever seems good to you."

The priest here presumably is Ahijah, son of the infamous Phinehas first mentioned in 14.3. Despite what might be a dubious reputation certainly not discouraged by Samuel, he gives sound advice. Ahijah doesn't offer his opinion directly but indirectly by asking Saul and others to "draw near" to God, *qarav* being the verb (cf. 10.21). It was an opportune moment with everyone assembled at the altar Saul had just built.

**Vs. 37: And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day.**

*Sha'al* is the verb for "inquired" (cf. 10.22), the root for the proper name Saul which reads here *yish'al Sha'ul* with the preposition *b-* prefaced to *'Elohyim*, literally as "in God." Saul is careful to ask for the Philistines to be delivered not into his hand but that of Israel. The exact way by which he did this is not specified, perhaps through a ritual as opposed to personal prayer. This seems most likely because Saul was in the presence of the priest Ahijah who could have cast lots to obtain a result though this is not clear. However, Saul received no answer, just a silence which must have been deafening. Here's another instance where an incident is heightened by use of the phrase which reads literally "in that day." It must have been embarrassing for Ahijah as well, standing there with absolutely no sign.

**Vs. 38: And Saul said, "Come hither, all you leaders of the people; and know and see how this sin has arisen today.**

*Pinah* is the noun for "leaders" which literally means corner, presumably because such men were corner(stones) on which the people depended. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" [Ps 118.22]. Most likely such "corners" were close by to Saul and Ahijah when the two made the ritual inquiry of God. They too could see that the Lord failed to answer them by the downcast expression on their faces. To Saul's credit, however, he wasn't going to allow this get in the way from exercising his office as he saw fit.

Saul interprets the lack of divine response in terms of *chata'th* or "sin" (cf. 2.17) which in the literal sense can be taken as missing the mark with regard to his inquiry. He bids the leaders of the people to both "know" and "see" in this instance, the verbs being *yadah* (cf. vs. 12) and *ra'ah* (cf. vs. 29). Most likely these leaders didn't want to approach Saul because they had a growing sense that God may have rejected him. To be associated with such a king...and Israel's first king at that...was not a good idea. Nevertheless, they obeyed but must have been considering various ways by which they might extricate themselves from Saul's influence.

**Vs. 39: For as the Lord lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people that answered him.**

Even though Saul knew Jonathan was the instrument through which the Lord saved (*yashah*, cf. vs. 23) Israel, he felt constricted by the oath made in vs. 24. The leaders assembled around Saul knew this was pushing it, yet another indication that he was starting to lose it. The only response under such circumstances was to remain silent, a silence just as heavy as the lack of response from God when Saul inquired of God in vs. 37.

**Vs. 40: Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other**

side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.”

Now in dramatic fashion Saul lines up the entire nation of Israel, most likely the soldiers only, who were representative of the nation. Again, the people were reduced to agreement. Surely while standing there most who had demanded a king were haunted by that memory with Samuel’s stern admonition echoing in their ears.

**Vs. 41: Therefore Saul said, “O Lord God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped.**

After having addressed the leaders of Israel starting in vs. 38 and not having received an answer from the Lord in vs. 37, Saul again calls upon the Lord and adds “of Israel” in the hope that making an identity between the Lord and the people will rouse him. Saul was speaking publically in this manner or at least in the presence of the priest Ahijah and the leaders which must have caused them considerable discomfort. The Hebrew text lacks “why have you not answered your servant this day?”

Despite this lack of divine response Saul turns to casting the lots known as the Urim and Thummim which were in the custody of Ahijah. Although Saul made use of them, we don’t have any dialogue between him and Ahijah. The suddenness with which Saul performed this casting of lots intimates the distress that overwhelmed him.

As for the people, their leaders were present who were relieved when let off the hook regarding responsibility for Jonathan. Word about this spread like wildfire, and they “escaped” which can mean not only did they get out from under this oath but ran away from their king as quickly as possible.

**Vs. 42: Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” And Jonathan was taken.**

At this second role of the dice, as it were, Jonathan “was taken” compared to the previous verse which speaks of him and his father. Note the passive of *lakad* (‘was taken’) which means, of course, that such was the result of the lots cast by Ahijah. As priest he was charged with this task begun in vs. 41 and never felt so uncomfortable in his life as now. Once Jonathan “was taken,” all eyes were upon him as a doomed man.

**Vs. 43: Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand; here I am, I will die.”**

Most likely Saul knew what Jonathan had done, having received reports from people in Jonathan’s company. However, Jonathan was his own son, so he wanted to know first hand if he had violated the oath of not eating. Jonathan is forthright, not attempting to hide, which is a kind of defiance: “Here I am.”

**Vs. 44: And Saul said, “God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.”**

Often in a tense situation like this, each person unwillingly raises the stakes and becomes impervious to resolution of the crisis at hand, a kind of perverse competition. At the same time Saul shows regret which is his way of attempting to seek an exit: “God do so to me and more also,” the verb *yasaph* being used for the latter (cf. 12.25). It is as though he wished the accelerating tension of the dialogue itself would resolve the situation, but things never turn out that way. Finally Saul settles the matter by saying that his son will die. The verb *muth* (to die) is used twice, a way of expressing determination and resolution. It’s the only escape open to Saul.

**Vs. 45: Then the people said to Saul, “Shall Jonathan die, who has wrought this great victory in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he has wrought with God**

**this day.” So the people ransomed Jonathan, that he did not die.**

The last time the people were mentioned is vs. 40 when they concurred with Saul’s decision to cast lots between him and his son. Throughout this drama they, along with the leaders (cf. vs. 38), acted as a chorus of sorts between Saul and Jonathan with Ahijah the priest as an unwilling mediator forced to cast the Urim and Thummim. Now as one man the people step in and take corporate responsibility, they being the ones responsible for having chosen Saul as king of Israel and therefore the ultimate arbiter.

The people as one voice address Saul, reminding him of Jonathan being responsible for their *yeshuah* or great “victory,” their salvation (cf. 2.1). They add spontaneously and even for effect, *chalylah* (‘Far from it’) is noted last in 2.30, often alternately rendered as something like “God forbid.”

*Hasah* (cf. vs. 6) is the verb for “has wrought” meaning that Jonathan had co-operated with God for victory and did so “this day” meaning this very day which, in the opinion of the people, should be memorialized and not condemned. The appeal turned out successfully, for the people “ransomed” Jonathan, the verb *padah* meaning to set loose or set free. “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” [Ps 49.15]. How this ransoming took place isn’t spelled out; it doesn’t seem to have involved transfer of any goods or the like, just the unified appeal of Israel as a people. If Saul were to go against that singular will, he would be deposed on the spot...which some, of course, would like to happen.

**Vs. 46: Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines; and the Philistines went to their own place.**

As always, the Philistines are hovering around and ready to pounce, this time just after their recent defeat when they abandoned most of their possessions and livestock. “Place” (*maqom*, cf. 6.2) isn’t specified but can be multiple places since the Philistines, as well as the Israelites, lived within the small confines of Palestine ever a threat to each other. Surely Israel wished that the Philistines resided in just one *maqom*. It’d be easier to deal with them.

**Vs. 47: When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah and against the Philistines; wherever he turned he put them to the worse.**

*Lakad* is the verb for “taken over” as in 42. Although Saul didn’t seek the kingship, once chosen he took steps to consolidate his power. The first order of business, of course, was to address the Philistine threat which was “on every side” or *savyv* (cf. 12.11). Moab is mentioned once, more or less in passing (12.9), when Samuel was recounting Israel’s earlier history. This is the first time the kings of Zobah are noted First Samuel although later King David fought against Hadadezer, king of that land. It is located north of Damascus and as yet of no immediate threat to Israel.

*Panah* is the verb for “turned” and found in 13.17 though not mentioned there. In the verse at hand, *panah* complements *savyv* giving a picture of Saul standing in the center of Israel, if you will, easily turning this way and that with sword in hand as he was slaying all enemies who dared approach him. At last a favorable picture of the man and a testimony that despite the odds against him, Saul had the best interests of his people at heart. Praise of him continues through the remaining verses of Chapter Fourteen.

**Vs. 48: And he did valiantly and smote the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.**

This is the first mention of the Amalekites though 15.7 speaks of Saul defeating them. *Chayl* is the word for “valiantly” noted last in 10.26. As for “plundered,” the verb is *shasah* which occurs next in 23.1: “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.” Despite this strenuous effort,

certainly at some personal cost by a man who didn't chose to be king, is admirable. However, by any standard neither Saul nor anyone else could sustain this multi-faceted assault on enemies.

**Vs. 49: Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua; and the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the first-born was Merab and the name of the younger Michal;**

This is the first time we hear of Saul's other children; the first isn't mentioned elsewhere as tied in with Saul; only the latter son is noted again in 31.2 when slain by the Philistines along with Jonathan. Chances are that Ishvi was among them as well but not recorded. Saul offered Merab to David in marriage (cf. 18.17), but she ended up as someone else's wife. Later when king David had the five sons of Merab executed (2Sam 21.8). A bit later we find Michal as chiding David (cf. 2Sam 6.20) who became barren because of this rebuke. All in all the four children of Saul suffered one calamity or other. Their influence diminished quickly which means that the remnants of Saul's kingship would no longer pose a threat to David and his immediate descendants.

**Vs. 50: and the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahima-az. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle;**

This is the first time we hear of Saul's wife. Later in First Samuel David takes Ahinoam of Jezreel for one of his wives, most likely not the same woman. Why would David marry the widow of a man who had sought to kill him as he descended gradually into madness? Abner will figure prominently in Second Samuel. We don't know what happened to Ahinoam; Abner is slain and presumably Ner. The point is the same as in vs. 49, the extinction of Saul's family.

**Vs. 51: Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.**

This rather succinct genealogy of Saul's family ends with Kish. In a sense, he set in motion this whole chain of events starting back in 9.3 when he sent Saul out on an expedition to search for his lost asses. Surely in later years Kish must have regretted that decision. However, he is the one bright spot amid this familial tragedy. Kish dies, of course, but we don't know if it had been along with his sons at the hands of the Philistines. Something says no on the basis of 2Sam 21.14: "And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in...the tomb of Kish, his father." The scene, while sad, has a comforting feel about it, intimating that long before his death Kish had prepared a tomb for himself and his family. Mercifully Kish wasn't around to see that tomb fill up quickly.

**Vs. 52: There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.**

Yet another depressing reminder of the continuing strife between Israel and the Philistines, this time being called "hard" or *chazaq* (cf. 6.6, verb) which connotes firmness as well as stubbornness. "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then drawn back from him, that he may be struck down and die" [2Sam 11.15]. In the verse at hand, *chazaq* is used with the preposition *hal-*, literally as "on the Philistines," which could be taken as showing the desperate fighting. It is compounded, as it were, by adding "all the days of Saul."

Due to this endless conflict Saul was tirelessly on the look out for warriors and must have scouts scattered throughout Israel for this purpose. Later he hits upon David who, of course, proved central to his downfall. Saul was in search of two qualities: *gibor* (cf. 2.4) and *ben-chayl* (cf. vs. 48). That is to say, strong as well as impetuous and literally a "son of valiance." Men of this quality were needed sorely which is why Saul "attached" that type of person to himself, the verb being *yasaph* (cf. vs. 44) which has the idea of continuous increase or growth. That was true regarding both parties. Saul was a proven leader and warrior who naturally attracted men who flourish under him.



## Chapter Fifteen

**Vs. 1: And Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord.**

Suddenly Samuel reappears and addresses Saul through vs. 3. Although we haven't heard from him since 13.15 when he rebuked Saul for his foolishness, Samuel did not disappear but carefully watched the unfolding of recent events from afar. On one hand he must have been dismayed at Saul's success which seemed to go against the rejection he brought upon him. On the other hand he was glad that Saul had rescued Israel yet again from the hands of the Philistines. So when Samuel comes on the scene he does so with another threat against Israel, this time from Amalek. Note that this occurs after Saul was in the company of the priest Ahijah against whom Samuel must have borne a grudge going all the way back to Hophni and Phinehas because Ahijah was a direct descendant of the latter. Also Samuel's command to Saul takes place right after Saul sought counsel to pursue the Philistines but received no answer from the Lord (cf. 14.37).

The Hebrew text has *qol* or “voice” (cf. 12.15) as in “hearken to the voice the words (*davar*, cf. 14.12) of the Lord.” We don't have Saul's response who must have been uneasy with Samuel suddenly coming on the scene.

**Vs. 2: Thus says the Lord of hosts, `I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt.**

The last time we've heard the phrase “Lord of hosts” is back in 4.4 when the people brought the ark of the Lord from Shiloh out to battle against the Philistines. For Samuel to speak thus adds to the solemnity of his message, that Saul would do well to pay close attention.

Samuel gives Saul a brief lesson in Israel's history when Amalek challenged the people shortly after they departed Egypt (cf. Ex 7.8+). Obviously like most Israelites Saul was familiar with his nation's past and was forced to listen to it repeated, kind of like a lecture. Although Amalek was later a source of trouble, Samuel is careful to mention this particular incident in the context of “on the way” (*derek*, cf. 12.23), that is, from Egypt to the promised land.

*Paqad* (cf. 4.17) is the verb for “will punish” and has a number of various meanings, most of which have to do with mustering. “Opposing” is not in the Hebrew text. The Amalekites were a lesser threat than the Philistines, so might as well take care of them now in order to concentrate on the larger issue of national security.

**Vs. 3: Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”**

The last time the Amalekites are mentioned is in 14.48, more or less in general terms among other enemies of Israel, though the verse at hand speaks of the king himself, Amalek, for the first time. This could be taken as a way of personalizing a people, of making them into one person, either for good or for ill.

“Go up” suggests that Amalek is located somewhere north of Saul's present situation, most likely between Michmash and Aijalon, recent scene of the victory against the Philistines. This time Saul is to “utterly destroy all that they have” which means focus is to be upon their possessions, a way to get at their very source of support and hopefully force them to withdraw. However, David later on fights against the Amalekites (cf. 27.8) which takes place not long before Saul's ignominious defeat and death at the hands of the Philistines. After David's slaughter mentioned at the beginning of Second Samuel, threat from the Amalekites fades away; the Philistines, however, remain a perpetual thorn in Israel's side. In the verse at hand, *charam* is used for “utterly destroy,” a verb with special significance in the sense to extirpate or engage in this total warfare for the glory of

God. It occurs several times in Chapter Fifteen, the only instances being in First Samuel. “You shall beat in pieces many peoples and shall devote their gain to the Lord” [Mic 4.13].

*Chamal* (‘spare’) is the opposite of *charam* in that it connotes compassion. “May you be blessed by the Lord; for you have had compassion on me” [23.21]. It may be acceptable to slay the men, but here the divine injunction given through Samuel applies not just to women by to “infant and suckling.” I.e., such is the absolute destruction of *charam*.

**Vs. 4: So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah.**

Without hesitation Saul obeys Samuel speaking on the Lord’s behalf and takes two important steps. First he “summoned” the people, *shamah* basically meaning to hear, to listen to (cf. 13.4). Second he “numbered” them, *paqad* meaning to muster and prepare for battle (cf. vs. 2). The process of *shamah* can intimate that agents fanned out among Israel explaining the dire situation as opposed to pressing them into service. Once this had been accomplished—and two hundred and ten thousand people were involved, no mean feat which had to be done as quickly as possible—they were mustered in Telaim, this being the only reference in the Bible.

Saul manages to raise a formidable army which had to counter what must have been an equally formidable force of Amalekites. Surely the Philistines kept a close eye on this because they wanted to see what tactics the Israelites might use against this enemy. Surprisingly the Philistines didn’t take advantage to assault the Israelites at this time which intimates their recent defeat taught them a lesson. The next encounter between these two enemies will involve David and Goliath.

**Vs. 5: And Saul came to the city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.**

Typical of Saul’s boldness, he takes the initiative by bringing the battle to the door of his enemy, this time at the very city of Amalek. As noted earlier, the Amalekites weren’t as formidable a threat as the Philistines. To get them out of the way now, however, was essential to tackle the real threat at hand.

*Arav* is the verb for “lay in wait” and occurs next in 22.8: “that my son has stirred up my servant against me to lie in wait as at this day.” The valley in which the Israelites are waiting suggests they had sufficient forces to overtake the city before them. Perhaps this valley was an entrance way of sorts to the city which was on a plain.

**Vs. 6: And Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.**

The favorable relationship between the Israelites and Kenites goes back to Moses: “And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah...and they went and settled with the people.” In other words, a strong bond between the two peoples existed because of Moses. Actually the Kenites had the best of both worlds, at peace with the Israelites as well as the Amalekites. The same may have applied to the Philistines. As for the Israelites, the Kenites thus provided a good means of contact with these two other peoples.

Saul sent spies into the city of Amalek to warn the Kenites and beg them to depart. Apparently they left on their own without rousing suspicion. The Amalekites were well aware these people were on good terms with Israel so for some to go there was not unusual, possible under the pretext of holding a feast or the like. While that smaller group left officially, if you will, it provided sufficient cover for the rest of the Kenites to make good a

backdoor escape. Besides, the Amalekites were unaware that the Israelites lay in wait a short distance away.

*Asaph* (cf. 14.19) is the verb for “destroy” which here has a meaning different from the common one of increase or gathering. However, it makes more sense when you consider that the Kenites and Amalekites were living together in one city and had to be separated least all fall victim to the sword. The reason why Saul spared the Kenites is because they “showed kindness” or *chesed* (cf. 1.9), that virtually untranslatable word usually applied to divine mercy. Such is an example of the importance of memory among ancient peoples, the chief means by which they held together their identity.

**Vs. 7: And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur which is east of Egypt.**

*Nakah* is the verb for “defeated” noted last in 14.31. The territory at hand extends south into the Arabian peninsula and east to Shur, not far from Egypt. In other words, the southern flank of Israel would be secure, thereby enabling Saul to focus his resources against the Philistines, the real task at hand. Nothing is said about the Kenites taking arms up their former hosts, preferring to stay neutral.

**Vs. 8: And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.**

Compare the proper name Agag, the king, with Amalek of vs. 3 which is a personalization of that group of people against whom Israel is struggling. *Taphas* is the verb for “took” which involves some violence or force. “As Saul and his men were closing in upon David and his men to capture them” [23.26].

After Saul had captured Agag...the very name has a primitive ring to it...he “utterly destroyed” his subjects, the verb being *charam* as in vs. 3. “Edge of the sword” serves to heighten the determination not to leave a single person alive. Why Saul captured Agag isn’t clear; perhaps he wanted to press him for intelligence and then kill him. Given Saul’s track record thus far, showing mercy isn’t one of his characteristics.

**Vs. 9: But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings and the lambs and all that was good and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed.**

Here we see both Saul and the Israelites having “spared” Agag which goes against the divine injunction spoken through Samuel, *chamal* being in that verse. The same applies to the best of the livestock. Somewhere along the line there was a breakdown of communication, that is, between Samuel and Saul and then from Saul to his people.

The Hebrew *mela'kah* is not translated except as “all” and noted last in 8.16 as “work.”

The people “utterly destroyed” (*charam* again) what was “despised” and “worthless,” those things not being specified. We do know, however, that they were not livestock which the Israelites prized perhaps because like the Philistines, the Amalekites had ones of superior quality. Also livestock was easy to transport; all it had to do was walk. *Bazah* (cf. 10.27) and *masas* covered pretty much everything that didn’t walk. *Masas* means to melt or to flow down or to waste away. “It (my heart) is melted within my breast” [Ps 22.14].

**Vs. 10: The word of the Lord came to Samuel:**

A short verse, deliberately so, in order to stress the importance of the divine *davar* (cf. 11.4) with respect to Samuel. The Hebrew has “saying,” the verb *amar* (cf. 3.18). For a brief moment we’re left in suspense as to what this *davar* will *amar* through the medium of Samuel even though we feel it won’t be good.

**Vs. 11: “I repent that I have made Saul king; for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry; and he cried to the Lord all night.**

At this juncture Samuel was unaware of Saul’s disobedience but knew something not good was in the air when the divine *davar* came to him as reported in the previous verse. Samuel didn’t take the initiative to obtain this *davar*; it came to him though the details as to how the two interact are not given.

*Nacham* is the verb for “repent” and connotes being sorry. “And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel” [vs. 35]. Both instances can be taken as the Lord having admitted to a mistake though it was done at the people’s insistence for a king. Such a choice the Lord puts in terms of a turning back or *shuv* (cf. 7.3 as ‘return’). This *shuv* involves the performing of divine “commandments,” *davar* being the noun which is more intimate than any other word because the Lord speaks it directly. The verb at hand is *qum* or to rise (cf. 13.15), suggestive of a continuous (upward) growth.

*Charah* means “was angry” and noted last in 11.6 with its basic meaning to set on fire, to kindle. Such was the case with Samuel who didn’t get any sleep that night but “cried” to the Lord, *zahaq* (cf. 14.20). Such crying doesn’t have to be vocal but interior. For Samuel it was the longest night of his life.

**Vs. 12: And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning; and it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.”**

This rising early in the morning couldn’t have come quickly enough for Samuel. It must have been well before actual dawn, the first bit of light which signalled and end to the previous night’s *zahaq*. That means Samuel had to make his way to Gilgal noted last in 13.15, site of Saul’s earlier disobedience. Chances are he was with Saul first in Telim (cf. vs. 4) and later at the city of Amalek (cf. vs. 5). Apparently Saul left unannounced to Samuel which angered him further.

At Carmel—most likely the summit—Saul “set up” (*natsav*, cf. 4.20) a monument” or *yad* which is the common noun for “hand.” “And it (a pillar) is called Absalom’s monument to this day” [2Sam 18.18]. The monument isn’t described but most likely one to the recent victory over the Amalekites. Since the Kenites were among them and left before the battle, some must have been present at Carmel for the dedication. If the *yad* were on top of this tabletop mountain it was visible from all around.

The two verbs “turned” and “passed on” are indicative of a man in haste and one with an urgent mission in his mind, that is, after Saul had set up that monument.

**Vs. 13: And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”**

With the experience of Gilgal in Chapter Thirteen in mind, Saul greets Samuel with courtesy but with a trepidation he keeps to himself. He greetings of “blessed” (*barak*, cf. 13.10) is used with the preposition *l-* prefaced to *YHWH* suggesting that Saul knew Samuel had a special relationship with the Lord. He blurts this blessing mostly out of nervousness and fear of what Samuel will say to him, given their recent history.

*Qum* (cf. vs. 11) translates as “have performed”...have arisen...the divine *davar* (cf. vs. 11) of the Lord. Hopefully by taking the initiative and mentioning this *davar* Saul will counter the same *davar* which came to Samuel in vs. 10.

**Vs. 14: And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen which**

**I hear?"**

Saul's premonition seemed on the verge of coming true with this question posed by Samuel, that is, instead of greeting him. As Samuel approached the king, he heard the din of sheep and oxen all around him and the people taking delight in having spoiled the Amalekites, hoping soon they would do the same to the Philistines. In other words, Samuel gets to the matter that had been troubling him and keeping up at night as he cried out to the Lord (cf. vs. 11).

**Vs. 15: Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."**

Objectively speaking, a lame excuse on Saul's part as he attempted to shift blame away from himself to the people. He had in mind Samuel's condemnation of his action in Gilgal and wished to avoid a repeat though he knew it was about to happen right now.

*Chamal* is the verb for "spared" (cf. vs. 9) which is in direct violation of the *charam* (also cf. vs. 9) decreed by the Lord. Here we have another attempt to get out from under this situation, "to the Lord *your* God." In other words Saul tries to show solidarity between the people and Samuel as well as himself.

**Vs. 16: Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night." And he said to him, "Say on."**

By no means did this conversation start off well, especially with the noise of livestock in the background which must have troubled both men. "Stop" or *raphah* (cf. 11.3) Samuel speaks with force and the accumulated anger he had experienced during a sleepless night. He doesn't want to hear any more excuses nor a repeat of their encounter at Gilgal. Samuel continues to say that he will communicate the *davar* the Lord gave him during the night, this word not being translated into English here.

**Vs. 17: And Samuel said, "Although you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel."**

Although Samuel compliments Saul on his humility—after all, he didn't seek to be king—it isn't sufficient to get off the hook, this for the second time in a row. To see humility in a ruler is quite rare, so you'd think Samuel would capitalize on it and encourage Saul. However, for him the divine injunction takes precedence. *Ro'sh* is the noun for "head" noted last in 9.22, applicable to someone like a king or a physical head.

**Vs. 18: And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'**

*Derek* is the noun for "mission" which means a road or way noted last in vs. 2. This "way" is one of *charam* (cf. vs. 15) or utter destruction of the Amalekites which Samuel pronounces as "sinners" or *chata'*, a rather forceful statement you'd think he would apply to the larger threat from the Philistines. However, for Samuel the issue at hand was *charam*, something Saul wasn't enjoined to do against that enemy. In his eyes failure to carry it out means that Saul wouldn't do the same with regard to the Philistines. Another reference to *chata'* is 1Kg 1.21: "that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders."

*Kalah* or "consumed" is noted in 3.13 with another meaning, that of restraint and generally means to bring to a full end or consummation, not unlike *charam*.

**Vs. 19: Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?"**

*Shamah* (cf. vs. 4) is the verb for “obey” which means to listen, and the “voice” (*qol*, cf. vs. 1) comes through Samuel. Although Samuel is a highly respected mouthpiece of the Lord, one can’t but help that he’s miffed at Saul for personal reasons and hiding in part behind the Lord.

*Hyt* means “swoop” (cf. 14.32) and is applicable to a bird of prey as it hits with lightning speed from above. Samuel’s use of this verb shows his impatience and disgust with Saul, setting him up for the next question, why Saul had done “evil” (*rah*, cf. 10.19) in the Lord’s sight.

**Vs. 20: And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.**

Saul responds right away and in a straight-forward manner to the harsh words from Samuel, words he heard before at Gilgal. For Saul, having “obeyed” (*shamah*, cf. vs. 19) the Lord’s voice is the consequence of having gone on that “mission” (*derek*, cf. vs. 18), both coming as one from the Lord. Technically he is correct but doesn’t seem to have communicated his good intentions to the people who failed to carry them out. By capturing Agag Saul may have hoped to make a public display of him to the Israelites after which he would execute him. However, that falls outside the *charam* or utter destruction that Samuel insists upon as coming from the Lord.

**Vs. 21: But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”**

*Shalal* is the word for “spoil” (cf. 14.30) with emphasis again upon livestock that could move on their own as opposed to the people carrying heavy objects. *Re’shyth* (cf. 2.29) is “best of things” and is suggestive of a head as *ro’sh* of vs. 17. Such prime objects are “devoted to destruction” or *charam* which here is equivalent to fuel for a sacrifice. Note the location Saul has picked out for this sacrifice, the now infamous Gilgal. Perhaps by returning to that spot Saul could repair what Samuel had accused him of doing. One can just picture Samuel listening to these words, getting more infuriated the more Saul goes on. Saul, however, never manifests anger but retains his cool throughout possibly because Samuel is his senior. That would change once David comes on the scene, i.e., his junior, a direct threat to his kingship.

**Vs. 22: And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.**

After Saul gives an explanation of his behavior in the last two verses Samuel responds with a more or less rhetorical question. He compares sacrifices with obedience to the Lord, *zevach* (cf. 10.8) vs. *shamah* (cf. vs. 20). Both options (actually the first sentence contains ‘burnt offerings’ as well as ‘sacrifices’ compared with ‘sacrifices’ only in the second) are put in terms of divine “delight” or *chaphats* noted last in 2.25 as will. With this in mind, it’s natural that the Lord delights in obedience which involves attentiveness to what he wants. Note that obeying...hearing...is relative to the Lord’s “voice” or *qol* (cf. vs. 19) which may speak at one time and at other be silent.

“To obey” is used in the second sentence for emphasis which begins with *hineh* or “behold” (cf. 14.26), a means of bringing one’s attention to the statement at hand. However, the verb at hand is *qashav* which implies a greater attentiveness. “Making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding” [Prov 2.2].

Chances are that when uttering these words Samuel had in mind his childhood experience of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas in the Shiloh temple. For many years they had defrauded Israelites of their sacrifices and



at last were made to pay the ultimate price of forfeiting their lives.

**Vs. 23: For rebellion is as the sin of divination and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”**

Samuel must have taken special private delight in this sentence, having waited a long time to get it out of his system. Again, bitter memories of his youth in the Shiloh temple must have been behind these words.

Two sets are presented here. The first set is rebellion = divinization (mercy = *qesem*) which Samuel posits as a “sin” or *chata’th* (cf. 14.38), that noun connoting missing the mark as in target practice with a bow and arrow. Two references are: “I know how rebellious and stubborn you are” [Dt 31.27] and “Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you” [28.8]. Although the latter is a verb, perhaps when uttering these words Samuel had a foreboding of what would happen in the near future as through the medium at Endor.

The second set is stubbornness = iniquity plus idolatry or *patsar* = ‘*awen* plus *teraphym*. *Patsar* is an infinite meaning to push, to press with six other biblical references. “But he urged them strongly” [Gen 19.3]. This negative trait is comprised of ‘*awen* or vanity and *teraphym* which means images usually but not always in the negative sense of idols. Two references are: “Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity” [Ps 10.7] and “Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats hair at its head and covered it with the clothes” [19.13].

*Ma’as* or “rejected” (cf. 10.19) takes two forms, if you will. The first is Saul’s rejection of the divine “word” or *davar* (cf. vs. 16) and from reigning as king.

**Vs. 24: And Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.**

*Chata’* or “I have sinned” (cf. vs. 18) or I have missed the mark, just what Samuel was waiting to hear. He shows no mercy, none at all, and turns away (cf. vs. 27) from Saul, leaving him to his own devices. Samuel must have relished this, at last having been vindicated. He could depart now until the two meet in the un auspicious context of divinization by the medium of Endor shortly before Saul is killed in battle.

*Havar* (cf. 14.4) is the verb for “transgressed” and fundamentally means to turn or to turn aside. In the context at hand it means the same as *chata’* and more specifically pertains to the Lord’s “commandment” (*py*) and Samuel’s “words (*davar*, cf. vs. 23). *Py* literally means mouth and is suggestive of not obeying or hearing (*shamah*, cf. vs. 22) the Lord himself whose command came directly to Saul. Samuel must have taken some delight in Saul’s admission that he did not listen to his words as well.

Saul was more afraid of the people and listened to their collective voice, the preposition *b-* being prefaced to *qol* (cf. vs. 22) or literally “in their voice.” Earlier they had submitted to Saul’s rather draconian fast while engaging the Philistines which may have played a part in this.

**Vs. 25: Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the Lord.”**

Saul certainly deserves sympathy. Always he’s deferential before Samuel, even on occasions when you expect in the next verse he was about to kill him on the spot. Here Saul beseeches Samuel to “pardon” him, *nasa’* being the verb noted last in 14.3 with the different meaning of “wearing” but fundamentally means to take up or away. In the verse at hand it’s prefaced with *na’* (‘I pray’) used in situations requiring permission and the like.

In a straight-forward manner Saul acknowledges his sin and asks Samuel to return with him to “worship” the Lord, *shachah* as in 2.36 which means more to implore or to beseech. The place Saul had in mind for worship could be either that altar he had built in 14.35 or Gilgal (cf. vs. 32), the place where he slew Agag.

**Vs. 26: And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.”**

It’s amazing that Saul, first king of Israel and having been flung suddenly and without preparation into a position where he had to defend his country from all sides, put up with this continued rejection from the man who had anointed him pretty much against his will.

*Ma’as* is the verb for “have rejected” as in vs. 23, the same context. Samuel equates Saul’s rejection of the divine *davar* (cf. vs. 24) with his being king. Apparently Saul felt otherwise; he didn’t feel being rejected nor did he pick up any intimations of the sort from among the people. We don’t know if the Israelites had gotten wind of Samuel’s attitude. If so, they could have turned on him. Despite the recent fast imposed by Saul and coming close to slaying his son Jonathan, his courage was unparalleled. Therefore it wouldn’t be surprising that Samuel felt animosity toward the people as well. After all, they were the ones who had demanded a king.

**Vs. 27: As Samuel turned to go away, Saul laid hold upon the skirt of his robe, and it tore.**

One of the most dramatic verses in First Samuel which appears to be one final act of *na’* (‘I pray,’ cf. vs. 25) on Saul’s part. As mentioned several times earlier, Samuel must have taken a certain hidden satisfaction in rejecting Saul, going away like an angry old man. Hopefully we would wish that before he died he would reflect on his attitude and make peace with the Lord. However, this was the case judging by his response to Saul when summoned up from the dead by the medium of Endor (cf. 28.15: ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’).

The verb *chazaq* means “laid hold” (cf. 14.52), a rather violent, impulsive action made all the more so by the preposition *b-* prefaced to “skirt” (*kanaph*) which reads literally “in the skirt.” “Then David arose and stealthily cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe” [24.4]. As for the tearing (*qarah*) of this edge of Saul’s garment, never did Samuel hear such a more pleasant sound. *Qarah* is found in 4.12 though not mentioned there. “For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David” [24.17]. That is, Samuel speaking with Saul through the medium of Endor.

**Vs. 28: And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours who is better than you.**

While the first *qarah* or tear is nothing compared with Samuel’s claim that the Lord did the same to Saul regarding the kingdom, the second time it’s mentioned in vs. 27 was devastating, the eve of Saul’s death. This is compounded by the Lord giving that piece of tear, if you will, to a “neighbor” of Saul, *reah* (cf. 14.20). Samuel taunts Saul further by not divulging the name of this person who is “better than you.” This further insult is rendered literally as “good from (*min-*) you.” As for this neighbor, it must have intrigued Saul, intimating that he knew the man or at least knew of him.

**Vs. 29: And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man that he should repent.”**

On several occasions the importance of the conjunction *w-* is made, usually translated as “and.” Being prefaced to the beginning of most verses, it links them together as a whole, making for rapid reading. This is especially true in the dialogue between Saul and Samuel where the tension is at the highest.

Samuel personalizes the “Glory of Israel” where *netsach* is used instead of the more familiar *kavod*. It connotes perpetual-ness or completeness as in Ps 89.46: “Will you hide yourself forever?” With this perpetual presence of the Lord on Samuel’s side, how could he be wrong? In the verse at hand, *netsach* refers to two verbs: “lie” and “repent” (*shaqar* and *nacham*). The former intimates deception and falsehood whereas the latter (cf. vs. 11), grieving or vengeance. Note that Samuel is quick to say that the Lord will not *nacham* but says nothing about him not lying (*shaqar*).

**Vs. 30: Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel and return with me that I may worship the Lord your God.”**

These are the last words Saul communicates to his nemesis, Samuel, hoping for a last minute change of heart. Again Saul claims that he has “sinned” (*chata’*) as in vs. 24 and begs “honor” from Samuel, the verb *kavad* being used (cf. 9.6). He especially asks this before the elders and Israel as a nation who by now must have gotten wind of Samuel’s rejection of the king they had insisted upon with such force. If Samuel would comply...and of course he would not...Saul would muster both elders and the people to join in worshipping the Lord.

**Vs. 31: So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the Lord.**

Samuel doesn’t respond to Saul but departs at once, leaving him to his own devices which implies that the elders and the people of Israel will go down the same road of ruin. Despite this, Saul feels no other choice but to worship (*shachah*, cf. vs. 24) the Lord. Why not? Everything else is lost. This verb is used with the preposition *l-* prefaced to *YHWH*, literally as “to the Lord.” Given the circumstance, he must have done this alone. What it consisted of we don’t know, but it reveals the good intention of Saul. He must have been the loneliest man in all of Israel while engaged in worship. As for Samuel, we don’t hear of him doing likewise.

**Vs. 32: Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”**

Probably during his time of worship just recounted Saul decided upon the fate of Agag, having been preoccupied with Samuel’s total condemnation. After all, something had to be done about him. Saul figured it was best to execute Agag on the spot in case the people thought he would spare their former foe, thereby setting an example. Apparently Agag had some freedom, for he comes to Saul on his own and does so “cheerfully” or *mahadan*, a noun which has three other biblical references. “Asher’s food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties” [Gen 49.20]. This attitude came from his life having been spared and perhaps more recently from reasonable treatment which involved friendly conversations with some Israelites. So when he came on the scene, Agag said aloud that he wouldn’t experience death’s “bitterness,” *mar* being an adjective and noted last in 1.10. Besides, Agag could have heard about Samuel’s rejection of Saul which delighted him.

**Vs. 33: And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.**

One can just imagine Agag’s expression summed up by the word *mahadan* in the previous verse when he heard Saul addressing him. Although making women childless may be a kind of stock expression, it could refer to the ruthlessness Agag had showed to Israel, slaying them as well as children. Chances are Saul didn’t know the mother of this brutal king but brought her into the picture to insult Agag as much as possible at the last minute of his life.

*Shasaph* is the verb for “hewed in pieces,” the only occurrence in the Bible, as if that term had been reserved for Agag and his crimes. Note that Samuel does this himself and in Gilgal where the Israelites had sacrificed the

livestock captured from the Amalekites (cf. 15.21). If the people committed what to Samuel's eyes was close to an abomination, why not execute Agag at the same place in a last minute attempt to ward off his rejection?

**Vs. 34: Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.**

The last time Ramah is mentioned is 8.4 where the Israelites had gathered to ask for a king. Samuel must have pondered that momentous day long and hard, a way of justifying, if you will, his rejection of Saul. So with Samuel headed off to Ramah and Saul going to his own home, the opposite directions taken by these two antagonists is all the more dramatic.

**Vs. 35: And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.**

Fortunately for the reader, at last the conclusion of a difficult chapter, but it doesn't reveal the slightest change on Samuel's part.

"See again" is rendered such by the verbs *ra'ah* (cf. 14.38) and *yasaph* (cf. 14.52), the latter meaning to increase. Actually this seeing takes place not on the day of Saul's death but shortly beforehand. Obviously this *ra'ah* refers to Samuel having been conjured up from the dead by the medium of Endor.

*'Aval* (cf. 6.19 but not noted there) is the verb for "grieved" which means to walk around with one's head cast down as in mourning. "And David mourned for his son" [2Sam 13.37].

Again the Lord repents (*nacham*, cf. vs. 11) for having made Saul king. What form this takes isn't specified but seems closely allied to Samuel's grieving, the two firmly allied against Saul.

## Chapter Sixteen

**Vs. 1: The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."**

This chapter begins on both a note of humor and irritation: humor in that the Lord confronts Samuel with his sullen attitude insofar as he's saying to the prophet "Get on with your life." However, the Lord has something in mind for Samuel of which he had an intimation, albeit dimly.

*'Aval* is the verb for "grieve" found last in 15.35, the point for which the Lord is rebuking Samuel. How this takes place isn't spelled out but left to our imagination. *'Aval* is used with the preposition *'el-* prefaced to "Saul" rendering it literally as "to Saul." Despite hostility towards Saul, Samuel retained a soft spot for the king but never...never...would admit it.

*Ma'as* or "rejected" is found last in 15.26. Samuel must have been delighted to receive a divine confirmation of Saul's rejection as well as straight-forward admittance that the Lord caved into the people's demand for a king. Nevertheless, the Lord did not belabor the issue but respected the people's decision.

Apparently Samuel had a "horn" (*qeren* noted last in 2.10 as 'power') at the ready, standing by for emergencies, if you will, for various purposes. He may have used the horn for other kinds of anointing when active as a judge. Although Samuel had an inkling of a new candidate for king ('a neighbor of yours,' 15.28), he knows only in part, that he belongs to the family of Jesse. In the meanwhile Samuel couldn't help but get out of his mind who this mystery man was since as judge he had passed through Bethlehem many a time. So when the Lord

said “go,” Samuel rushed to Bethlehem as quickly as possible. All this going from one place to another throughout First Samuel was mostly on foot. While making such arduous treks, the people as well as individuals like Saul and Samuel involved had plenty of time to reflect on what they were about to do and how they were to do it. Furthermore, seldom or even did people set out alone on a journey, so always they had company.

The verb for “provided” is *ra’ah* or to see (cf. 15.35) which here Samuel does not yet participate in.

**Vs. 2: And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’”**

Samuel rightly makes this objection shortly after the hash words which had brought Chapter Fifteen to an end, that is, his separation from Saul. Indeed, Saul wasn’t going to let him off easily...not to kill him...but to keep close eye on his activity and the possibility that Samuel would stir up trouble among the people. Among all Israelites he had the best grasp on what people thought and how they felt after having made so many circuits around the country as a judge. In other words, Samuel had earned the mantle of an elder statesman.

The Lord offers Samuel a ruse of sorts, to take a heifer for sacrifice but doesn’t specify the reason for it. Given Samuel’s association with the Shiloh temple and priestly activities, it seemed the best of all possible disguises. In that way he would rouse the least suspicion among Saul’s spies. After all, Gilgal was not far from Bethlehem; all distances in Israel were close at hand, hence reference to ‘neighbor’ as in vs. 1 could mean the entire land.

**Vs. 3: And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me him whom I name to you.”**

*Qara’* is the verb for “invite” noted last in 12.18 and basically means to call, to summon. As it turned out, Jesse had eleven sons, so he must have been a man of some influence and a man with whom Samuel had earlier dealings as judge.

*Yadah* (cf. 14.38) means “will show” or more literally, will know. As with earlier divine communications, the one with Samuel isn’t necessarily verbal but can be seen as two different types of awarenesses, if you will, communicating with each other as the intimacy of this verb suggests. Once Samuel has discerned the man to anoint as successor to Saul, he is to “anoint” him (*mashach*) just as he had done with Saul at the beginning of Chapter Ten. As for the naming of the future king, the verb is *’amar* or to speak. Thus Samuel will make a transition from *yadah* (intimate knowledge) to speaking (*’amar*) this aloud...proclaiming it...not unlike 15.10 where *’amar* is used: “The word of the Lord came to Samuel.” The Hebrew of this verse has “saying.”

**Vs. 4: Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?”**

Samuel was pleased with the so-called deception from the Lord, so much so that he hastened to Bethlehem to see this man become king. En route he must have thought of those eleven sons of Jesse. He may have met them briefly when they were younger but had little knowledge of them, so naturally he was eager to question Jesse.

The verb *davar* is used for “commanded” and noted last in 11.4 which completes the interaction between the Lord and Samuel discussed in the last few verses. The elders of Bethlehem certainly were familiar with Samuel and his earlier visits. Some of them must have been quite painful, hence the response of “trembling” coupled with their question, *charad* (cf. 13.7). *Shalom* (cf. 7.14) is the noun for the English adverb “peaceably.” The people in Bethlehem recognized Samuel at once and quickly summoned the elders, they too being afraid to

question Samuel as to his visit.

**Vs. 5: And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.**

Saul had to put at rest the elders right away and respond with *shalom* which caused a collective sigh of relief. Not only them but virtually every inhabitant of Bethlehem, for people got wind of Samuel’s visit as soon as it was announced and quickly gathered around the elders, all waiting for his response. These people didn’t know why their former judge was in their presence nor his reason for making sacrifice. It be helpful for them to know. Should the people of Bethlehem discover why Samuel was present, they would expel him immediately, fearing Saul’s reprisal.

*Qadash* is the verb for “consecrate” noted last in 7.1 and means to be holy or separate from everything else that would interfere with one’s relationship with God. Usually such *qadash* involves ritual purification as through washing. The time of this sacrifice could be during the evening though it isn’t specified, reminiscent of Samuel’s sacrifice the day before meeting Saul (cf. 9.12+). Although the people sanctified themselves, Samuel himself made it a point to do this to Jesse and his sons. That got everyone’s attention as well as what seemed their special invitation (*qara’*, cf. vs. 3) to the sacrifice.

**Vs. 6: When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.”**

As mentioned earlier, Samuel must have known Jesse but not so much his eleven sons because during his days as circuit judge they were either too young or some weren’t even born. Although Eliab is mentioned two more times in First Samuel, he fades off the scene. Yet there must have been something special that got Samuel’s attention because Eliab is the first son mentioned. It could have been not unlike Saul who was “a handsome man” [9.2]. Yet Samuel must have kept that experience fresh in his mind during this critical choice. He didn’t want to repeat the choice of another Saul.

**Vs. 7: But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”**

So when Samuel was assessing Eliab the Lord speaks to him...not in the literal sense but as pointed out in vs. 3. *Navat* is the verb for “look” which implies beholding or having respect (cf. 2.32), here with respect to Eliab’s “appearance” or *mar’eh* which derives from the verb *ra’ah* (to see). “For he was but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance” [17.42]. Just in case Samuel had forgotten his experience with Saul’s first dramatic impression, the Lord reminds him not to judge by appearances. “I have rejected him,” the verb being *ma’as* (cf. vs. 1). Again, with the possibility of self-deception in mind, the Lord pretty much shouts out to Samuel that he sees (*ra’ah*, cf. vs. 1) not as man sees.”

The Lord makes a clear distinction between “outward appearance” and “heart.” The first reads literally as “sees (*ra’ah*) to the eyes” and the latter has *lev* (cf. 14.32), “sees (*ra’ah*) to the heart.”

**Vs. 8: Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”**

Time for son #2 which the Lord rejects as well. In vs. 6 Eliab came on his own whereas here Jesse brings forth Abinadab. Jesse must have felt let down at this second rejection...more are soon to follow...but Samuel had reassurance from the Lord. Although he’d like to make them privy to this knowledge, he felt obliged to keep it secret until the Lord revealed the right man.



As with Abinadab and the remaining sons, Jesse makes them “pass” in front of Samuel, *havar* (cf. 15.24). You get the impression that each son walks before Samuel somewhat awkwardly and conscious that he is under close scrutiny while his brothers were looking on. After the warning in vs. 7 not to be fooled by outward appearances, Samuel looks more intently to see if any outward gesture or posture can reveal the inner man.

**Vs. 9: Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”**

This is the last son by name which Jesse makes to pass by Samuel, for after him more rejections are to take place which means the pool of resources is diminishing rapidly. As the number of rejects, if you will, grows, the brothers must have whispered among themselves what this newly arrived stranger was up to. Obviously their doubts increased as each brother is eliminated and while Samuel has not made up his mind.

**Vs. 10: And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.”**

The rest of Jesse’s sons aren’t mentioned as though the author of First Samuel wanted to get this choice over with, having begun by mentioning three sons by name, a sign one of them would be chosen. Perhaps in desperation Jesse made these remaining sons to pass by Samuel one right after the other to get it over with.

**Vs. 11: And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here.”**

Samuel was fully aware that Jesse had one more son but was curious as to why he didn’t bring him along with the others. He had a feeling that this son, considered unimportant, was the right man. While Samuel was asking this more or less rhetorical question, the brothers who had passed before Samuel and had experienced rejection were more curious than ever as to resolving this unusual test. While Jesse had each present himself, it isn’t clear whether Samuel told them the reason for his action. Chances are they had a high opinion of Saul for having defended Israel and were not privy to Samuel’s insight. If they had known this, no doubt they would run as far away as possible from assuming the mantle of kingship.

Note that in response to Samuel’s question Jesse begins with “behold” (*hineh*, cf. 15.22) which here belies some surprise and even embarrassment that this son had been left out of the picture. Samuel bids Jesse to get this son as quickly as possible without revealing why. However, Jesse and the rejected sons pretty much knew the result beforehand. The time between getting the youngest son and bringing him back must have dragged on for all involved. In the meanwhile, the sons were grumbling among each other as to why this, their youngest brother, might be the chosen man. They were on the verge of becoming like Joseph’s brothers who had sold him into slavery, but to their credit we have no record as to any betray on their part that occurred under David’s kingship.

**Vs. 12: And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.”**

The name of the person whom Jesse sends to fetch David isn’t given, most likely a servant, because Jesse didn’t trust his other sons. Samuel had rejected them, the reason not being made known as they passed before him. At the same time, given Samuel’s reputation as judge, they had an inkling that something big was about to happen, and they were left out of it in favor of their youngest brother who wasn’t present.

*Adam* is the verb for “ruddy” and implies being dyed red, for this verb occurs four times in Exodus with respect

to the dying of rams' skins. "Tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood" [Ex 25.5]. From this verb derives the proper name Adam, the first man, because he was taken from the red-colored earth ('*adamah*'). In sum, David made a stunning physical appearance, especially to Samuel, who perhaps hadn't seen him before because he was an infant during his earlier passages through Bethlehem as a judge.

"Arise" or *qum* (cf. 15.13) can be taken as a way of getting the attention of Jesse and his sons who were sitting around waiting from the arrival of David. It too is a way of saying to them something like snap out of it and pay attention. Immediately Samuel orders "anoint (*mashach*, cf. vs. 3) him" as though he bade someone else to do it whereas he was the only qualified person to perform the ceremony. It was a collective way of saying that everyone has to arise now and get down to business.

As soon as the brother heard the word *mashach* they realized David was set apart for something big, even king. This may have caused some consternation because Saul remains the legitimate ruler. Was Samuel setting up a rival in an attempt to divide Israel and therefore proclaim himself king? Although it isn't recorded, Samuel must have spent considerable time explaining to Jesse and his brothers about the rejection of Saul. Perhaps some didn't buy his interpretation, seeing that it was Samuel, not the Lord, who had a grudge against their king.

**Vs. 13: Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.**

Samuel had a store of oil for such purposes used last when he had anointed Saul as king. We don't have any details as to its kind, most likely olive, nor if Samuel used this oil for ceremonial purposes when he had been judge. Note that Samuel anoints Saul "in the midst of" his brothers, *qerev* (cf. 4.3 as 'among') meaning that which is interior to anything. Samuel wanted to make sure these men were solemn witnesses, to insure that they would support their youngest brother and not thwart him later on. In other words, with David *qerev* his brothers, they were sworn to obeisance even if they murmured among themselves. By no means were they to follow the example of Joseph's brothers. As with Saul's anointing, there doesn't seem to be any words as part of this ceremony, just the act of pouring oil upon the person's head..

*Tsalach* is the verb for "came mightily" just as it had done with Saul (cf. 10.6). The major difference is that in David's case the divine *ruach* (also cf. 10.6) was with him "from that day forward."

Once this brief but poignant ceremony had been accomplished, Samuel departs immediately which is fairly typical in such instances. He doesn't linger around to give advice or encouragement to David nor to his brothers. The anointing had been done, and that was that. Yet David and everyone present were left wondering what to do next, how to interpret Samuel's gesture. If the anointing made David king, he had to deal with Saul who was the legitimate ruler over Israel. In other words, a strange situation that could border upon treason.

**Vs. 14: Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.**

Here the familiar conjunctive *w-*, often as "and" but as "now," has greater significance because it serves to transit from Saul to David in light of the latter's recent anointing...again, as king? We're not exactly certain, but it seems to point in that direction. We could say that this is not a transition but a genuine rupture, given how harshly Samuel rejected Saul.

The divine *ruach* (cf. vs. 13) which pounced upon David mightily (*tsalach*, cf. vs. 13) came, as it were, directly from Saul though David was unaware of this. *Sur* also means a turning aside as noted last in 12.21, a turning which never looks back. Almost immediately an "evil spirit" or a *ruach* which is *rah* (cf. 15.19) takes the place of the Lord's *ruach*. Surely Saul perceived this but couldn't quite grasp what was going on. He may have

consulted the priest Ahijah (cf. 14.3) as he did in the past, but even he couldn't figure out what had happened. The manifestation of this evil spirit was one of torment, *bahat* being the verb which fundamentally means to frighten or to terrify. "Ungodly men made me afraid" [2Sam 22.5].

**Vs. 15: And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.**

This is the first mention of "servants" (*heved*, cf. 8.17) belonging to Saul who seem to have a fairly easy relationship with their king, more as advisors. Use of "behold" or *hineh* (cf. vs. 11) is a clear indication that Saul is not acting normally as picked up by his servants. They witness first hand and up close that this evil spirit is "tormenting" (*bahat*, cf. vs. 14) him and wish to help in any way possible. It seems to have come on rather suddenly, just as sudden as that *tsalach* or leaping upon David in vs. 13. We don't have any concrete information about Saul's behavior at this point...perhaps now at this early stage Saul was behaving peculiarly only among his intimates...but soon it will be manifest to everyone.

**Vs. 16: Let our Lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well."**

Saul's servants couch their request in typical deferential style as before a ruler more to protect themselves against any consequences for which they might be responsible, hence the significance of *na-* as in 15.25. ('let'). They ask to "seek out" a man to help (*baqash*, cf. 13.14), that is, one "skilful" or one who has *yadah* (to know in the intimate sense, cf. vs. 3) on the lyre or *kinor*. This instrument often accompanies singing and is noted last in 10.5 but not mentioned there. "David took a harp and played" [vs. 23].

The evil spirit afflicting Saul has visible manifestations and here has a source, "from God." For example, it comes "upon (*hal-*) you" which is a sign to those closest to Saul, his family and servants, that they must rush off to get this man to play the lyre. He has to be on call at all times and if found, would live in the king's residence or close to it. Now a huge responsibility rests upon Saul's servants. They have to act quickly and get this man with a special musical talent.

"And you will be well" is rendered literally as "and good to you."

**Vs. 17: So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me."**

Without the slightest hesitation and while in a good mood Saul agrees with his servants' suggestion before that evil spirit comes upon him. The quicker they find a man to play the lyre, the better. Even since his introduction in First Samuel Saul has been responsive to those around him, never mistreating them, this being another example.

*Ra'ah* is the verb for "provide" which means to see(cf. vs. 7).

**Vs. 18: One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him."**

*Nahar* as "young men" can apply to a servant as it did with the man who accompanied Saul in his search for his father's lost asses. Given the circumstances, this *nahar* could have been a bodyguard or attendant close to the king. As with the servants in vs. 15, this young man exclaims *hineh* or "behold" to get Saul's attention. He doesn't specify where he had seen Jesse's son, but given his talent, David must have entertained plenty of people at his father's home, a child prodigy of sorts.

Among other things, this *nahar* describes Jesse's son not only as "skilful" (*yadah* as in vs. 16) with the lyre but more importantly, as having military skills, unusual for someone who is "the youngest...keeping the sheep" [vs. 11]. That is to say, he is "a man of valor" and a "man of war." In the first *gibor* is used for "man" which usually applies to someone trained in battle (cf. 14.52) and in the second, the more common 'ysh. *Chayl* ('valor') is noted in 14.48 and *milchamah* ('war') in 7.10.

To balance these military skills, the *nahar* got reports that David is "prudent in speech" and a "man of good presence." *Byn* (participle; cf. 3.8) as "prudent" with respect to *davar* or speaking (cf. vs. 4) applies to understanding and *to'ar* to "good presence" in the sense of a well-formed physical appearance. "The woman (Abigail) was of good understanding and beautiful" [25.3].

After speaking of these five qualities, the young man adds by way of conclusion, almost as a separate sentence, that "the Lord is with him." That means the *nahar* had a certain sensitivity towards things divine and was not captivated by physical traits alone.

**Vs. 19: Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son who is with the sheep."**

This verse is consistent with the rights and duties of a king which Samuel promulgated in 8.11-18, that is, he can do whatever he wants with his subjects even if it's against their will. Note that Saul got word that David was with the sheep instead of being with his brothers, that is, relegated to a position semi-outside the family by reason of his youth.

Possibly Saul sent more than one messenger because Jesse had many sons, and they may have offered stiff resistance to any demand, even from their king. While the messengers were present, the two groups felt uneasy and not knowing what to say as they waited for David.

**Vs. 20: And Jesse took an ass laden with bread and a skin of wine and a kid and sent them by David his son to Saul.**

Without hesitation Jesse obeys the command sent to him by the messengers. To show his good will and that of his brothers—they could yet rebel against this order by the king—Jesse sent gifts of food which showed he was a man of some resources.

**Vs. 21: And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer.**

Chances are David did not go to Saul alone but was accompanied by a servant. It was inappropriate for Jesse, his father, to go, for that would show to the king that he was still attached to his son. Now the king would be father to the child. Certainly Jesse didn't send any of David's brothers. He feared they might do the same to Joseph the patriarch, throw him in a pit and give him up for dead.

The Hebrew for "entered his service" reads literally "and stood (*hamad*, cf. 14.9) before him."

Right away Saul took a liking to David, "loved" him, *'ahav*, which as noted in 1.5 means to desire or long after. Instead of putting David to service as a court musician of sorts he made him his personal armor bearer. That means that David will be putting his life at risk every time Saul goes to battle.

**Vs. 22: And Saul sent to Jesse saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight."**

Even though Saul as king could take anyone into his service according to the guidelines laid out in 8.11+, he is

courteous enough to request Jesse's permission to serve (*hamad*, previous verse) him. *Chen* is the noun for "favor" (cf. 1.18). Saul doesn't go into any details about David being his armor bearer which would have frightened Jesse.

**Vs. 23: And whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.**

Most likely a king's personal armor bearer was quartered with troops such as the bodyguard and thus had quick access to his master should an emergency arise. That means this young man, David, had to adjust to a stricter form of military life and must have been the butt of many jokes among season soldiers. However, they would never speak thus directly to David who easily could inform the king.

The Hebrew text lacks the adjective "evil" with regard to "spirit" (*ruach*, cf. vs. 14) whereas later in this verse *raha* (cf. vs. 16; mentioned there but not noted) is used. In the verse at hand this *ruach* is "to ('el-) Saul," or has a direct influence upon him. This affliction was noticed first by Saul's family and attendants who had order to get David as quickly as possible, meaning he was on duty twenty-four hours a day and hence not far off.

*Ruach* is the verb for "refreshed" (same spelling as the noun) which could be taken as "Saul was blown through." There are two other biblical references (Job 32.20 and Jer 22.14), the former being quoted here: "I must speak that I may find relief."

The concluding words of Chapter Sixteen—"and the evil spirit departed from him"—are significant in that while Saul is comforted, most likely this same spirit will torment him and eventually bring him to ruin. Also they set the tone for the coming conflict between Saul and David.