

Five Chapter

Vs. 1: When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they carried it from Ebenezer to Ashdod;

Typically this chapter begins (as with most sentences in First Samuel) with the connective *w-* (and, here as 'when') to show continuous action between events. In the case at hand, *w-* serves to demonstrate that the Philistines wasted no time after their stunning victory to transport the ark of God away from the battlefield in order to prevent any raid by the Israelites to re-capture it. They must have been in awe of the ark, the most sacred religious object in Israel's possession. Some may have had a foreboding that the ark would cause them trouble...not so much from the Israelites but from the Lord himself. That's why the text is silent about any celebrations en route. Ashdod is located on the seacoast, a safe haven of sorts. In case the Israelites made a raid, the Philistines could put the ark on a boat and send it out to sea where it could be protected more easily. If things got worse, they could ship the ark off to another country. Surely the Philistines recalled how Joshua captured Ashdod (cf. Jos 11.22-22). The same applied to the Israelites. If Joshua could do this, why couldn't it be repeated?

Vs. 2: then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.

Foregoing any celebration, the Philistines were quick to install the ark of Israel's God in their own temple. Dagon is the god of fertility, so putting the ark in his temple was risky: either the fertility among the Philistines would abound all the more or the opposite would happen. For them, Dagon gave them victory of Samson, but that proved to be a disaster, Samson having pulled down the temple killing many people including their lords. "So the dead whom he (Samson) slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life" [Judg 16.30]. Would this happen again, wondered some Philistines?

To set the ark of the Lord next to Dagon meant, of course, that the two deities were equal. By that gesture the Philistines thought the two would preclude the disaster just mentioned. Surely the God of the Israelites wouldn't have the temple pulled down on his resting place. With this in mind, the Philistines must have posted a number of their priests within the temple to keep watch on any potential Samson who might try the same trick.

Vs. 3: And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

Specific mention of the people rising the next day intimates that the Philistines had brought the ark of the Lord in under the cover of night so as not to rouse attention. In fact, the people might not have been informed at all. The verse at hand says that the people of Ashdod rose as one man at the crack of dawn. Some may have heard a strange noise in the middle of the night and had a premonition of things to come. So all who heard it lay uncomfortably upon their beds,

anxiously awaiting first light to see what had happened. No one dare approach the temple at night, too scary a thing to do. Would it come crashing down again as with Samson mentioned in the last verse? Any guards or priests inside the temple knew first hand that Dagon came crashing down before the ark, rushed out but were afraid to spread the word so as not to scare the city's inhabitants.

Those who restored Dagon...he is called by his proper name as though a live person...did so quickly and before any worshippers or curiosity seekers made their way to the temple. Apparently Dagon suffered no damage; any scuff marks or the like priests and artisans repaired quickly. All the while they were right in front of the ark of the Lord, an uncomfortable experience, and were glad to get the job done.

Vs. 4: But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

The first day when Dagon and the ark of the Lord were displayed together must have attracted all sorts of people from the devout to the curious. Most people took the latter's presence next to their fertility god as a kind of trophy. We see a similar example with Goliath's armor on display in Chapter Twenty-One. After some time of public display they would remove the ark, but for now it was the talk of the town. The people heard how valiantly their military commanders roused the soldiers to attack the Israelites despite the prospect that Israel's God might strike them dead.

For a second time in a row Dagon himself fell down during the night. Those who heard it just twenty-four hours ago must have stayed up expecting this to happen and when it did, they were very much afraid. Still, no one dare venture to the temple at night. Any priest-watchmen in the temple itself were even more frightened yet did their best not to spread word and thereby send all Ashdod into an uncontrollable panic.

Now the damage done to Dagon was close to irreparable. If it were day, priests and artisans could do some make-shift repairs to conceal the damage, but that was impossible. Dagon's head and two hands were severed. As for the latter, the text reads literally "palms (*kaph*) of hands" which is suggestive that Dagon lay prostrate in adoration with his palms on the ground.

Miphtan is the word for "threshold" which occurs seven other times in the Bible, the next being in vs. 5. "Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house" [Ezk 9.3]. Presumably Dagon and the ark of the Lord were situated in a sanctuary towards the front of the temple, so when people entered they would see both at a distance and approach them reverential awe. So while Dagon's trunk was left in its original position, his head and hands made their way during the night all the way to the temple's entrance. Threshold here suggests that they didn't go outside but remained within, showing a titanic struggle that must have taken place with no observers. Though the Lord

prevailed, Dagon must have put up a vigorous fight. As for the word “trunk,” it is not in the Hebrew text. “Only Dagon was left to him” is how it’s rendered, suggestive of his emptiness as a idol. All the while no sound nor movement is recorded concerning the ark of the Lord. It didn’t have to say or do anything. Just its presence was enough to damage Dagon.

Vs. 5: This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

Kohen means “priests” noted last in 2.25, a word applicable to Israel and Philistines alike. The practice of not walking on the threshold of the Ashdod temple means that people stepped over it and did so as quickly as possible. Again, they must have been very mindful of Samson who was responsible for the collapse of the earlier temple at Ashdod.

The verse at hand is intriguing in that it demonstrates the persistence of the Philistines among the Israelites. Despite the demise of Dagon (apparently he was either repaired or a new statue was fashioned), “to this day” intimates that worship of him remained alive and well. Some of that determination to maintain their native religious habits is shown when the Philistine lord rallied their troops against the Israelites despite the ark of the Lord having entered their camp. This give and take between two people continued for centuries which meant that polytheism and monotheism interacted during all that time.

As for the verb “tread,” it is *darak*, the verbal for *derek* (way). “You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot” [Ps 91.13].

Vs. 6: The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

It didn’t take long...two short days...for the people to know they were the object of wrath by the God of the Israelites. Use of “hand” is a vivid example of the Lord pressing down up the entire population, *kavad* being the verb (‘was heavy’) noted last in 2.30 with its alternate meaning of honor, as though the Lord were squeezing honor out of the Philistines. *Kavad* is found next with the same meaning of being heavy in vs. 7. Such an image of the divine hand is frequent in the Bible, one of the most famous being in Ex 9.3 with respect to one of the ten plagues: “Behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague” [Ex 9.3].

The two verbs *shamam* and *nakah* (‘terrified’ and ‘afflicted’) work hand and hand with respect to the tumors about to be described, making them all the more painful. The former connotes astonishment as well as laying waste; suddenness of action seems to belong to this verb. “And I defiled them through their very gifts in making them offer by fire all their first-born, that I might horrify them” [Ezk 20.26]. The latter is noted last in 4.10.

Hophel means “tumors” usually found in the anus and is found several times through this chapter and the next. It also means a hill and can refer to a fortification as in Mic 4.8: “And you,

O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion.” A reference for *hophel* in the medical sense not unlike as used in vs. 6 is Dt 28.27: “The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with the ulcers and the scurvy and the itch of which you cannot be healed.” In the verse at hand, such tumors are inflicted not just upon Ashdod itself but its “territory” or *gevul*. Those in the city got wind of what happened to their god Dagon, but those in the outlying areas, the *gevul*, may not and were particularly angry when they got word of why they were afflicted. With this area must have been some Israelites and foreigners, Ashdod being located on the ocean, all of whom were not touched.

Vs. 7: And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us; for his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god.”

The men involved probably were officials and priests of Dagon’s temple worried about how their god ended up decapitated and with both hands missing. Not only that, the Lord had pushed this god’s head and hands all the way to the other end of the temple’s threshold. As mentioned above, they must have had in mind Samson pulling down the earlier temple and naturally were afraid of a repeat performance. Perhaps, they thought, the cherubim on top of the ark of the Lord was responsible. If Samson could cause such damage, how much worse damage these heavenly beings could do.

Yashav is the verb for “remain” noted last in 4.4 as “enthroned.” Even as they spoke the Philistines at the temple perceived the Lord’s hand as being “heavy” or *qashah* which is a verb connoting obstinacy and stubbornness, an accurate assessment of their situation. Note that they Philistines use *qashah* compared with the narrative use of *kavad* in vs. 6, to be heavy, with the alternate intimation of being glorious. “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel” [Gen 49.7]! Such *qashah*, they see so palpably, is not only upon them but upon Dagon.

Vs. 8: So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” They answered, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.” So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there.

Seren is the noun for “lords,” and all biblical references have it refer to the Philistines. Originally *seren* applied to an axis or pole from which came the common use as a prince, someone around whom the people rotated or were dependent. It is found next in vs. 11. In a short time these lords gathered at Ashdod knowing full well the potential disaster at hand. Although it was just two days after the incident in the temple, word must have spread quickly. The lords had dealings with the Israelites and knew the power of their God. Their solution? Send the ark to Gath which is more inland and towards Israelite territory. Thus the decision was made on the spot, Gath being the most logical place to transfer the ark to the Israelites. Little did they know that later in Chapter Seventeen David would slay their military hero, Goliath, who came from Gath.

Vs. 9: But after they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out upon them.

Again we have the phrase “hand of the Lord” which here is neither *kavad* (vs. 6) nor *qashah* (vs. 7), that is, heavy, but “against the city” meaning Gath. The preposition *b-* (in) is used, literally as “in the city” suggesting the divine hand was more than just a heavy burden but penetrated right into Gath itself.

Mehumah means “panic” (‘causing’ is not in the Hebrew text), suggestive of commotion and disturbance and found next in vs. 11. It derives from the verbal root to die and implies this. Another reference is 14.20: “And behold, every man’s sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion.” Such *mehumah* or violent shaking seems worse than what had happened recently at Ashdod. We have no account of how and who transported the ark, perhaps volunteers or even slaves though by no means Israelite ones. One can only imagine what was going through their minds during this journey which they hastened to complete as quickly as possible. All those en route rushed as far away as possible when they saw the contingent approaching. As for Dagon, once the ark left, the priests and artisans decided it was easier to fashion a new one. This they did immediately in case the ark of the Lord decided to return on its own. In the meanwhile they posted a guard in the temple at night just to make sure their god did not suffer the same fate as twice before.

Nakah is the verb for “afflicted” as in vs. 6. Both that verse and the one at hand have it with *hophel* or “tumors.” Vs. 9 says of these tumors that they “broke out” among Gath, *satar* being the only use in the Bible. It has the preposition *l-* (to), literally as “to them.” Here specifically are mentioned “young and old,” a way of saying that the affliction of tumors affected everyone without exception.

Vs. 10: So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But when the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, “They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to slay us and our people.”

Here we have no consultation among the Philistine Lords about sending the ark to Ekron. They knew from experience at Ashdod and Gath that the inhabitants wanted it out of their midst as quickly as possible. Surely the people of Ekron didn’t know about their hastily contrived plan until it was too late. It turned out that Ekron was the last stop, if you will (noted next in 6.16). Any other city would have risen up in rebellion against their own leaders. Later the prophet Amos would say about Ekron as well as Ashdod: “I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod...I will turn my hand against Ekron; and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish” [1.8].

One has to pity the unnamed men who bore the ark throughout this process, up and down hills and under a burning sun. All the while they ran the risk of being slain by the Lord. The only hope

they had was that they were on a mission to return the ark unharmed, not to keep it nor to destroy it.

Already the people of Ekron knew what had happened both at Ashdod and Gath. That's why they "cried out" or *zahaq* as did the inhabitants of Shiloh in 4.13 with regard to the ark. Here we have the third mention of "brought around" or *savav* which means to go around as in a circle, very descriptive of the ark's journey. It gives the impression that the Philistines were in a quandary as well as near panic as what to do and couldn't resolve their dilemma, so round and round they went. Although there's not specific mention that the Lord has slain any Philistines thus far but have afflicted them with anal tumors. By now the inhabitants of Ekron were afraid that he would get down to business and wipe them out once and for all.

Vs. 11: They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place that it may not slay us and our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there;

Throughout this circuitous journey men bore the ark of the Lord. Perhaps they started out as volunteers, but as panic began to spread, they were forced into bearing it. Surely no one in the other towns or surrounding areas would do the job.

For the second time the "lords' (*seren*) are summoned as what to do. They came voluntarily and as quickly as possible, this time determined to resolve the situation. It turned out that the Lord of Israel was taking a heavy toll, almost as much as the two defeats inflicted recently upon Israel. Their plan of shuttling the ark from city to city proved an utter disaster. Now it was time to return the ark home, ultimately meaning the Shiloh temple. Such is the meaning of "its own place" or *maqom* (cf. 3.9). The verb *yashav* ('return; cf. vs. 7) is used with *maqom* and implies that the ark will rest in the original place for which it was intended.

Note the two words "deathly panic" which are composed of the same verbal root, *muth* (to die, to perish): the noun *maveth* (death) translated as an adverb and another noun, *mehumah* as "deadly." It is found in vs. 9 as "panic." Both are used with the preposition *b-* (in), literally as "in the whole city."

Yet once more the "hand of the Lord" is described not so much as being "heavy" but as "very" heavy, the adverb *me'od* connoting excess (cf. 2.22).

Vs. 12: the men who did not die were stricken with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Chapter Five ends with both death and the affliction of anal tumors upon the inhabitants of Gath which turned out worst of all and thereby setting the stage for the ark's return to Israel in

the next chapter. *Shavhah* means “cry” as for help, a last desperate plea. “And their cry under bondage came up to God” [Ex 2.23].

Use of *shamaym* or “heaven” (noted last in 2.10) is associated usually with the God of Israel. While he is not mentioned in the verse at hand, we can say that the Philistines in their desperation turned to him. It seemed that Dagon was of no help.

The affliction of anal tumors and even death must have reminded the Philistines of the ten plagues Moses had brought down upon Pharaoh and Egypt. If this were just one plague, so they reckoned, what will the nine others be like?

Chapter Six

Vs. 1: The ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

Sadeh is the noun for “country” and more commonly refers to a field, and so here it could include the territory mentioned in 5.6. It is found in 4.2 but not inserted there; the next occurrence is vs. 14: “The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh and stopped there.”

Seven months seems like a long time for the ark of the Lord to be in possession of the Philistines. During that time stayed in the cities recounted in the last chapter including other places not mentioned in the text. This time of seven months also provided an opportunity for the Philistines to feel out the Israelites, of how and when to return the ark.

Vs. 2: And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said “What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place.”

“Priests” or *kohen* is with respect to the Philistines who most likely belonged to the cult of Dagon which is mentioned last in 5.5. In the verse at hand, these priests are more or less equivalent with “diviners” or *qasam*, a verb usually associated with false prophets: “And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and sorcery” [2Kg 17.17]. Surely these official ministers knew what had been transpiring throughout their homeland for the past seven months and were just as eager to assist. Already the Philistines were determined to return the ark of the Lord to the Israelites—they couldn’t wait—yet wanted to make sure some kind of peace offering accompanied it. This offering would be not so much for the Israelites but for the Lord himself.

Note use of *maqom* or “place” noted last in 5.11 which as in this case is equivalent to home, sending the ark of the Lord to its proper dwelling place.

Vs. 3: They said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you.”

Quickly the priests and diviners intervened so as to not send the ark away “empty,” *reyqam* being an adverb which connotes emptiness as vanity. “And the sword of Saul returned not empty” [2Sam 2.22]. Instead, a “guilt offering” is to be included...not in the ark itself but in a box to be brought along with it. The Philistines risked instant death if they opened the ark. They knew this even before having captured it yet at the same time must have been intrigued by any contents. As for the phrase “guilt offering,” it consists of the noun *’asham* which occurs frequently in Leviticus and is found next in vs. 4. The Philistine lords must not have liked hearing these words, as though capture of the ark were forbidden from their point of view. Yet their religious leaders recognized the dignity and autonomy of the ark which is to their credit, given the many years of tension between the two religions.

Most Philistines were afflicted with anal tumors, very painful, and wanted a cure as quickly as possible. This would come about if they followed the advice just offered which fortunately turned out in their favor. *Rapha’* is the verb for “healed” which originally meant to sew or mend together. “So the water has been wholesome to this day according to the word which Elisha spoke” [2Kg 2.22]. Once this has occurred (and when is yet to be seen), the Philistines will know (the verb *yadah*, cf. 4.6) why the Lord’s hand has weighed down upon them so relentlessly. *Sur* is the verb for “turned away” and akin to *kavad* in 5.7 or heavy. It is found next with this form in 12.20: “You have done all this evil yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.”

Vs. 4: And they said, “What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the Lords of the Philistines; for the same plague was upon all of you and upon your lords.

There is no conflict between the priests (of Dagon?) and the Philistine leaders because the latter group simply asks about the proper guilt offering. Without batting an eye, the former came up with the most unusual...gross...guilt offering recorded in the Bible. When the priests equated the five lords with five gold tumors and golden mice, they seem to be taking their lives into their hands. Yet the plague of anal sores was so severe that the leaders consented readily.

Hophel is the word for “tumors” noted last in 5.9. *Hakbar* means “mice,” especially a field mouse compared with a rat and is found five other times in the Bible, three of which in First Samuel. “Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating swine’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together” [Is 66.17].

The priests point out that the “lords” or *seren* (cf. 5.11) suffered the same “plague” or *magephah* (cf. 4.17). Here *magepneh* has the preposition *l-* (to) prefaced to it, literally as “to all of you and to all your lords.”

Vs. 5: So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land and give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land.

This talk about mice stems from knowledge that disease or that *magephah* (‘plague’) of the previous verse is carried by swarms of mice. Thus to make images of both would be away of making objective what the Philistines were undergoing. While everyone was smitten with anal plagues, making “images” of them isn’t the most pleasant artistic task their craftsmen had undertaken. The noun here is *tselem* (next reference is vs. 11) which also means a shadow as well as an idol. “Let us make man in our image and in our likeness” [Gen 1.26].

By making these images (not in the sense of idols, for the mice and tumors do not fall under that category) of mice, they hope to stop the plague from intensifying, the verb *shachath* which also means to act wickedly. “And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies” [13.17]. The Philistine priests, by reason of their long exposure to the Israelites in their midst, were familiar with the God of Israel and knew his power as acknowledged in the next verse by his treatment of the Egyptians. That memory stayed with them from the time Joshua led his people into Canaan which had struck terror into the native peoples and never left their collective memory. *Kavod* means “glory” and is noted last in 4.22 when the Israelites cried out that the divine *kavod* abandoned them. Thus the Philistine priests which for his *kavod* to return to the Israelites and so alleviate their own affliction.

Still, this gesture was a gamble intimated by the word “perhaps” (*’olay*). The priests knew that despite the harshness the God of Israel showed to Egypt, he does have a merciful side, the one they hope will prevail. *Qalal* is the verb for “lighten” which means to diminish as well as to be of little concern and noted in 3.13 as to blaspheme. Such lightening is with respect to the Philistines’ gods as well as land. The priests speak in a kind of objective manner, as though they were not a part of the Philistines as well as their gods. That may intimate that the priests were not of Dagon but of other divinities.

Vs. 6: Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had made sport of them, did not they let the people go, and they departed?

Here’s where the priests get to the heart of their real appeal, to when Israel left Egypt with divine intervention, for that country had been the most powerful nation around. Everyone knew about it and kept it alive in their traditions. Although that event had occurred several hundred years earlier, for ancients time passed differently because it was uniformly the same over an extended period time. Thus the gap was perceived as much narrower.

Kavad is the verb for “harden” found in vs. 3 as “does (not) turn away” or does not refuse to be heavy. Compare this hardening with the lightening (*qalal*) of vs. 5, namely, the divine hand. In the verse at hand, *kavad* pertains to the “hearts” (*lev*, cf. 4.2) of the Philistine leaders. While Exodus recounts numerous instances of Pharaoh’s heart being hardened, always at the Lord’s instigation, one other time does it refer to the Egyptians in 14.17 just before the Red Sea incident. There the verb is *chazaq* noted last in 4.9 with a different nuance of binding which suggests that Pharaoh had compelled his people to follow him in pursuit of the Israelites.

A key insight the Philistine priests had—and it is to their credit—is that they did not wish the same afflictions on the people as had happened upon Egypt, the essence of which is contained in how the Lord “made sport” of that people. The verb is *halal* which means to maltreat as well as to glean and to perform any deed. It occurs next in 31.13: “So he changed his behavior before them and feigned himself mad in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.” The verse at hand makes reference to Ex 10.2: “That you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son’s son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them.” Indeed, the priests knew well that the Israelites made it their sacred duty to keep alive for future generations the story of their deliverance from Egypt. It must have been convincing because the Philistines did not counter the argument put forth by the priests. They were too stunned and hurting from anal tumors to disagree.

Vs. 7: Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows upon which there has never come a yoke and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them.

Hasah is the common verb for “prepare” is noted last in 3.11 and means to do or to make with respect to a new “cart” or *hagalah* alternately as wagon or chariot. “He burns the chariots with fire” [Ps 46.9]! This cart is to be pulled by two “milch” cows or *parah*, a young cow or heifer which yields milk. It occurs several times here in First Samuel, another reference being Is 11.7: “The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together.” It seems that two such milk-bearing cows are a symbol of fertility and are being sent to the Israelites with the ark without their young so as not to be distracted en route. Coming from the Philistine priests, it is a brilliant idea which was adopted immediately. Anything to cure the people of the tumors. Those Philistines who had borne the ark from the field of battle must have felt relieved that they weren’t summoned for the job. Also, if the Lord of Israel decided to slay the cows, at least it would not cause any human casualties.

Vs. 8: And take the ark of the Lord and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off, and let it go its way.

This takes place in Ekron (cf. 5.10), one of the cities the Lord had struck with anal tumors. While the ark was there, it may have been kept strictly under guard in a local temple, though the local people gladly kept themselves as far away from it as possible. At the same time they were fascinated by the power this God of Israel had shown. As for placing the ark of the Lord on the

cart, it was tricky business. Perhaps the priests themselves did it or asked for volunteers knowing full well they could be struck dead in the process.

Next to the ark was a “box” or *’argaz*, a noun which has two other biblical references, 6.11 & 15. It seems to be relative small and designed to be put on, for example, the side of a camel to transport goods. Within this *’argaz* are the “figures” of gold or *kely*, a word applicable to any utensil or implement. It occurs next in vs. 15, another reference being 8.12: “And to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.” Compare *kely* with *tselem* in vs. 5 which describe the offering in the form of tumors and mice. As pointed out there, *tselem* refers to an idol or image. Perhaps the Philistine priests decided to change the offerings to the lesser status of *kely* so as not to anger the Lord who would consider the offerings as rival gods and therefore inflict the people with even worse plagues. Thus we have two containers set side by side, an uneasy alliance of sorts: *kely* as *’asham* (‘guilt offering,’ cf. vs. 3) and the *’aron* or ark.

As the second sentence says, the Philistines are to let the cows take the lead and bring the contents of both *kely* and the *’aron* to the Israelites. They must have needed some prodding to get on their way, turning back to look for their calves who had been sent home.

Vs. 9: And watch; if it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-Shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm; but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, it happened to us by chance.”

Ra’ah is the common verb for to see and here as “watch.” Actually, the priests had no need to say this because the eyes of all the Philistines were transfixed on the two milch cows to see which way they would go. Beth-Shemesh or House (in the sense of temple) of the Sun is the nearest town to Ekron not far from Jerusalem. Apparently that place belonged to the Israelites, hence use of the words own “land” or *gevul* noted last in 5.6 as territory. In other words, Beth-Shemesh is at the border between the Israelites and Philistines and “it” refers to the ark.

Rah translates “harm” and as in 2.23 means evil.

Yadah is “know” found last in vs. 3 which here takes on an air of discernment as to which way the two milch goes will head. *Miqra’* or “chance,” usually fortuitous, is the second option or the cows not going to Beth-Shemesh. It derives from the verbal root *qara’* meaning to call, to summon. “Something has befallen him; he is not clean, surely he is not clean” [20.26]. Although this option remained open, it was difficult to persuade the Philistines otherwise since they had been suffering terribly after having brought the ark of the Lord into their midst.

Nagah is the verb for “struck” and is used with the preposition *b-* (in), literally “in us.”

Vs. 10: The men did so and took two milch cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home.

This verse demonstrates the ready compliance manifested by the Philistines to the advice of their priests. They were waiting eagerly for them to say these words and prepared the two cows in great haste. Anything to get the ark of the Lord out of their midst. At the same time, they had regret at letting go the very divinity of the Israelites.

Vs. 11: And they put the ark of the Lord on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors.

This was the most delicate part of the task, making sure the ark of the Lord was secured safely on the cart along with the “box” or *‘argaz*. A sigh of relief went up among all present knowing that in the near future the Philistines would know whether or not they would be cured of their affliction. Note use of the preposition *‘el* with regard to the cart, literally as “to the cart.”

Vs. 12: And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-Shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went; they turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-Shemesh.

Yashar is the verb for “went straight” which also connotes a sense of righteousness. “Now Saul’s daughter Michal loved David; and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him” [18.20]. Right away this *yashar* is reassuring to the Philistines because the two cows went in the “direction” or *derek* (road, cf. 5.5) of Beth-shemesh, the closest Israelite town. *Derek* is used a second time as “highway;” the two occurrences back up the single-mindedness, if you will, of the animals being directed by the Lord within the ark itself. The “lowing” was a kind of warning to those along the way, this verb (*gahah*) occurring one other time, Job 6.5: “Does the wild ass bray when he has grass or the ox low over his fodder?”

Sur means “turned” noted last in vs. 4 and has the opposite sense of *yashar* as going straight on.

The Philistine “lords” (*seren*, cf. vs. 4) followed but must have done so at what they deemed as safe distance. They didn’t know whether the two cows would head straight for Beth-Shemesh, somewhere else or worse, would return from where they had come. Chances are there was little or no conversation because everyone was anxious as to what would happen. A sigh of relief went up from them when the cows crossed the “border” (*gevul*, cf. vs. 9) meaning that their mission had been accomplished. Shortly the lords could return home, give a favorable report and hope that the people would be cured of their tumors.

Vs. 13: Now the people of Beth-Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it.

The Hebrew text lacks “people but simply has Beth-Shemesh implying that the entire town was out in the field. Since it is a valley and therefore exposed, a good number of men must have stood guard around it in order to prevent any surprise attack by the Philistines. They had good reason for this. First, the terrible defeat suffered at the hands of the Philistines and when their

ark had been captured. Second, the inhabitants wanted to harvest as quickly as possible the wheat crop before the Philistines raided them and took it away.

Note the connection between “lifted up their eyes” and “saw the ark.” First the guards on the hill heard the lowing of the two cows as they came over the hill who immediately alerted the people harvesting wheat below. Easily they could pick out the ark of the Lord which caused so much excitement that the entire population beheld it as one man. Their response, of course, was one of exultation, the verb being *samach* noted last in 2.1. We get the impression that the people did not rush up to the ark but were waiting with great anticipation where the two cows would lead it. Some may have thought it a clever ploy by the Philistines to catch the Israelites off guard and therefore raid the wheat which was being harvested.

Vs. 14: The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there; and they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord.

Everyone’s eyes were fixed on the cart pulled by the two cows waiting for it to stop. Joshua most certainly was with his fellows in the field harvesting the wheat and was at a loss what to say or do once the cows “stopped” in it. *Hamad* is the verb meaning to stand, not to move, and is found next in vs. 20: “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?”

Without any hesitation the people sacrifice the two cows on the spot using the “great stone” as an altar with the ark of the Lord right there, the first such offering since the ark left the Shiloh temple. The verb for “offered” is *halah* which occurs in the next verse and also means to go up as found earlier in 2.6. *Holah* (in the next verse) is the noun “burnt offering” derived from this verbal root as that which goes up (to God). “So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord” [7.9]. Note the triple use of the letter / which conveys this going up/sacrifice: *halah-holah-IYHWH*. For Joshua this must have been the greatest honor of his life. Certainly this “great stone” which functioned as an altar had to be commemorated which is noted later in vs. 17 as a “witness.”

Vs. 15: And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the box that was beside it in which were the golden figures and set them upon the great stone; and the men of Beth-Shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the Lord.

This is the only mention of the Levites or priests in First Samuel though most likely Eli and his two sons belonged to that class. As a footnote in the **RSV** says, “The Levites did not begin to function as priestly assistants until later times.” Thus the verse at hand could be an insert added later. Regardless, some official representatives from Shiloh may have been summoned for this delicate task lest anyone decide on his own to take down the ark and incur the same type of plague that so recently had afflicted the Philistines.

After some waiting, the Levites began their task reverently removing first the ark of the Lord followed by the box containing the golden figures. Perhaps they had some kind of ritual for the 'argaz or "box" to avoid contamination by the Philistine divinities. They had no idea what was inside at this moment because apparently the Philistines didn't inform the Israelites. Thus the Levites put both objects on the "great stone" which just recently had functioned as a make-shift altar.

As with the two milch cows, the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh made burnt offerings along with "sacrifices" or *zevach* (cf. 3.14). *Holah* or "sacrifices" seems to differ from the latter in that it pertains to any offering whereas the latter concerns animals. Nothing more is said of the box containing the golden figures. They may have been brought to the Shiloh temple as a trophy of sorts to counter the Philistines having captured the ark of the Lord.

Vs. 16: And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.

The five lords of the Philistines were taking their lives into their hands getting so close to an Israelites settlement. In vs. 12 we see them going only as far as "the border of Beth-Shemesh" but here are practically in the town, at least on its outskirts. Perhaps curiosity got the better of them, and they decided to press on. Then again, they had in mind that their people were afflicted with anal tumors and wanted to make sure return of the ark would alleviate this plague.

No doubt the Israelites were aware that these Philistine lords were on the hilltop looking down to see if they would burn the box and golden figures. If they did, war may have ensued, endangering the delicate peace treaty of sorts that was in effect. Once the lords saw that the citizens of Beth-Shemesh did not destroy their offerings, they returned home. They were anxious to hurry and report the good news and hoping to find out that their people had been cured. En route they passed through Philistine territory and began to see that the plague was lifted or was beginning to be lifted. Chances are these five lords were treated as heroes upon returning home while at the same time regretting that for a short time they had Israel's most precious object in their possession.

Vs. 17: These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron;

Asham means "guilt offering" noted last in vs. 8. The preposition *l-* (to) is prefaced to the Lord as well to each of the five cities listed here.

Vs. 18: also the golden mice according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five Lords, both fortified cities and unwalled villages. The great stone beside which they set down the ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh.

The golden mice represent the means by which the plague of anal tumors had been spread. Although the five chief cities of the Philistines are mentioned in vs. 17, the verse at hand adds “fortified cities” and “unwalled villages.” *Mivtsar* is the former, from the verbal root *batsar* meaning to cut off as it pertains to a city removed from its surroundings for protection. “Who will bring me to the fortified city” [Ps 108.10]? The latter consist of two words, the first being *kopher* which also means pitch and ransom. The basic idea seems to be that the verbal root means to cover. “Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it” [12.3]? In the verse at hand, *kopher* is found with another noun, *perazy* (‘unwalled’) which has two other biblical references, Dt 3.5 and Est 9.19, the former being cited: “All were cities...very many unwalled villages.” From this word derives the proper noun Perizzites, a race living in Canaan.

In vs. 15 we have the Israelites placing both the ark and box of golden figures upon the great stone whereas here the ark is set beside this stone. Since the stone functioned as a make-shift altar for sacrifice of the two cows, the ark had to be placed elsewhere though close by. The verb used is *nuach* which connotes a gentle placing down or resting. “And the spirit rested upon them” [Num 11.26].

Hed means “witness” and is found next in 12.5: “The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day that you have not found anything in my hand.”

“This day” means that the “great stone” was held in veneration a long time, even after the ark of the Lord returned to the Shiloh temple and later to the temple in Jerusalem.

As for the Philistines, chances are they were healed of their anal tumors once the smoke of the sacrifices reached heaven and even before the five lords who followed the cart bearing the ark had returned home.

Vs. 19: And he slew some of the men of Beth-Shemesh because they looked into the ark of the Lord; he slew seventy men of them, and the people mourned because the Lord had made a great slaughter among the people.

Nakah is the verb for “slew” (cf. vs. 9 as ‘afflicted’) used twice. First it is used with respect to seventy citizens of Beth-Shemesh, the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to “men” which reads literally, “slew in men,” making the sense quite dramatic. The reason for this was that these men “looked” (*ra’ah* as in vs. 9) inside the ark, obviously out of curiosity. How this slaying took place isn’t spelled out. Still, seventy is a significant number of people. Compare this indiscreet *ra’ah* with that of the angels in 1Pt 1.12: “Things which have now been announced to you...things into which angels long to look.” There the verb is *parakupto*, to stoop down and peep inside.

The second half of vs. 19 applies *nakah* to “of the people seventy men, fifty thousand men” as it reads in the Hebrew, perhaps a corruption of the text. Still, the Israelites considered this tragedy a great “slaughter” or *makah* noted last in 4.10 (it derives from *nakah*). As with “men,” the preposition *b-* is prefaced to this word for emphasis as well as drama. The citizens of Beth-

Shemesh were unsettled by this not long after Israel had lost so many in battle against the Philistines. Perhaps some regretted the ark's return in their midst and feared they would suffer even a greater affliction than the Philistine with their tumors.

Vs. 20: Then the men of Beth-Shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?"

Here the people echo the cry of the Philistines of 5.11: "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place that it may not slay us and our people." By reason of what had just happened they recognize the Lord as "holy" or *qodesh* which fundamentally means that which is set apart. Those who peered into the ark and were slain had no clue as to this holiness; now it was established firmly in the consciousness of Israel. *Qodesh* is noted last in 2.2 as part of Hannah's prayer where she acknowledges this apartness of the Lord. Thus in the verse at hand, *hamad* ('to stand,' cf. vs. 14) and *qodesh* are exact opposites.

By reason of having lost a considerable number of men, the citizens of Beth-Shemesh, again like the Philistines earlier when they sent the ark of the Lord from town to town, exclaimed in near despair that no one would be able to receive it. The verb *halah* ('shall go up,' vs. 14) intimates that the hand of the Lord was pressing hard upon the people and needed to be relaxed.

Vs. 21: So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to you."

Mal'ak means "messengers" or one who is sent and found next in 11.3: "Give us seven days respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel." Surely the citizens of Beth-Shemesh picked the swiftest runners they could find in order to relieve themselves of the ark of the Lord.

Kiriath-Jearim means City of Woods and found next in 7.1. Apparently the circumstances of the urgent message was not given, either a ploy or simple desperation on the part of the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh. Chapter Six closes without a response though the next chapter has the men of Kiriath-Jearim accepting the ark of the Lord gladly. The verb *halah* for "take (it) up" is used, the same verb as in vs. 20 ('shall go up') and is suggestive that the people of Kiriath-Jearim relieve the heaviness of the Lord's hand. Perhaps that's the real reason why those people were chosen.

Chapter Seven

Vs. 1: And the men of Kiriath-Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill; and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to have charge of the ark of the Lord.

Halah as “took up” is noted in 6.21 with regard to the invitation from the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh to those of Kiriath-Jearim. Chances are the former tried to conceal the incident of the men who had peered into the ark lest the latter refuse to take it into their possession. Despite their best efforts, word must have leaked out, an incident bound to spread swiftly. As soon as they could find somewhere safe (‘on the hill’ intimates that) they left the ark in the custody of Abinadab. He is mentioned in 16.8 as one of Jesse’s sons though the two aren’t the same since the Abinadab of vs.1 has a son. Note use of the word “house” or *beyth* (cf. 2.30) which can mean one’s ancestry or estate, not especially a domicile though it can include that. We have no information whether or not Abinadab was consulted; the decision seems to be made hastily and by reason of its relative isolation on top of a hill. From down below the citizens of Kiriath-Jearim could keep an eye on the ark of the Lord...at a safe distance, that is. In the meanwhile, Abinadab and Eleazar must have felt especially lonely as sole guardians of the ark.

Qadash means “consecrated” and is found next in 16.5: “Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” Apparently the citizens of Kiriath-Jearim did this as a group, for no mention is made of priests. Then again, it could be a hasty gesture, a way of designating Abinadab in the literal sense of setting him apart. We have no further mention of him in First Samuel simply because the situation at hand was supposed to be temporary. It turned out otherwise. Eleazar was charged with the task of *shamar* (‘to have charge,’ cf. 2.9) of the ark. The most important aspect of *shamar* in light of the Lord having slain men at Beth-Shemesh is to prevent its reoccurrence. Perhaps the people of Kiriath-Jearim offered sacrifices and if so, Eleazar would be directing such activities. Both he and his father, Abinadab, were pleased to be honored but at the same time anxious to have the ark move on to a permanent home as quickly as possible. Also they could count on people in later years coming to their house to pay their respects, for it would become a witness of sorts not unlike the “great stone” noted in 6.18.

Vs. 2: From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

Yashav is the verb for “lodged” and noted last in 5.11. The words “a long time passed” are rendered literally as something like “there were many days.” What started out as a temporary shelter for the ark of the Lord turned out to be twenty years, the reason for which is not given. However, ongoing strife with the Philistines might account for this as well as destruction of the Shiloh temple. And so the citizens of Kiriath-Jearim, Abinadab and his son Eleazar gradually settled down for the long haul. There seems no objection or question why so long, just that it was accepted by everybody. Although Eleazar started out as being consecrated...set apart...temporarily to guard the ark, he seems to have evolved into being a new Eli of sorts although unofficially. Without a doubt he knew the long history of abuse by Eli’s two sons and their eventual fate and wished to take precautions as not to repeat that unfortunate state of affairs.

The entire house (*beyth*, cf. vs. 1) of Israel “lamented” or *nahah* which also means to wail, to gather together, and has two other biblical references, Mic 2.4 and Ezk 32.1, the former being

cited here: “In that day they shall take up a taunt song against you and wail with bitter lamentation.” Perhaps residence of the ark of the Lord didn’t start of with this lamenting. In fact, there’s no account as to the people’s reaction to having the ark which implies they were ambivalent. Then a year passed which was followed by another and so forth. As the time went by anxiety grew. Would Kiriath-Jearim turn into another Shiloh and suffer the same demise? Word quickly spread as to it being the center of Israelite worship which was troubling mor than comforting in that the Philistines could attack at any moment. And so the lamenting here is a complex web of various events and reactions to them. Surely Israel and the Philistines engaged in war or at least ongoing skirmishes, and it turned out that Abinadab’s house was the safest spot in the land, more easily defended on a hill top.

Vs. 3: Then Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Rather suddenly Samuel makes his appearance, 3.21 being the last time he was mentioned at the Shiloh temple. He was a boy then and now was approximately in his mid twenties. Of his activity during the last twenty years we have absolutely no information. Somewhere in that time frame he may have experienced the death of his parents and destruction of the Shiloh temple. Without a temple Samuel was out of work and had to fend for himself or even spend most of his time in the desert not unlike a precursor of John the Baptist. Because the Lord have favored Samuel with visions and perhaps had experienced more of them while in the desert, he knew something must be done about the situation at Kiriath-Jearim. As already mentioned, the situation started out as a temporary solution and expanded unexpectedly to a twenty year long stay.

The next time we hear of the ark is 14.18 which is “with the people of Israel” or when Saul bade it to be brought as a rallying point in a battle against the Philistines. Surely those who were old enough recalled what had happened earlier, when the Philistines captured the ark and were reluctant to bring it forth. As for the ark being “with the people of Israel,” perhaps that means it continued to reside at Kiriath-Jearim. The entire nation of Israel surrounded the city, if you will, to protect the ark or more practically speaking, were in continuous high alert as to any attempt by the Philistines to capture it. Later—and this was after the end of the twenty year period of the ark at Kiriath-Jearim—David brought it to Jerusalem (cf. 2Sam 6.1-3).

When Samuel makes his rather sudden appearance after many years absence, he warns Israel about the worship of “foreign” gods or *nekar* which essentially means strange, not foreign in the sense of a far-off land. In addition to these gods rivalling God, they stand in opposition to the “people of Israel” noted in the last paragraph, that is, the unity of the people under the one Lord. This was a problem from the very beginning and would continue in the future, the first mention of *nekar* being Gen 35.2: “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.” Word got out to Samuel about this tendency to

polytheism which roused him so much that he made his way to Kiriath-Jearim. He must have been surprised because the ark of the one God had been among them for so long.

Shuv is the verb for “return” (it is noted earlier but not in this religious sense) which intimates that the people of Kiriath-Jearim had allowed the relative isolation of the ark upon on the hill in the home of Abinadab allowed them, as it were, to leave it alone and follow after foreign gods, many of which must have been Philistine, perhaps even Dagon (cf. 5.7). Samuel includes the Ashtaroth, the Hebrew for Astarte, goddess of fertility which belonged to the Canaanites. So all these people—Israelites, Philistine and Canaanites (plus others)—mingled and interacted with each other in a relatively small geographical area. The Ashtaroth are mentioned in the next verse and later in 12.10 along with the Baals. “From among you” (*tavek*) means more “from the midst of you,” as though these foreign divinities were inextricably linked with the Israelites and therefore difficult to extricate.

The collect “heart” (*lev*, cf. 6.6) of Israel which Samuel bids to return to the Lord he then continues with directing them to him, the verb being *kon* which implies establishing them in a firm place with regard to the Lord. “Go, make yet more sure; know and see the place where his haunt is and who has seen him there” [23.22]. This stability, once established, will enable the Israelites to “serve” (*havad*) him alone. “Forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you” [8.7]. *Havad* is a verb of action or of doing. There first comes to mind in this context that the Israelites will show their collective solidarity by unity of worship through proper liturgical expression in a temple yet to be built.

By the hearts of the Israelites being *kon* or established in the Lord, he will “deliver” them or *natsal* (cf. 4.8), a verb which means to snatch from the Philistines. Such snatching is more than being delivered from their rule but also from worship of their gods.

Vs. 4: So Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.

Sur means “put away” and is found last in 6.12, implying more that Israel turned away from the two types of gods in preference to “serve” the Lord, *havad* being noted in the previous verse with its liturgical association of formal worship, at least when it comes to Israel as a whole. Such turning away is more active than putting them away, a break with their association.

This is the first mention of Baals or local Canaanite fertility divinities and as noted in vs. 3, occurs next in 12.10, these being the only two instances in First Samuel.

Vs. 5: Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.”

Samuel decides to move “all Israel” to Mizpah, the first biblical mention being Gen 31.49, the covenant between Jacob and Laban: “Therefore he (Laban) named it Galeed and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, ‘The Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other.’” More recently Mizpah is associated with Jephithah’s victory over the Amorites in Judg

11. So while the entire nation gathered there, Eleazar was left behind in Kiriath-Jearim to keep watch over the ark of the Lord along with a sizable contingent to protect it. Samuel must have bidden the people strongly to pass word among themselves quietly about Mizpah so the Philistines and other informers might not know of this assembly. It turned out otherwise. They could either attack them there or better, attempt to re-take the poorly defended ark of the Lord. The only thing that refrained them was memory of having been afflicted with anal tumors.

The verb for “gather” in the sense of to form an assembly is *qavats* and is found in the next verse as well as in 22.2: “And everyone who was discontented gathered to him (David).” Samuel doesn’t let on as to why he summons the entire nation to Mizpah but intimates it will have something to do with the Lord delivering them from the Philistines (cf. vs. 3). More explicitly Samuel says that he will “pray” for Israel (*palal*) which is noted last in 2.25 with the intent of making intercession. Indeed, Samuel has considerable influence to pull this off, memory of his childhood communication with the Lord being fresh in the minds of the people despite the years that have passed. Also they must have heard more about his mother, Hannah, whose prayer or “Magnificat” to the Lord by now had become famous and perhaps took on a liturgical form.

Vs. 6: So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

Qatsav means “gathered” as in the previous verse, something the entire nation of Israel did spontaneously at the bidding of Samuel. They wanted to resolve the now twenty year old dilemma of the ark residing at Kiriath-Jearim which, as vs. 3 states, is contingent upon the nation returning to the Lord, for that is upmost in the minds of everyone. The people realized this instinctively but were at a loss how to go about it, hence Samuel’s intervention. Many who had engaged the Philistines when the ark was captured must have remembered that incident as well as its return. Though grateful, the Israelites remained on edge at their continuous strife with this native population.

The first task at Mizpah was to draw water and pour it out before the Lord, no mean gesture given the desert environment and in light of the entire nation of Israel being there. Probably that was the reason why Samuel chose Mizpah, an abundance of water. In addition to this, the people “fasted” (*tsum*), the second mention of this religious practice in the Bible, the first being Jdg 20.26: “Then all the people Israel, the whole army...fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.”

Note that these two gestures of libation and fasting led everyone to speak as one man that they have “sinned” or *chata’* (noted last in 2.25, literally as to miss the mark as in target practice). Since this practice apparently was unfamiliar, the entire nation realized instinctively it was the proper gesture to do. It was followed by Samuel judging Israel, *shaphat* (cf. 4.18). No details

about this *shaphat* are given, but it pertains to the question of religious worship, the foreign gods and Ashtaroth vs. the Lord.

Vs. 7: Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the Lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

“Now when the Philistines heard.” Obviously they had spies or informants, but it was easy to detect the entire nation of Israel gathering at Mizpah despite Samuel’s warning for them to keep this quiet. Perhaps the Philistines didn’t know the purpose of their assembly but clearly recalled Jephthah’s victory over the Amorites (cf. vs. 5) and were afraid it could happen to them. Note, however, that in the verse at hand the “lords” (*seren*, cf. 6.12)...presumably five of them...went up, not an army. Although it was some twenty years after the return of the ark of the Lord to Israel (five lords followed it, cf. 6.13), some of these lords, if not all, may have been different leaders. In other words, this assembly of an entire nation at one place was sufficient warning to warrant the Philistine leaders to check it out. The preposition *‘el* (to) is used for “against Israel” which renders it literally “to Israel.” That is, they did not confront them but stayed off a safe distance to gather intelligence about this assembly. Surely the Philistine lords got wind of Samuel’s rather sudden appearance on the scene and were curious about his judging the nation, of what that meant. Chances are the Israelites kept that secret which worried the five Philistine lords.

Just as the Philistines heard about Israel being at Mizpah, so the Israelites heard about the Philistines being close by. They were worried especially at the five Philistine lords compared to an army, knowing full well they were being spied upon. Chances are the lords disguised themselves. If their status became known, Israel would pounce upon them immediately. All in all the discourse thus far in First Samuel is fraught with tension and anxiety with the threat of attack and actual fighting between Israel and the Philistines, all within a not completely defined territory between the two antagonists.

Vs. 8: And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”

Charash is the verb for “do (not) cease” whose fundamental meaning is to cut into, to be deaf or to plow. It is a strong word in the context conveying urgency. “But he held his peace” [10.27]. The urgency at hand is entrusted to Samuel whom the people hope will “save” them from the Philistines, *yashah* being the verb noted last in 4.3. Such spontaneity and unity of voice which is cried out as one voice (*zahaq*, cf. 5.10) clearly reveals the desperation of Israel, of how much they feared the Philistines. Obviously it places a huge burden upon Samuel to deliver, for most likely a show-down is bound to happen shortly.

Vs. 9: So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

Taleh means “lamb,” one of two biblical references, the other being Is 65.25: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food.” The noun *chalav* is used for “suckling” and alternating translates as fat as found in 2.15. Also the adjective *‘achad* (one) is used for the indefinite article (*‘a*).

The noun *holah* (cf. 6.15) is derived from the verb *halah* (cf. vs. 1), “burnt offering” and “offered.” This offering is “whole” or *kalyal* as in Ps 51.19: “Then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings (*holah*).” The precedent is Ex 29.18: “And burn the whole ram upon the altar; it is a burnt offering to the Lord; it is a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord.”

It appears that immediately after having made the offering, Samuel “cried” to the Lord, *zahaq* being the verb noted last in vs. 8. Note the use of two similar prepositions for “to:” *l-* as in *YHWH* and *‘el-* as in *‘el-YHWH*. The former seems more general whereas the latter suggests direction towards-which. As a result of this double entreaty, sacrifice and crying with the respective use of *l-* and *‘el-*, the Lord “answered” Samuel, *hanah* as noted last in 4.20. The verses that follow do not record any communication between the two, just that it happened and took the concrete form of Israel being victorious in battle over the Philistines.

Vs. 10: As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel; but the Lord thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion; and they were routed before Israel.

This verse has Samuel engaged in the sacrificial offering of the suckling lamb at the exact same time the Philistines move to “attack” Israel which is expressed by two words, *nagash* (‘drew near’) and *milchamah* (‘attack’). As for *nagash*, cf. 9.18: “Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate.” *Milchamah* is a noun meaning war or battle noted last in 4.1. Most likely this attack was preceded by the Philistines carefully watching the activities of Samuel whose renown as a judge (cf. vs. 6) reached their attention. They figured that now was the best time to make their move, when Samuel and the Israelites appeared at their most vulnerable during a religious service. The Philistines had been watching Samuel’s activities for some time and wished to eliminate him as a threat, the first real leader in a long time that could challenge them. This watching is intimated by the verb *nagash* which means the Philistines had their army drawn up waiting to pounce.

Just as simultaneous as the connection between Samuel making the sacrifice and the Philistines about to attack is the Lord’s intervention. This is done in a non-military fashion by thundering or *raham* noted last in 2.10. Use of *raham* there is important because it forms part of Hannah’s prayer (‘against them he will thunder in heaven’). Because Hannah is the mother of Samuel, she must have taught her son this prayer and what it meant. Thus her words echoed in Samuel’s ears just as clearly as they were uttered yesterday. As for what the Lord uttered, we have no specifics, just that it was a “mighty voice” (*qol*, cf. 4.14) equivalent to a thunder clap. This divine

qol was “against the Philistines,” the preposition *hal-* being prefaced to that proper noun rendering it literally as “upon the Philistines” which is consistent with the image of a clap of thunder (and lightning) striking them from above.

This sudden intervention by the Lord against the massed Philistines certainly took them off guard and “threw them into confusion,” the verb being *hamam* which also means to impel or to drive. Later King David would sing of another victory over the Philistines with “And he sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning and routed them” [2Sam 22.15]. As soon as this *hamam* occurred, the last in a series of rapid events presented as one, the Philistines “were routed” or *nagaph* noted last in 4.17. Although this took place “before Israel,” Israel did not have a hand in what was transpiring. They, like the Philistines, were equally astounded. Such was the answer by the Lord to Samuel uttered in the previous verse.

Vs. 11: And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them as far as below Beth-Car.

The verse above spoke of four events taken as one. To them three more may be added, all in rapid succession. First the Israelites departed Mizpah where they had assembled to offer sacrifice with Samuel who judged them there. They were reinvigorated by this experience of solidarity which was followed by the Lord himself intervening on their behalf by routing the Philistines. Secondly, they “pursued” their foes, *radaph*, a verb noted next in 17.52, a similar context: “And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath.”

The third and final event forming a unity of action by the Israelites is when they “smote” the Philistines, *nakah* (cf. 6.19). They did this in the vicinity of Beth-Car, House of Sheep, and sheep implies an offering to be made to the Lord. Thus the *nakah* by Israel was a kind of offering which fulfilled that of Samuel in the previous verse. We don’t have a number of Philistines slain, but later in First Samuel they return to menace Israel. In other words, a victory in an ongoing battle that for both sides never comes to a definitive resolution.

Vs. 12: Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Hitherto the Lord has helped us.”

After the rout of the Philistines Samuel takes a stone and places it as a monument. Compare it with the “great stone” of 6.15 when the Philistines returned the ark along with the golden figures as a peace offering. Perhaps lack of the adjective “great” intimates that yes, Samuel will commemorate the Lord’s help. However, he knows full well it is one of a number of victories which is by no means final even though secretly he wishes this were the last memorial.

Samuel places the stone between Mizpah where he had assembled Israel for judgment and sacrifice and Jeshanah (also called Shen which is in the Hebrew text). The latter has one other biblical reference, 2Chron 13.19 as among the cities taken by King Abijah. The name for this

stone (the 'great stone' of 6.15 had no name) is Ebenezer which means Stone of Help. This city is noted in 5.1 as one of the Philistine cities though the two may not be the same. Regardless, the issue is that the stone represents divine help, the verb being *hazar*. "Because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me" [Ps 86.17]. The word "hitherto" (*had-henah* or literally 'until behold') can suggest that weariness Samuel and Israel are experiencing with their ongoing struggles against the Philistines which underlies their sincere gratitude to the Lord. But, as they asked themselves privately, is this strife going to continue indefinitely?

Vs. 13: So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

At last, words which resolves the tension discussed in the last verse but conflict continues as future events testify. *Kanah* is the verb for "were subdued" which pertains to bowing the knee in reverence thus hinting at a religious gesture. "Because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God" [2Chron 34.27]. Fortunately for Israel the Philistines were beaten so thoroughly (but not permanently) that they had no sufficient military strength to enter the "territory" or *gevul* of Israel. As noted in 6.12 *gevul* usually refers to a border and for an enemy not to enter this area means that it lacked strength even to approach the general territory of Israel.

Samuel's power prevailed throughout his life as expressed by the Lord's hand being against the Philistines. The preposition *b-* (in) is prefaced to that proper noun rendering it literally as "in the Philistines" or right into their very lives. This sentence can be seen as functioning not unlike those tumors which the Philistines endured after they had captured the ark of the Lord. The Lord remembered that insult and wished not so much to punish them but to keep them at bay, well away from Israel.

Vs. 14: The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel from Ekron to Gath; and Israel rescued their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

Chances are that when the Philistines took cities belonging to Israel, they populated them with their own kind and expelled the native inhabitants, perhaps even having killed some of them. The exact number of cities taken isn't given, but they are intimated as being between Ekron and Gath. However, not long afterwards the Philistines retook some of these cities; Gath is singled out as the home of Goliath, their most famous warrior. Thus a peace treaty of sorts is intimated whereas Israel seems to taken Philistine "territory" by force, *gevul* (cf. vs. 13). Such is the meaning of "rescued" or *natsal* (cf. vs. 3). Mention of "hand" suggests that this *gevul* was under particular harsh rule and needed to be relieved as quickly as possible.

Just as important as this temporary truce or peace with the Philistines was "peace" or *shalom* (cf. 1.17) with the Amorites, the only mention of the Canaanite tribe in First Samuel. Apparently they were a lesser threat than the Philistines, so it was easier to conclude a peace agreement.

Vs. 15: Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

This verse and the remaining two of Chapter Seven cap off a series of dramatic encounters with Israel's age-old nemesis, the Philistines and at last gives a sense of normalcy. Vs. 6 was the last time this function of judging (*shaphat*) was mentioned. The details aren't given, but Samuel was destined to be the last judge in Israel before that nation demanded a king, the subject of Chapter Eight.

Vs. 16: And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all these places.

Savav, along with *halak* (to go, cf. 2.30) is the verb for "went on a circuit," the former noted last in 5.10 as to go around. In the three cities included here Samuel "judged" (*shaphat*, cf. vs. 15) Israel. During these yearly visits Samuel got a very good idea of the political and religious situation although we have no details as to the exact nature of any decisions he had made. On top of the minds of most people was their ongoing relationship with the Philistines, of how to be prepared continuously in case of war.

Vs. 17: Then he would come back to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he administered justice to Israel. And he built there an altar to the Lord.

Ramah is mentioned first in 1.19, home of his parents, Elkanah and Hannah. Surely he recalled how his mother had offered him as a young child to the Shiloh temple and how she had suffered at the hands of Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah. *Shaphat* is the verb for "administered justice," again with reference to the entire nation of Israel. At Ramah Samuel built an "altar" or *mizbeach* (cf. 2.33) to the Lord, perhaps more in commemoration of Hannah than for any center of sacrifice. It could, however, function as a temporary place of worship until a permanent home was found for the ark of the Lord which remained at Kiriath-Jearim. That would have to wait until King David moved it to Jerusalem.

Chapter Eight

Vs. 1: When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel.

An ominous way to start a new chapter which will prove fateful both for Samuel and Israel. The preposition *l-* (to) is prefaced to Israel reading literally, "to Israel," which is indicative of directness with regard to judging. We have no time frame as to when this appointment occurred. Samuel must have been older, knowing that someone would have to succeed him. Chances are he had in the back of his mind the memory of Eli who had appointed Hophni and Phinehas as priest at the Shiloh temple, a disaster which soon would be repeated though apparently (and thankfully) for Samuel, not on such a pervasive scale.

Vs. 2: The name of his firstborn son was Joel and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba.

This is the only information we have about Joel and Abijah, let alone their fate, which is better left unsaid after the prolonged abuse of temple worship by Hophni and Phinehas. Both Samuel's sons were delegated to Beer-sheba or far to the south. That could imply Samuel had an intimation of how they would turn out and wanted them as far away as humanly possible. Surely people who knew Samuel, including his parents Elkanah and Hannah, were dismayed that such a holy man would beget two scoundrels.

Vs. 3: Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.

“Walk in his ways” (*derek*, cf. 6.12) is a familiar biblical expression which technically applies to the just manner of judging Israel. It makes you think of the “circuit year by year” of 7.15 that Samuel performed faithfully. By contrast, Joel and Abijah, while they must have followed the same *derek* of that circuit when not in Beer-sheba, did so eccentrically meaning they perverted judgment. However, we have no details as to how long this lasted but figure it wasn't too long. People had memories of that prolonged abuse by Eli's two sons and moved quickly to stop it as the next verse reveals. All in all this was profoundly embarrassing for Samuel whose reputation was impeccable. At least he could be grateful that his mother Hannah was not around to see what was transpiring. Did Samuel, unlike Hannah, fail to present Joel and Abijah in the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-Jearim where the ark of the Lord was in residence?

Betsah is the noun for “gain” which also means prey, that obtained through bribes. What profit is there in my death if I go down to the Pit” Ps 30.9]?

Shachad means “bribes” as well as a gift in the positive sense. “Behold, I am sending to you a present of silver and gold” [1Kg 15.19].

Natah is the verb for “perverted” and fundamentally means to stretch out, to incline. “He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet” [2Sam 22.10]. *Natah* is used with respect to *mishpat* or “justice” noted last in 2.13 as “custom.” The same verb is used in the verse at hand as “turned aside.”

Vs. 4: Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah,

Zaqen means “elder” found last in 4.3 and means those who represent the people, in the case at hand meaning the entire nation of Israel. They “gathered together” or *qavats* (7.5) at Ramah or Samuel's birth place which means that the elders have been in touch beforehand. Everyone in the nation of Israel appeared on edge, having had the terrible recollection of Hophni and Phinehas burned into their memories. The elders were so bound not to repeat this that they would come up with a request never before presented in their history. They seemed as one

about it and must have discussed it heatedly as they assembled from all the corners of Israel. Obviously Samuel knew all about it and as noted earlier, was quite embarrassed but had to acknowledge the elders were correct.

Vs. 5: and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations.”

One has to give the elders credit for their great respect of Samuel who had been a faithful judge for many years. By saying that he was “old” (*zaqan*, the verbal root for ‘elder’s), they wished to cushion the blow they were about to deliver. Even before stating their real purpose by coming to Ramah, Samuel knew something ominous was about to unfold. By mentioning that his sons failed to walk in his ways, they weren’t embarrassing Samuel nor telling him anything new. Everyone was familiar with the behavior of Joel and Abijah. But as noted in vs. 2, we don’t hear anything more about them. Given the warfare just experienced, people were tired of violence and most likely just wanted to ease out the two sons as well as to save face with their beloved Samuel. Suddenly Samuel found himself in the place of Eli, not a flattering position.

Sum is the verb for “appoint” noted last in 2.20 with regard to a king whose function is to “govern” or *shaphat*. This request was particularly hard for Samuel to take, for *shaphat* means to judge (cf. 7.17), a task he performed faithfully for many years. Although the Israelites knew that kings in other lands were despotic by nature, perhaps they felt that a king taken from one of their own would not go this route but would follow the familiar path of judging the people which implies a certain intimacy and personal one-on-one relationship. Although the Lord and Samuel were against the proposal, the people can’t be blamed, having had such a prolonged negative experience with Hophni and Phinehas and more recently, Samuel’s own two sons. Surely they questioned how such (two) holy men could be fathers of two pairs of scoundrels. Besides, having a king “like all the nations” would give Israel greater prestige in their ongoing struggles with the Philistines and perhaps allow the formation of alliances with other kingdoms.

Vs. 6: But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” And Samuel prayed to the Lord.

Davar is the noun for “thing” and noted last in 4.16, the fundamental meaning as word, expression. Although presented in the English translation as such, *davar* can represent what the elders expressed to Samuel. As for Samuel, the *davar* “displeased” him, *rahaḥ* basically as to make a noise and applies to being evil or doing it. Here *rahaḥ* is used with “in their eyes.” “And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him” [18.8].

The first response by Samuel is not to answer the elders but to pray to the Lord, *palal* (cf. 7.5) which means to make intercession. The elders accepted this knowing full well it is the way Samuel handles important matters, so there was little or no time gap between their approaching him and his praying for them. Samuel must have made intercession plenty of times

during all the years he had judged Israel. Only now came a true crisis that would determine Israel's future once and for all.

Vs. 7: And the Lord said to Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

So after some time of intercession (*palal*, cf. vs. 6), the Lord responded by saying he must "hearken to the voice of my people," the preposition *b-* (in) being prefaced to *qol* or "voice" (cf. 7.10) rendering it literally as "in the voice." This must have been the most painful experience of Samuel's life, giving into the people's demand for a king. However, he did not argue but consented. The Lord continues to speak through vs. 9.

Ma'as is the verb for "reject" which also means to despise and is found next in 10.19: "But you have rejected your God this day who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses." Actually the motivation of the people seems reasonable but upon further consideration, is not. If the Lord is able to get rid of two corrupt men like Hophni and Phinehas, surely he could do the same with Joel and Abijah thus avoiding the establishment of a king.

Vs. 8: According to all the deeds which they have done to me from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.

The Hebrew text lacks "to me."

The Lord now makes references to embarrassing and shameful acts Israel had done in the past, i.e., "deeds" or *mahaseh* which derives from the common verbal root *hasah* (to do, to make) and used here as "have done." "And because his deeds have been of good service to you" [19.4]. This bringing to mind by the Lord of past offenses shows the collective nature of Israel, that one nation has one mind and one memory which affects all members of its society regardless of time and space. Such is the meaning of "even to this day" which also intimates that Israel has not reformed herself very much over the centuries. This phrase is supplemented, if you will, by the fact that the Lord has "brought them up" from Egypt, a frequent phrase throughout scripture. Perhaps after hearing this, the Israelites might change their mind.

The crux of the divine complaint is twofold: "forsaking me" and "serving other gods." First comes *hazav* which connotes desertion. "They forsook their cities and fled" [31.7]. Secondly comes *havad* noted last in 7.4 which reflects more or less the same situation as the one at hand. To *havad* other gods means to be their slaves compared to the freedom of *havad* with respect to the Lord noted in 7.4.

Next the Lord brings his twofold complaint home directly to Samuel, making it personal, perhaps having in mind the shameful behavior of his sons which parallel that of Eli's two sons. Though not pertaining to idolatrous worship, they defrauded people in the act of worship over

an extended period of time. The words “so they are also doing (*hasah* again) to you” is a kind of wake-up call to Samuel. To date he may have not been aware of the impatience shown by Israel by demanding a king in place of the Lord himself. In the years when Israel had left Egypt and wandered in Egypt as well as the early years in Canaan, this impatience was at the root of so many problems, hence the unity between “from the day I brought them up,” “even to this day” and “so they also are doing to you.”

Vs. 9: Now then, hearken to their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

The verb “hearken” or *shamah* (cf. 2.24) is used with the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to “voice” (*qol*, cf. vs. 7) which reads literally as “in their voice” or a divine command for Samuel to listen with complete attention to the request set before him.

This hearing-in is qualified by the small word *’ak* or “only.” That is, first listen carefully and then “solemnly warn” the people, the verb *hod* which means to say again and again or to testify. *Hod* is used twice, a common practice to show emphasis. “For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt” [Jer 11.7]. As with *qol* (‘voice’) the preposition *b-* is prefaced to “them,” literally as “warn in them.”

Nagad is the verb for “show” and noted last in 4.13 as to tell or to communicate about the “ways” of a king. *Mishpat* is the noun here as in vs. 3 (‘justice’), something with which Samuel was very familiar over the years when he had judged Israel. Now that more or less egalitarian form of government is about to change into a monarchical one. It appears the people’s request for a king was based in some naivete and lack of reflection as a nation unique among all others. As a leader, Samuel had experience with other nations and their kings, perhaps having concluded treaties and the like with many of them. Thus he knew well the contrast between Israel’s form of governance and the more common one around him.

Malek is the noun for “king” and derives from the verbal root *malak* used here, “shall reign,” the latter being used with the preposition *hal-* or “upon them” which suggests the real possibility of abuse and oppression.

Vs. 10: So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking a king from him.

Because Samuel was in a position of leadership, i.e., a judge, he was familiar with the *mishpat* of kings neighboring Israel, so he had no need to reflect on how to communicate this to the people. There is seamless connection between the time when the Lord spoke to him as just recorded and the actual telling of this *mishpat*. In this verse, the noun *davar* means “words” (cf. vs. 6), that is, exactly as the Lord has spoken. The way vs. 10 is phrased does not bode well for Israel although later the Lord relented and supported David when he became king. This establishment of kinship gave rise to prophets who both warned and gave counsel to kings

compared to judges who were more servants to the people. Such service lies behind the words of vs. 15, “he (Samuel) went on a circuit year by year.”

Vs. 11: He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots;

Now Samuel begins to unpack the previous verses when God communicated his displeasure to Israel’s request for a king. He did this, of course, with full awareness that it came about directly through the behavior of his sons Joel and Abijah who “did not walk in his ways.” Surely that would haunt Samuel all the days of his life, that his neglect prompted this momentous shift. It may, in fact, have something to do with his life long hostility toward Saul. Thus both the Lord and the people were correct; now it was time for a compromise. From this point on through vs. 19 Samuel goes into the details of what it means to be subjected to a king, these observations having been garnered from surrounding nations, especially the Philistines and Amorites.

Mishpat is the familiar term for “ways” or the manner of judgment a king will govern (*malak*, cf. 9). This king and all who succeeding him will be considerably distant from the more familiar give-and-take form of *mishpat* the people had known under Samuel’s governance. The very first decree a king will do is to take at will the sons of his subjects and put them in military service, especially chariots which usually are at the front line of any battle. To run before a chariot was even worse. It meant these soldiers had to undergo rigorous training in order to keep up with the horses and were the first to make contact with the enemy. This was a far cry from the way battles had been conducted, that is, something akin to a home-grown militia. If the Philistines had spies among the Israelites while Samuel was speaking of this, they would have taken special notice.

Vs. 12: and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

This verse speaks of a general division of the army to be formed under a king, namely, through the rule of “commanders” or *sar* which also applies to princes. “He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Jabin, king of Hazor” [12.15]. The militia which Israel earlier had mustered lacked this formal structure, probably their greatest weakness. By speaking thus in the name of the Lord, Samuel was imparting divine concern for the future preservation of Israel.

Sar as commander or prince intimates that they will offer a dual function, both military and during peacetime. That is, they will supervise sowing, planting and reaping as well as the production of weapons. Given the constant threat of the Philistines, this is the wisest part of a king’s responsibility because earlier citizen soldiers had been summoned to meet a specific threat after which they disbanded.

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

This command must have been particularly difficult for people to hear after the king had the right to take sons for military purposes. Daughters as well as sons could be seized from the same household thereby leaving the parents hard pressed to continue with their lives. In short, we have a disruption in how society had functioned, pretty much at the local level. It also means that the king will appoint spies who will go throughout the land to pick out suitable candidates.

Vs. 14: He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.

After having scoured the entire nation for men and women to be put at his service, the king will turn his attention to property which was integral to an agrarian society. First the king must establish his authority and means of governance which means he will have “servants” or *heved* (cf. 3.10). These servants—they could range from court officials to common functionaries—have been removed from the society in which they lived and now are set apart from it. That means they had no vested interest in the people and had authority to take anything from them. Even if former family members and friends were in more direct subjugation to their former colleagues, these official could turn against them easily and quickly. It was bad enough for a king to have indiscriminate power but another to have others endowed with authority to do pretty much what they wished with little or no checks and balances in place. Both the king and those he chooses to form a functioning government have little or no experience on which to rely.

Vs. 15: He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.

As Samuel continues with increasingly ruthless guidelines for governance by a king, those listening to him must have been appalled and wished they could back off. However, we hear no complaints from them which is indicative at how fixed they had become in their desire for a king. And that demand again needs to be set against the background of the prolonged abuse by Hophni and Phinehas and more recently, Samuel’s two sons.

Samuel mentions again “servants” as in the previous verse only here with “officers” or *sarys* which means any minister of the royal court as well as a eunuch. “And they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” [Is 39.7]. With the mention of *sarys* and its connotation of a court member being mutilated sexually, many listeners must have been appalled at what they were getting into though it was too late now.

Vs. 16: He will take your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and your asses and put them to his work.

The two classes of “menservants” and “maidservants” (*heved* and *shiphchah*) were common among the ruling elite of Israel, the latter being mentioned in 1.18 with reference to Hannah. At

the same time they were of a lesser status border upon slaves since the verse at hand puts them in the same category of cattle and asses.

Mela'kah is a noun meaning “work” and usually applies to service or anything prescribed. “And would not utterly destroy them” (*mela'kah* being translated here as ‘all’); cf. 15.8.

Vs. 17: He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

If those listening to Samuel thought his account from the Lord was appalling, this last demand by a king they wanted so desperately is the worse, the people becoming his “slaves” or *heved* noted last in vs. 16. That means a end to freedom and unending domination by a single ruler with a court removed from the life of the people which will insulate the king from reality.

Vs. 18: And in that day you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

The phrase “in that day” is significant, a final warning by Samuel to those asking for a king to be like other nations. They will “cry out” or *zahaq* (cf. 7.9)...to whom is not specified but most likely to the Lord as well as to Samuel. “In that day”—and that day will be the longest in the people’s memory—they will recall the drastic words and consequences of what Samuel had communicated to them about a king. As the text will reveal shortly, the king Samuel foresaw was Saul who started out well but not long afterwards spiralled down a path taking Israel with him to defeat by the dreaded Philistines. That’s why Samuel says “because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves,” “yourselves” being rendered literally as “to you,” indicative of the people’s stubbornness.

The second half of vs. 18 has “in that day” when the Lord will not “answer” (*hanah*, cf. 7.9), that is, he will not respond to the *zahaq* in the first mention of “in that day.” In other words, the Lord will remain silent, a dire warning if ever there was one.

Vs. 19: But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No! But we will have a king over us,

This statement is astounding in light of how harshly a king will treat his subjects. It is as though the people didn’t even pay attention to Samuel’s words, *ma’an* being the verb for “refused” which has a note of unwillingness about it. “He refused and said, ‘I will not eat’” [28.23]. Such refusal is emphasized—an overarching theme throughout this incident of wanting a king—by the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to “voice” or *qol* (cf. vs. 9) which reads literally as “in the voice of Samuel.”

Even though Samuel tried his best to keep Israel under the form of judges instead of kings, at least he can claim that he tried his best and can withdraw with a clean conscience. However, shortly he will have to contend with the first king Israel elects, Saul.

Vs. 20: that we also may be like all the nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

At last the true motive of the people is revealed. While they had their fill of abusive priests and judges (Eli’s two sons as well as those of Samuel), their real concern lay with security, namely, the Philistines who were threatening them constantly. This would supercede the king’s governance, *shaphat* being the verb here (cf. vs. 5). Up to this point First Samuel recounted two battles with the Philistines: the first when the ark of the Lord had been taken ransom and later when the Lord himself intervened (cf. 7.10). Though the first battle was a disaster, it turned out favorable for Israel because of the Lord’s intervention. With a king, however, this would not have been the case, and the people seemed to have forgotten quickly the just two incidents of divine favor.

Vs. 21: And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord.

Samuel paid extremely close attention to all the details being exchanged between him, the Lord and the people. He wanted to make sure he understood every last detail so that Israel would prosper after he leaves the scene. Then with an almost photographic memory Samuel “repeated” these words, *davar* being the verb used. More accurately, Samuel *davar* the *dever* “in the ears of the Lord.” That means he went off by himself and whispered them secretly, the Lord having bent himself down to Samuel’s level so he could reach his ears. Note that both ears are mentioned which implies a face-to-face encounter.

Vs. 22: And the Lord said to Samuel, “Hearken to their voice, and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”

The Lord responds as soon as the people had persisted in their request for a king and Samuel’s report of this to him. As in vs. 19, *qol* (‘voice’) is prefaced with *b-* or literally “in their voice.” In other words, give them what they want despite warning from the Lord of the future consequences. The Lord entrusts the duty of appointing a king which means he has to be on the look-out for a suitable candidate, one who will fulfil all the dire things noted earlier. With that, Samuel dismisses the people. Both he and they know what to do, but how to do it is another thing. We hear nothing of how the people may have felt after their request, that some may have had second thoughts. However, there was no turning back. Israel is about to enter a completely different phase of her history, the path ahead being uncharted territory.

Chapter Nine

Vs. 1: There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth;

Benjamin as a person is mentioned for the first time in Gen 35.18 whom Rachel begot and died as a result of giving birth. Later a person by that same name is among the twelve brothers of Jacob, a favorite of Joseph as in Gen 43.29. However, Jacob later calls him "a ravenous wolf" [Gen 49.27], an association which can be made in part with Saul's future behavior, he being a descendant of that brother. In the verse at hand, Kish, Saul's father, is called "a man of wealth" (*chayl*) as in 2.4 where it applies to strength. Such *chayl* can derive from wealth, physical prowess or boldness in military action.

As for the descendants of Kish, nothing is known; their role is to establish the lineage of Saul with regard to the tribe of Benjamin, a way of legitimizing him as the first king who will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel.

Vs.2: and he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

Although Saul is mentioned as the son of Kish, it isn't clear whether he had other brothers or sisters. Emphasis upon his physical trait is striking; it intimates that Saul can be lacking in more important qualities even though in his early career he demonstrates decisive leadership. Still, this remains a hint that thing won't turn out well. The adjective for "handsome" is the common *tov* or good (cf. 2.32).

Also Saul's height is given, "taller than any of the people," *gavuah* noted last in 2.3 as "proudly" and intimating his character which interestingly extends "from his shoulders upward." Perhaps this fellow would make a striking appearance to the people who had been so adamant about demanding a king. True, but it's only superficial.

Vs. 3: Now the asses of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the servants with you, and arise, go and look for the asses."

'Athon means "asses" or more specifically, a she-ass, and they are mentioned next in vs. 5. Such animals were of high value and like camels, used for transporting goods as well as people, one reference being Gen 45.23: "ten asses loaded with the good things of Egypt." Such was an indicator of Kish's wealth according to vs. 1. The verb *'avad* for "lost" also means to perish, something which caused Kish great anxiety. "How the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished" [2Sam 1.27]!

Most likely Saul was more than capable of searching out his father's lost asses. Still, Kish wished a "servant," *nahar* also meaning a young boy as in 2.11. Thus a *nahar* wasn't necessarily a slave though perhaps belonging to a family living under the protection of Kish.

The command "arise" (*qum*, cf. 4.15) is more a polite yet firm way of saying "Get going right away" and "'look for' " (*baqash*) the lost asses. It is found next in 13.14. Of course, having

someone to help Saul would make the job easier. Since Saul could have been Kish's only son—and it would be dangerous to send him off alone—the servant would offer some protection though perhaps not much being a *nahar*.

Vs. 4: And they passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin but did not find them.

The preposition *b-* (in) is used for "through" rendering this as "passed (*havar*, cf. 2.24) in the hill country (literally as 'hill')." This is the only mention of both Shalishah and Shaalim in the Bible. What made Saul and his servant search through very hilly terrain was the preference of asses for high, inaccessible places. Finally the pair went through Benjamin, the ancestral land of his father, Kish, again coming up empty-handed. During this arduous search Saul and his servant must have had plenty of conversations. Perhaps because of this and the able service of the servant Saul appointed him to an official function later when he became king.

Vs. 5: When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the asses and become anxious about us."

Zuph is mentioned in 1.1 and 1Chron 6.35 but only as persons whereas here it is with regard to a particular land. Apparently the land of Zuph in the verse at hand was getting too far afield from home. Both in this leg of their journey as well as the earlier ones Saul had an opportunity to get acquainted with fellow Israelites, a chance he may never have had otherwise. It would serve him well when he became king.

Chadal is the verb for "cease (to worry)" and noted last in 2.5. The words at hand read literally "cease from the asses."

Da'ag means "become anxious" and connotes fear used with the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to "asses," literally as "from the asses." Also it is the verbal root for Doeg, a functionary of Saul who slew the priests of Nob (cf. 22.18+). "And now your father has ceased to care about the assess and is anxious about you" [10.2].

Vs. 6: But he said to him, "Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man that is held in honor; all that he says comes true. Let us go there; perhaps he can tell us about the journey on which we have set out."

The servant had knowledge of Samuel's presence in a city which is not identified, most likely Ramah, his home (cf. 7.17), yet doesn't mention him by name, and perhaps this young man came from there or knew Samuel personally. Throughout the remainder of Chapter Nine there's no indication that Saul knew Samuel personally though he must have heard about him as a famous judge of Israel. In other words, the text give no indication of this acquaintance which means that the two meet for the first time. Perhaps if the servant mentioned the "man of God"

by name, he would have frightened off Saul who was more interested in finding his father's lost asses and getting back home as quickly as possible.

Kavad means "held in honor" and found last in 6.6, and "comes true" is rendered by the common verb *bo'* used twice. It is linked with the verb *davar* ('speaks,' cf. 8.21). So in Samuel's case, the coming forth of a future event is bound up with his very speaking which, in a way, imitates the way God works. Although Samuel is not a fortune teller or anything of the like, it seems that some people attributed that to him which must have annoyed him considerably. And so the servant proposes to Saul that they visit Samuel to inquire as to the lost asses. Because Saul seems to be ignorant of Samuel, he figures it was worth a chance. If they found the asses, wonderful; if not, it was time to return home at once. In other words, at this juncture Saul wants the situation resolved one way or the other.

Vs. 7: Then Saul said to his servant, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What have we?"

This verse reveals sensitivity as to Samuel (again, Saul not seeming to know him nor about him) as well as a certain reluctance. *Teshurah* is the noun for "present," the only reference in the Bible. Although the servant belongs to Saul, he turns out to be more resourceful than his master.

Vs. 8: The servant answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me the fourth part of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way."

A note in the **RSV** says "There was no coinage in those days; the fourth part of a shekel was merely a bit of silver of a certain weight." In other words, the servant had a small amount of silver on him as an offering to the "man of God" Samuel. In addition to being resourceful compared to the more passive Saul, the servant hopes this small offering will "tell us our way." In other words, he wouldn't come right out and ask him about the asses, for that would be the equivalent of taking Samuel as a cheap kind of fortune teller. *Derek* means "way" (cf. 8.3), a general term here for obtaining guidance. Chances are if Saul had been alone, he wouldn't have the courage to approach Samuel.

Vs. 9: (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come, let us go to the seer;" for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.)

The parentheses of this verb indicate it is not unlike a footnote to flesh out the identity of Samuel, for by this time in Israel's history the word "seer" has not been used. The function of "prophet" or *navi'* takes over, apparently with the emergence of Samuel (cf. 3.20), even though seer is used in Chronicles and a few times in some of the prophets. Chances are that Samuel was unaware of this transition. However, the soon to be established line of kings in Israel seemed to have required a more consultative role from holy men which may have contributed to this transition. Thus a prophet evolves into a formal office of sorts compared with the more

spontaneous one of a seer. This situation may also be viewed in light of the ark of the Lord which remained longer than expected in Kiriath-Jearim until David moved it to a permanent home in Jerusalem.

Darash means "to inquire" and fundamentally means to rub, to tread or to trample. Thus the general idea is to walk around within a place in order to become familiar with it. "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium that I may go to her and inquire of her" [28.7]. In the verse at hand, *darash* is used with respect to "seer" or *ro'eh* which derives from the verbal root meaning to see and found in the next few verses. "And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer" [2Sam 24.11].

Vs. 10: And Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

"Well said" is rendered literally as "good (*tov*) your word (*davar*)." This verse presupposes, if you will, the absence of the previous verse and flowing directly from vs. 8. Saul was open enough to his servant to follow his advice, for by this time the two had shared the hardships of seeking his father's asses. Again, the city is unspecified but most likely is Ramah, Samuel's home. On the journey there doesn't seem to any indication that the servant revealed to Saul the name of this "man of God" nor did he presume to ask about his identity. Soon that mystery would be solved.

Vs. 11: As they went up the hill to the city, they met young maidens coming out to draw water, and said to them, "Is the seer here?"

This verse is reminiscent of Abraham's anonymous servant who went on a mission to procure a wife for Isaac (cf. Gen 24.11+). In that incident it was evening, the time for such chores, so most likely Saul and his servant approached the city when this activity was being performed. Contact with such anonymous people (two other being the man who directed Joseph to his brother in Gen 37.15 and the girl who urged Naaman to see Elisha to cure his leprosy in 2Kg 5.3) come at critical times acting as hinges upon which the story takes on a wholly different direction. If it were for their discreet intervention, things would have turned out very differently. These unknown people have a certain insight which, once made known and changes events, fade away from the picture yet are remembered as forming an essential ingredient.

So when the two asked the maidens about the seer, they had an eye on them and another on the city above which was being illumined by the setting sun, an evocative image that must have told them, yes, the seer was present within.

Vs. 12: They answered, "He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Make haste; he has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place.

Hineh or "behold" (cf. 4.13) is a way of getting one's attention, for as in this instance Samuel was nearby, "just ahead of you." That could mean Samuel had a premonition of sorts that Saul had

arrived the same time as he, and he was outside the city gate awaiting his arrival. He knew that the women drawing water at the base of the hill would be the first people Saul would encounter, so he kept a sharp look out. Because Samuel was the most famous man in Israel, people came from the city to greet him. Despite the commotion, Samuel's attention was elsewhere, that is, behind him, the women at the well.

The nature or occasion of the "sacrifice" (*zevach*, cf. 6.15) isn't given but was sufficiently important for Samuel to preside over it. Samuel must have presided over many such occasions in his circuit as judge but always with a heavy heart. After all, his two sons Joel and Abijah "did not walk in his ways" [vs. 2] were apparently still active and up to no good.

Bamah is the noun for "high place" noted in the next few verses and last in 10.13: "When (Saul) he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place." *Bamah* applies to a sanctuary on a prominent height which may or may not be within the city walls. During these years when the ark was residing at Kiriah-jearim such high places were more important than in later years when the offering of sacrifices was focussed upon Jerusalem. In the verse at hand, this sacrifice is to take place "today" or in the evening before nightfall.

Vs. 13: As soon as you enter the city, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat; for the people will not eat till he comes since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately."

In other words, the maidens bid Saul and servant to meet Samuel whom they identify as the seer, not by personal name, which must have increased Saul's curiosity as well as apprehension. And so the two made their way into the city and perhaps did some jostling to get through the crowd. As of yet, Saul was just another face in the crowd and unknown to the city's inhabitants. Samuel kept ahead a few paces without stopping in order to entice Saul to follow knowing full well what is to happen shortly. Those around Samuel saw that he was preoccupied but figured he was intent on the sacrifice.

The verse at hand says that Samuel ascends the *bamah* not so much to perform the (evening) sacrifice but to eat though most likely he performs the sacrifice, the reason for his visit. As noted above, we have no information about the occasion for this sacrifice. Since Samuel had the custom of making the rounds to judge, it could be a sacrifice in his honor, no so much a religious feast. Samuel specific task is to "bless" the sacrifice, (*barak*, cf. 2.20) which could mean a priest had done the preparatory work.

Qara' means "invited" (cf. 6.9) and fundamentally means called or summoned, thereby involving people such as officials, etc. However, knowing Samuel, he must have asked common folk to participate in the sacrificial meal.

Yom (cf. 1.3) means "immediately" and more specifically translates as "day" which gives a broader or more expansive understanding than in English. In other words, *yom* as used here is not unlike the Greek *kairos*, special occasion or event.

Vs. 14: So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.

Because Samuel was present in the city for the occasion of a sacrifice (again, the reason isn't specified) which was at evening, the sun was on or just below the horizon giving a glow in which the identity of people was not fully clear. It adds a sense of mystery to Samuel approaching "them" (Saul and his servant), going right by them very closely but without any acknowledgment by both parties. Also the fact that all knew the issue at hand increased the sense of mystery as well as tension that had to be resolved in the near future. As vs. 16 says, tomorrow at the same time (evening) Samuel and Saul will meet.

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

This verse gives a clue to observations made earlier, that is, about the relationship between Samuel and Saul, of how Samuel knew about this son of Kish whom he is about to anoint. *Galah* means "had revealed" as in 2.27. Actually the revelation about Saul took place just the day earlier while Samuel was en route to the city. It was a fortunate choice because it (again, most likely Ramah) had a *bamah* or high place. It should be noted that while Samuel's parents came from there, they made the yearly pilgrimage to the temple at Shiloh. Chances are that for a long time sacrifices had been performed on Ramah's high place, but they did not hold as much significance as at Shiloh before it had been destroyed by the Philistines. Thus Ramah must have become a temporary temple until a more suitable place was to be found. Everyone was aware of this, and that the ark of the Lord continued to reside in Kiriath-Jearim. People had to make due with what they had at their disposal. No doubt, the people's desire for a king had something to do with the desire to have a permanent home for the ark.

Vs. 16: "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the affliction of my people because their cry has come to me."

This "time" or *heth* is found last in 4.20 but not mentioned there suggests a proper time not unlike a *kairos* event which in the present context refers to the evening, the time of sacrifice. As of now, Samuel had not yet met Saul but certainly was aware that he was present.

The Lord bids Saul to "anoint" Saul, *mashach* (the verbal root for Messiah) and found next in 10.1: "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?" In 2.10 the adjective *mashyach* is used ('anointed'), the conclusion of Hannah's "Magnificat," which speaks of both the Lord's king and anointed. Since Hannah was the mother of Samuel, she must have had an

intuition that in the future her son and Saul would be bound up together irrevocably. Note that Samuel is to anoint Saul not as a king but as "prince" or *nagyd* noted in 10.1 just cited. *Nagyd* is a general term applicable to a leader and derives from a verbal root meaning to be in front of, to be in sight of. By so using this term the Lord is attempting to mitigate the idea of a king with its "Gentile" associations, making it more palatable to Samuel who had been a *nagyd* of sorts for many years when judging Israel. In the verse at hand, Saul is to be a *nagyd* "over" Israel or literally "on" (*hal-*) Israel.

Saul as *nagyd* will "save" the Lord's people (*yashah*, cf. 7.8) from the Philistines. Here the Lord comes directly to the issue at hand, of why the people demanded a king, which stems from the constant threat of invasion from their hostile neighbors. That's the reason why he consents, albeit grudgingly. If the Philistines were a nation apart and distinct such as Egypt, it would be different. However, both peoples lived side by side, village next to village. So when the verse speaks of the Philistines' "hands," these limbs were very close indeed, for both peoples lacked clearly defined borders. And so the Israelites thought this fluid situation warranted a monarchical rule.

Ra'ah (cf. 6.19) is the common verb for "have seen" which means this visual contact must originate somewhere usually perceived in terms of heaven located somewhere up in the sky. But judging from the interaction which has taken place thus far between the Lord and Israel, such seeing originated from the ark temporarily located at Kiriath-Jearim. Because the Israelites were very conscious of this presence of the Lord in their midst, instinctively they knew his seeing came from that ark.

The English **RSV** mentions "affliction" which is lacking in the Hebrew text: "I have seen my people."

The divine seeing of Israel results in their "cry" coming to him, *tsahaqah*, cf. 4.14). Even though "affliction" is lacking in the Hebrew, this verse is reminiscent of Ex 4.9: "The cry of the people of Israel has come to me." If we take the notion of God seeing from the ark at Kiriath-Jearim, not far away by any standard, both it and the cry interact on a horizontal plane, not the more familiar up-down or vertical plane associated with heaven.

Vs. 17: When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall rule over my people."

In this verse Samuel "saw" Saul, *ra'ah* as in the previous verse applicable to the Lord. The seeing at hand takes place in the evening on the *bamah* ('high place') which means that Samuel was looking down upon Saul as he approached.

Simultaneously with this seeing in the rapidly approaching darkness is when the Lord addresses Samuel. Such telling—the verb is *hanah* as in 8.18 and means to answer—suggests not a passiveness on Samuel's part but the ability to respond...to answer...properly when addressed.

Hanah is followed by *hineh* which introduces the Lord's actual words, "Here is" in the sense of "behold" (cf. vs. 12). The Lord is reminding Samuel of a previous conversation the evening before (cf. vs. 16). These words are phrased literally as "spoke to ('el-) you."

Hatsar means "shall rule" and fundamentally means to hold back, to restrain. It's used here with a certain ominous sense as Israel is about to abandon being led by a judge in favor of a king, that king being Saul who turned out to be a disaster. "Of a truth women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition" [21.5]. In the verse at hand, the already forceful *hatsar* is intensified by the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to "people," that is, "in my people."

Vs.18: Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Tell me where is the house of the seer?"

Saul approaching Samuel (*nagash*, cf. 7.10) means that the two men had made eye contact with knowledge that something momentous was about to happen, for as vs. 17 says, Samuel had seen Saul and recognized him as chosen by the Lord. This *nagash* was in the "gate" or *shahar* (mentioned in 4.18 but not noted there) or *betok hashar*, literally "in the midst of the gate." Often city gates had open areas meaning that the two men met in that place. Apparently Saul had gotten there first and was awaiting Samuel's approach; still, Saul did not recognize him, hence the question posed in this verse.

Saul asks Samuel as to the location of the "seer's" house (cf. vs. 11). Although Saul's servant who had accompanied him in the search for the asses is not mentioned, chances are he was present but did not inform his master that yes, Samuel was right before him. It was up to the two men to introduce each other.

Vs. 19: Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer; go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind."

At last Samuel introduces himself to Saul. Because this meeting took place "in the midst of the city gate" (vs. 18), it may have been dark in that confined space—besides, it was evening—and the two didn't recognize each other until they were literally face to face. Right away Samuel bids his guest to ascend the *bamah* ('high place') before him, that is, to go up there by himself. In that way those assembled for the evening sacrifice (it isn't mentioned here) could get a good look at Saul. They must have realized something was up because Saul preceded the well-known Samuel. Was this unknown man who towered above them about to become their king for which they had asked so persistently? In a short time they would have their answer.

As for eating with Samuel, that would take place later, most likely after the sun had set. Samuel appears adamant about not discussing what had brought the two together though in the next few verses it's spelled out more clearly. The real issue at hand will have to wait until the next day. Samuel wanted to speak privately with Saul away from any other supper guests.

Lev (cf. 7.3) is the noun for "mind" and more fundamentally means heart. It is the appropriate word to use in this context, for Saul must have been pondering deep within himself this encounter with Samuel, the most famous man in Israel. Such was the function of a seer or *ro'eh*, one who sees into the heart of a person.

Vs. 20: As for your asses that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?"

Samuel gets right to the point, of what had brought Saul to him, a search for the asses belonging to his father. By now that matter was quite secondary to Saul because of recent events, for he knew that from the time he met Samuel never would his life be the same. The Hebrew for "do not set your mind on them" is more to the point, reading literally as "do not place your heart (*lev*) to (*l-*) them." Already Saul has forgotten about the asses, if you will, he is confronted with a matter of far greater urgency that needs to be settled before returning home. The last time these animals were mentioned is vs. 5 just before Saul's servant suggests approaching Samuel for advice.

Samuel comes out with a cryptic sort of question without giving Saul a chance to respond and follows with a second. He wanted to check out Saul's initial reaction which, as the following verses recount, appears as favorable, that Saul is up to the job of being king. Samuel uses a noun in Hebrew for "desirable," *chemdah* (from the verbal root *chamad*, to take delight and even to covet). In most biblical references the **RSV** renders it as an adjective modifying a land, piece or furniture or some other object. "Thus the land they left was desolate so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate" [Zech 7.14]. Obviously Samuel had in mind the people's request—pretty much a demand from the Lord—for a king. Saul must have know about this but didn't consider himself a candidate as we can tell from later in this chapter.

Samuel also throws in the house of his father (Kish), namely, the tribe of Benjamin which hearkens all the way back to that brother whom Joseph favored and most likely was the impetus of making Joseph bring his father and other brothers to Egypt thus changing Israel's history.

Vs. 21: Saul answered, "Am I not a Benjaminite from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my family the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?"

These words from Saul show how unprepared and unsuspecting he had been all along while his servant had a greater intimation that something like this was about to happen. At face value we could take this as an expression of humility—probably it was genuine—although shortly after having been made king Saul began to change. At least these words are a good start. If it were otherwise, Samuel would change his mind at once, being under intense pressure by his fellow Israelites for a king.

Saul was correct about being a Benjaminite, the “least” tribe of all Israel, *qatan* meaning small and found last in 2.19 though not mentioned there (‘his mother used to make for him a little robe’). While this may be true as far as seniority among the twelve tribes of Israel, the person of Benjamin was beloved by Joseph as noted in the previous verse.

Tsahyr is the adjective for “humblest” and differs from *qatan* in the sense of being little or younger. “There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead” [Ps 68.27].

The third question of vs. 21 is both one of surprise and some irritation. Saul rebukes Samuel, if you will, for having spoken “in this way,” the verb *davar* being used with the noun *davar* (‘way’). Apparently Samuel didn’t respond to Saul which left him hanging and somewhat confused.

Vs. 22: Then Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons.

Now the scene of action shifts from the *bamah* or high place to the nearby hall. Again, the time was evening when the sun was setting or just had set, and Samuel made sure that he and Saul had been alone. Note the Saul’s servant was with the two all along which shows the close connection between the two. Surely Samuel had an eye on this fellow and later must have recommended him for a post in the new kingship due to his loyalty.

Lishkah means “hall” and usually refers to places within a temple such as a chamber. It is mentioned frequently in Ezekiel, especially Chapter Forty-Two: “Then he led me out into the inner court, toward the north, and he brought me to the chambers which were opposite the temple yard” [vs. 1].

Prior to this momentous encounter Samuel must have summoned (*qara’* as ‘invited, cf. vs. 13) certain trusted men of the city and area beforehand who awaited their arrival with some anxiety and expectation. Samuel wanted to keep them in the dark as to what was going in; also he required witnesses to his actions. If he had acted otherwise, people would question his judgment. Once in the hall with the thirty guests, Samuel placed Saul at the “head” or *ro’sh* of the table, found last in 5.4 though not mentioned there. Obviously this honor anticipates Saul becoming king on the morrow, a premonition held by many if not all of the thirty guests. We have no account of any conversation though by now Saul must have known he was singled out by the deferential way not only Samuel but these guests treated him.

Vs. 23: And Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the portion I gave you of which I said to you, ‘Put it aside.’”

“Portion” or *manah* is noted last in 1.5, the two being in a sacrificial context. In the case at hand, Samuel had just performed or presided over the evening sacrifice and put apart this piece of meat. When he was doing it he couldn’t help but keep in mind a bitter childhood memory

from the Shiloh temple, of Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons, who defrauded so many people of their portions over the years. That unfortunate even was instrumental in setting off a whole chain of events that was felt down to the present day being compounded by the similar misbehavior of Samuel's two sons.

"Put it aside" is rendered literally as "place it with you," that is, for safe keeping. We have no complaints coming from the guests; actually they were pleased that this mysterious stranger in their midst was deserving of such an honor. They must have whispered among each other if this is the man Samuel would chose to be king over Israel and thus fulfil their wish.

Vs. 24: So the cook took up the leg and the upper portion and set them before Saul; and Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat; because it was kept for you until the hour appointed that you might eat with the guests." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

All eyes were upon the cook as he entered the hall with the leg and "upper portion" which the **RSV** designates as "obscure" though closely related to *holah* or burnt offering noted last in 7.9. Saul must have gasped at the sight but kept calm; he had no other choice with thirty guests focussed upon him. Also Saul had to eat even if he weren't hungry; he was guest of honor amid a room filled with people he had never met before in his life.

Mohed as "appointed time" is found last in 2.22 and in the verse at hand, it was known only between Samuel and the cook who was more a temple assistant charged with arranging offerings that had been sacrificed. Here *mohed* is used with *shamur* which derives from the verbal root *shamar* (to keep) noted last in 7.1.

The words "that you might eat with the guests" reads in Hebrew "I have invited the people."

Vs. 25: And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul upon the roof, and he lay down to sleep.

Here "high place" (*bamah*, cf. vs. 19) is pretty much equated with the *lishkah* or "hall" of vs. 23, the two being more or less connected. So by the time this unusual feast after sunset had been concluded, the thirty-odd guests had a better assessment of the stranger who had come into their midst and were prepared for any announcement Samuel would make about him.

The bed on top of a roof is, of course, natural air conditioning to avoid the stuffiness of being inside a house. Samuel must have picked out a private spot for his guest and attendant, offering every available comfort. Despite his best efforts to get some rest, it was the most restless night to date in Saul's life. The same with his trusted servant as both gazed into the stars overhead.

Vs. 26: Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul upon the roof, "Up, that I may send you on your way." So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street.

Shakam (to rise early) is noted last in 1.19 and in the verse at hand is used with the noun *shachar* which means the dawn. “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea” [Ps 139.9]. Samuel himself got no sleep the night before and rushed to the rooftop to rouse Saul who was already awake anxious to know what would happen this day which would change his life forever. In later years he must have pondered over that early morning lying on the roof watching the stars fade away. During the night they offered some solace which the sun quickly consumed. Note how brusquely Samuel roused Saul who thought that he would simply return home with mission accomplished, that is, his father’s asses having been found. Without any hesitation Saul, his servant and Samuel left the rooftop and went out into the street. Now to return home as quickly as possible.

Vs. 27: As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on stop here yourself for a while that I may make known to you the word of God.”

Yarad is the verb for “going down” as in 13.12: “Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal.” In other words, Samuel accompanied Saul down from the *bamah* or high place at the crack of dawn so as not to rouse anyone in the city. At the “outskirts” or *qatseh* they paused. “Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah” [14.22]. Although most people were asleep, Samuel wanted to make certain he was alone with Saul, even away from his servant. Some of those thirty guests who had attended the banquet the night before might be up trying to find out what the two men were up to. Others may have been on the city walls attempting not so much to listen in but to garner information from any facial expressions, etc.

So once Saul’s servant had moved on out of earshot, Samuel felt it was time to divulge what was on his mind. “For a while” is rendered as *kayom* or literally “as for a day.” While an expression for an indefinite amount of time, for Saul this must have seemed like an entire *yom* or day.

Shamah (cf. 8.9) is the verb for “may make known” and fundamentally means to listen, to hear. In other words, Samuel wanted to make absolutely certain that Saul was prepared to pay attention to the *davar* of the Lord, not his own word. And so Chapter Nine ends on a note of high expectation.

Chapter Ten

Vs. 1: Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, “Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord, and you will save them from the hand of their enemies round about. And this shall be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.

This new chapter begins immediately from the previous one as though no such breaks existed which was true concerning the original text. As pointed out earlier, once again the connective *w-* as ‘then’ demonstrates the connection between the two verses.

Pak as “vial” means any small container for liquid and has two other biblical references, 2Kg 9.1&3, the former being cited here: “Take this flask of oil in your hand and go to Ramoth-Gilead.” In the verse at hand, this vial was filled with “oil,” the next reference being 16.1 where Samuel anoints David to replace Saul as king: “Fill your horn with oil and go.” *Shemen* also means fatness as derived from animals so the oil at hand could come from last evening’s sacrifice though such liquid used for anointing kings derived from olives.

Samuel “poured” this oil on Saul’s head, *yatsaq* being similar in sound to “kissed” or *nashaq*. “And they kissed one another and wept with one another until David recovered himself” [21.41]. Vs. 1 gives the impression that Samuel performed these two acts as one and as quickly as possible, much to Saul’s surprise. Such anointing or *mashach* is found last in 9.16 where it is noted that this verb first occurs in Hannah’s “Magnificat” in 2.10 as well as vs. 35: “and he (‘faithful priest’) shall go in and out before my anointed forever.” Perhaps Samuel derived the idea from other nations and more locally, from the tradition of anointing priests. Because he was doing something that was unprecedented, he wished to effect it quickly and privately as in the early morning hours outside the city gate.

As pointed in 9.16, *nagyd* is a general term for leader as here with respect to Saul as “prince.” In the verse at hand, such a *nagyd* will be on the *nachalah* or heritage, a term not found in the English text. “For they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord” [26.19].

The rest of vs. 1 is not in the Hebrew text but included in the (Greek) Septuagint.

Vs. 2: When you depart from me today you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will say to you, `The asses which you went to seek are found, and now your father has ceased to care about the asses and is anxious about you, saying, “What shall I do about my son?””

Apparently Samuel didn’t use any formula while anointing Saul. It was the first time a king had been anointed, so some improvisation was involved. Also the suddenness of the event suggests urgency: get Saul in position as king, form a government and take concerted action against the Philistines. The fate of Israel’s future was clearly in the balance.

Samuel bids Saul to return to his native territory of Benjamin, more specifically Zelzah, the only mention of this place in the Bible, which could be a village or name for a general area. The tomb of Rachel hearkens back to Gen 35.19 where in the next verse Jacob “set up a pillar upon her grave...where it is to this day.” Presumably this pillar was in existence during Saul’s time and was well known as some kind of place of pilgrimage. Here Saul is instructed to meet two men who are unspecified, yet another example of how someone anonymous makes an intervention, changes the course of events, and then disappears. Since the two men are in the area of Benjamin, perhaps they knew Saul, and he knew them. Regardless, they knew about the asses

belonging to Kish, Saul's father, and said that they had been found. By this time the long-lost asses were least on the mind of Saul. He was too preoccupied trying to decipher what Samuel had done. Given Israel's history of not having had a king, he needed to find his way and do it quickly so as to take action against the Philistines.

The noun *davar* to express the matter at hand, the assess, and is not translated.

Da'ag means "is anxious" and is noted last in 9.5. Perhaps the two anonymous men went out to meet Saul on their own as a favor to Kish. Even if they did, still they would sense that they had been summoned by the Lord in a way they could not fathom.

Vs. 3: Then you shall go on from there further and come to the oak of Tabor; three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread and another carrying a skin of wine.

Rachel's tomb was the first of several stops en route to his home at Gibeah (cf. vs. 26). In a sense, Saul didn't have to make this stop because already he had the necessary information about his father's asses. At the same time it was necessary for him to go through the actual journey out of respect to the pillar that Isaac had erected so many years ago.

There doesn't seem to be any clear significance as to the oak of Tabor though that mount was the scene of a victory by Barak (he was appointed commander by the judge Deborah) over Sisera (cf. Judg 5.4+). Indeed, Saul must have known of this decisive victory over a mortal enemy of Israel which foreshadows the one soon to take place over the Philistines. At this oak Saul is to encounter several more anonymous people who will direct him and then fade off the scene just like the two men at Rachel's tomb. Bethel (House of God) is mentioned now, the first time as included in Samuel's circuit as judge. However, it can be traced to Isaac in Gen 28.19 & 31.13. In the former, Jacob had the dream of a ladder reaching into heaven and in the latter, the Lord appeared to him after having left the service of Laban. With the first verse in mind, perhaps the three men of the verse at hand were some of the angels who had descended that ladder from heaven onto the earth and were "going up to God." Each of the three angels, if you will, were bearing sacrificial offerings.

Vs. 4: And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you shall accept from their hand.

"They will greet" is rendered literally as "they will ask to you to peace," the verb *sha'al* (cf. 2.20) and *shalom* (cf. 7.14) with two instances of the preposition *l-* (to). In sum, three of these angels/men will give Saul two loaves of bread after which they will disappear. However, the future bestowal of this gift is not mentioned let alone any conversation that occurred.

Vs. 5: After that you shall come to Gibeath-Elohim where there is a garrison of the Philistines; and there, as you come to the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre before them, prophesying.

Gibeath-Elohim is the only occurrence in the Bible and means Hills of God which implies hilly territory, one of which having a garrison of Philistines. Use of *'elohim* (it can apply to the God of Israel) generally refers to gods, hence an association with the Philistines which is not inappropriate. *Netsyv* is the noun meaning that which is placed such as a statue and is found next in 13.3: "Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines which was at Geba." Saul must have had second thoughts about Samuel mentioning this place; it was bad enough to be in a Philistine town but worse with a garrison of soldiers. Perhaps Samuel wished the new king, still unknown to the Israelites, to assess the situation as well as not to be fearful of them.

Apparently Gibeath-Elohim was a mixed city, that is, Philistines and Israelites living together, for the prophets (*navy'*, cf. 9.9) at hand certainly belonged to the latter. Given their unusual status, such men must have been under constant surveillance. These men...the number isn't given...but is spoken of as a "band" or *chevel* which also means a region or a line, being found next in vs. 10. "Two lines he measured to be put to death and one full line to be spared" [2Sam 8.2]. To speak of these Israelites as a *chevel* living in a precarious situation, that is, under the eyes of Philistines soldiers, shows that they maintained a close-knit bond and rarely communicated outside it. In the verse at hand the prophets are coming down from a *bamah* or "high place," the same word used with respect to Samuel in 9.12, a place of sacrifice or worship. Perhaps they had an agreement with the Philistines to worship there; after all, Gibeath-Elohim means Hills of God (gods) with the plural intimating that the Israelites worshipped on this hill and the Philistines on that one.

Apparently the act of worship—for that seems to be what the prophets had been doing on the *bamah*—was a joyous one accompanied by four types of musical instruments. That attracted considerable attention, done right out there in the open before Philistines and Israelites alike. Being prophets, these men were "prophesying" or *nava'* which fundamentally means to pour forth or bubble up words. "An evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre" [18.10]. With these two different meanings in mind of the same verb, it's easy to see how *nava'* refers not so much to the content uttered but to the constant outflow of words and sounds beyond the speaker's control.

Vs. 6: Then the spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

Two events are to happen simultaneously: Saul meeting the band of prophets and the "spirit" or *ruach* (cf. 1.15) of the Lord leaping upon him. When *ruach* is mentioned, an invisible yet felt rush of wind is implied which leaves just as suddenly as it arrives. Such *ruach* will "come mightily" upon Saul, the verb being *tsalach* which means to attack, to fall upon as well as to

prosper. Later *tsalach* is used with quite a different *ruach* concerning Saul: “And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house” [18.10].

As a result of this violent assault by the divine *ruach*, Saul shall “prophesy” with the band of prophets, *navy*’ (cf. vs. 5). That is to say, Saul will engage in that babbling noise just as they had done with their musical instruments. Perhaps later when Saul was assaulted by that evil spirit (cf. 18.10), memory of his encounter with these prophets and their musical instruments inspired David to take up a harp to assuage Saul.

As a result of the *ruach*’s assault followed by Saul prophesying he “will be turned” into another person, *haphak* being the verb noted last in 4.19. Samuel continues to speak with Saul about other events that will follow, almost too much for him to bear. Although Saul takes up the kingship and later falls out of favor with the Lord, he must be credited with a willingness to assume a wholly new task at the people’s request for a king.

Vs. 7: Now when these signs meet you, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

Oth is the noun for “signs” noted last in 2.34 which refer to everything Samuel had said thus far. Taking real-time events as signs is important so Saul will be equipped to see God working through them. If he were not warned in this fashion, easily he could brush them aside as nonsense and as not pertaining to himself.

Note that Samuel speaks in terms of Saul doing things with his hand, that is, to take action. He can do this because God is with him. Even though that may be true, it does not necessarily mean that Saul has a relationship with the Lord but is acting as his instrument, kind of passive-like.

Vs. 8: And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait until I come to you and show you what you shall do.”

In this verse Samuel gives Saul the final instruction he is to perform, that is, go to Gilgal or one of the towns that used to be on Samuel’s circuit as a judge (cf. 7.16). Samuel says “behold” or *hineh* (cf. 9.17), a way of telling Saul to pay very close attention among all the things uttered thus far. At Gilgal Samuel will perform two types of sacrifices: “burnt offerings” and “peace offerings,” *zevach* (cf. 9.12) and *shelem*, the latter being derived from *shalom* or peace. “There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” [11.15].

Saul is to await Samuel seven full days at Gilgal, that number being symbolic of fulfillment such as the six days of creation (plus one of divine rest). During this waiting time (*yachal* is the verb; cf. 13.8 for development of the same command) Saul must have been overcome by what had

transpired. And so the number seven represents not so much a period of time but an occasion to ponder over recent events. Although the servant who had accompanied Saul on his search for the lost asses isn't mentioned, he must have been with him at Gilgal. Chances are no one in the town knew Saul and wondered about this stranger in their midst.

As for the showing about what Saul is to do, the verb is *yadah* or to know noted last in 6.9. Saul realized it had to do with being a king but little else beside that. Surely during this waiting time Saul wondered how he would capitalize upon the desire of all the people for a king, how to actually implement it.

Vs. 9: When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day.

Samuel must have seen this change of "heart" (*lev*, cf. 9.2) in Saul compared to everyone else who may have been in the vicinity though when Saul reached Gilgal people knew this stranger among them was different. Both—turning his back and another heart—took place simultaneously. Though the Lord got Saul off to a good start, in a fairly short period of time things would start to unravel as intimated by the *navy'* or babbling of the prophets. From the Lord's point of view, he wanted to establish the kingdom and later have someone more qualified to assume leadership. So while Saul (and presumably his trusted servant) left Samuel, he must have turned around on occasion to see if Samuel was still there which he was. The two kept glancing at each other until out of sight knowing that they would meet and get down to the issue of establishing the kingship over Israel.

As noted in vs. 7, *'oth* or "signs" are equivalent to actual events which registered in Saul's mind and remained with him even in later years when things started to fall apart. It must have been consoling and troubling at the same time. Surely Saul must have discussed with his servant any role that man would play in the future government as well as getting advice from him as how to precede in the more immediate future. If the servant proved so trustworthy thus far, he could be counted to assume greater responsibilities.

Vs. 10: When they came to Gibeah, behold, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them.

Note third person plural or "they" which most likely refers to Saul and his servant.

Chevel (cf. vs. 5) means band as pertaining to prophets who were expecting Saul. Since these men were based at Gibeah, a garrison town of the Philistines (cf. vs. 5), perhaps they met Saul secretly...for example, at night. Then in accord with Samuel's prophecy in vs. 6, the *ruach* or "spirit" of God rushed upon Saul, the verb being *tsalach* as in vs. 6.

Note that Saul did not prophesy...babel (*navy'*, cf. vs. 6)...alone but "among them," *betok* (cf. 9.18) or right smack in the middle of these prophets. As noted elsewhere, *navy'* means a

babbling, a kind of meaningless utterance of words beyond one's control, so no one could interpret what Saul was actually prophesying. It could have been a kind of rehash of Samuel's words since he seemed to be the most genuine and most highly respected man of his time. Actually this *navy'* the prophets could have been a secret way of communicating among each other since they were living among the Philistines.

Vs. 11: And when all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

To date no mention was made of Saul having been known among the various people he encountered. However, the people of Gibeah did recognize Saul, possibly from his father whom the people mention, and wondered why he was associating with this band of prophets. All in all this observation in the form of a question is less than flattering as well as for the band of prophets themselves.

Vs. 12: And a man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

As the **RSV** remarks, the first sentence is unintelligible. However, if we taken the "man of the place" as a resident of Gibeah familiar with Saul's family—again, the role of an anonymous person who disappears as soon as he performs his function—he is the source of a saying that endured at the time, namely, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" One can just imagine what was going through the minds of the Philistines stationed in this garrison town; to them it seemed a lot of foolishness, but shortly the man who had just arrived would be their undoing.

Mashal means "proverb" which also can refer to a song or poem. "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'" [24.13].

Vs. 13: When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place.

The *navy'* or prophesying by Saul seems to have continued for a fairly lengthy period of time. While the prophets at Gibeah took in Saul as one of their own, the other people may have had doubts. Since they too were part of Israel who had demanded a king, they were now stuck with that decision and had to live with it. Though the verse at hand mentions a "high place" or *bamah* (cf. vs. 5) there's no mention of any sacrifice taking place there. Actually the band of prophets had just come down from that *bamah* and re-ascended with Saul.

Vs. 14: Saul's uncle said to him and to his servant, "Where did you go?" And he said, "To seek the asses; and when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel."

The "uncle" of Samuel or *dod* also means anyone who is loved (cf. 1.2, 'For your love is better than wine') and is found last in the text: "And the name of the commander of his army was

Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle" [14.50]. Although Ner could be another uncle, he could be the person at hand; he is mentioned a few times in First Kings and First Chronicles. Apparently Ner was present at Gibeath-elohim, not belonging to the band of prophets, but was sent by Kish to find Saul.

Vs. 15: And Saul's uncle said, "Pray, tell me what Samuel said to you."

Actually it was Saul's servant who asked him to consult Samuel. Because Samuel was the most highly respected man in the land, naturally Saul's uncle wanted to know details about the conversation between Saul and Samuel. It wasn't because this man was nosy but simply desired information about the lost asses. Surely this uncle knew about the people's request for a king and wouldn't rest until he knew if Samuel had let Saul in on it.

Vs. 16: And Saul said to his uncle, "He told us plainly that the asses had been found." But about the matter of the kingdom of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything.

Nothing concrete is said about who, how or when the asses belonging to Kish were discovered, just that they were safe and perhaps by now on their way home. *Nagad* is the verb for "told" and used twice for emphasis which here is rendered as "plainly." It is mentioned last in 8.9 as "show."

It must have taken some discipline on Saul's part not to divulge the "matter" or *davar* (cf. vs. 2) of the kingdom. That seemed sufficient, and his uncle didn't pursue the issue. Yet at the same time his uncle had a feeling that something more was involved, having heard how Samuel paid special attention to Saul which seemed highly unusual.

Vs. 17: Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah;

No longer could Samuel keep the matter at hand a secret. Tension was running high as to why he had favored Saul, and the Philistines were ever present waiting to attack at an opportune time. Spies were everywhere, and this talk about Israel getting a king was alarming. Perhaps the encounter between Saul and his uncle right after the incident with the band of prophets compelled him to take this step. *Tsahaq* is the verb for "called together" and more fundamentally means to cry out compared with the more conventional *qara'*. Thus used of *tsahaq* reveals a certain urgency and pain on Samuel's part, that now was the time to address the delicate yet urgent matter of kingship. Besides, Samuel was about to relinquish being judge in Israel which meant an end to his power. *Tsahaq* also reveals the urgency "to the Lord" implying that Samuel had asked the Lord as well to be present.

Mizpah is mentioned last in 7.5 where Samuel had judged Israel and set up a stone calling it Ebenezer ('the Lord has helped us,' 7.12). In other words, Mizpah represented a place of victory by Israel over the Philistines, a very important place to address the people. Saul, of course, was present because this was the occasion when he would be introduced as Israel's first king.

Because it was a matter of national security, the Israelites gathered quickly and without much ado as possible to hear what Samuel was about to say.

Vs. 18: and he said to the people of Israel, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’”

“And he said” (the connective *w-*) reveals the urgency of the situation once Samuel had summoned the people at Mizpah in the previous verse. In words later to be so typical of prophets Samuel begins with “Thus says the Lord.” This classical formula is a way the Lord himself takes over the prophet and speaks through him. It differs from that *navy*’ or babbling of the band of prophets Saul encountered and became a part of lasting only through vs. 19.

The essential message of “Thus says the Lord” is his redemptive power which rescued Israel from Egypt, led the people through the Sinai wilderness and re-established them in Canaan. This is summed up in one word, *natsal* or “delivered” noted last in 7.14 and means a sudden snatching away.

Vs. 19: But you have this day rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said, ‘No, but set a king over us.’ Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands.”

Samuel has been waiting a long to say these words or more accurately, waiting for the Lord himself to speak through him. *Ma’as* is the verb for “rejected” noted last in 8.7 and connotes a genuine sense of tragedy and foreboding for the future. The rejection is centered more directly upon divine salvation, *yashah* being the verb (cf. 9.16). Such saving grace (*yashah* is the verbal root for the proper name Jesus as mentioned in another reference to this verb, 4.3) is directed toward the people’s “calamities” and “distresses,” *rah* and *tsarah* (6.9 & 1.6).

It must have been particularly difficult for Samuel to re-state the words “No, but set a king over us” because they echo the request made with such persistence back in 8.6. That original request was made against the background, if you will, of the people’s complaint about Samuel’s two sons who “did not walk in his ways” [8.3].

After these brief but painful words Samuel speaks on his own, that is, he bids Israel to “present” themselves or *yatsav* (cf. 3.10) before the Lord. Perhaps this was a kind of liturgical gesture, for the ark of the Lord...his presence among Israel...was located at Kiriath-Jearim. Such *yatsav* began with the most general unit, tribes (of which there were twelve) followed by thousands and so forth as the next few verses recount.

Vs. 20: Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot.

This process of starting with tribes and working down to smaller units must have been a familiar one to Samuel during his days of being a judge. It was the accepted way of handling matters. We can imagine Samuel on a platform of sorts summoning the twelve tribes of Israel around him, he being as at the center. Of course he knew beforehand about Saul who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin which made him start there to avoid the tedious task of going through all twelve of them. And so Samuel may have fixed the narrowing down process through the casting of a “lot” which isn’t mentioned in the Hebrew text. Instead, it has the verb *lakad* or “was taken” as in 14.42: “And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped.”

Vs. 21: He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the family of the Matrites was taken by lot; finally he brought the family of the Matrites near man by man, and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found.

This verse has the second mention of the verb *qarav*, “brought near,” meaning that the smaller unit of a family which had stepped forth from the larger tribe. That family consists of the Matrites which is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Perhaps it was inserted deliberately to show the obscurity of Saul and thus to reflect unfavorably upon him.

Although Samuel may have manipulated this narrowing down process, he and others present were surprised when it came to Saul who was no where to be found. He presumed Saul was present among his fellow tribesmen and was fearful that Saul’s absence would reflect unfavorably upon him. All the while the troubling words of the people in 8.3 mentioned above must have echoed in his ears, “yet his sons did not walk in his ways.” Any glitch in such an important process of choosing a king for the first time reminded Samuel of this embarrassment.

Vs. 22: So they inquired again of the Lord, “Did the man come hither?,” and the Lord said, “Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.”

Sha’al is the verb for “inquired” last noted in vs. 4 and here used with *hod* or “again.” Since this apparently is the second inquiry, there is nothing said of the first nor of how this inquiry proceeded. Note that literally it reads “in (*b-*) the Lord,” an intense form of *sha’al*. Also *hod* means “hither.”

The Lord responds immediately to the people’s inquiry, and judging by the way he responds, he seems to have been standing all along right in with them. *Kely* is the word for “baggage” noted last in 6.8. Since the people had been so adamant about having a king, and the Lord was equally adamant against it, he wanted them to find their future king in an embarrassing situation. If they realized their mistake, there was still time to opt out of it. But then again, Samuel’s two sons had proved themselves just as corrupt as those of Eli, so there was little choice but to go forward.

Vs. 23: Then they ran and fetched him from there; and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward.

The running described here seems to back up the people's original determination...stubbornness...to stay with their original choice for a king even though this incident of getting Saul from among the baggage clearly was embarrassing. It also intimates that the people were running just as quickly from the Lord as toward Saul, a revealing instant.

Saul standing "among" the people (*betok*, cf. vs. 10) provides some necessary relief in a clearly awkward situation. Also it implies that despite his height described earlier in 9.2, Saul behaved cowardly by crouching low amid the baggage which probably was located some distance from the assembled people. While hiding there, Saul certainly had misgivings about his recent anointing by Samuel and how at last he was to step forward and assume the kingship. We don't know what the people said to Saul upon discovering him nor he to them. Most likely they proceeded to Samuel at the center of the gathering in silence with everyone else gazing on in silence.

Vs. 24: And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Upon seeing the group who found Saul approach with him in their midst Samuel couldn't get out of his mind their persistent demand for a king and the Lord's harsh response. What kept him in check was the failure of his two sons to follow in his footsteps. The people were aware of this, a kind of trump card in their pocket. If Samuel balked, immediately they would bring up his two sons. All in all, it did not forebode well.

When Samuel exclaimed aloud that the Lord had chosen, and no one could compare to him, it sounded sincere and was to a certain extent. Yet he realized in his heart that such was not the case. Samuel was fearful that perhaps the Lord had chosen Saul as some sort of curse for the people's demand for a king.

Vs. 25: Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship; and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home.

Mishpat is noted last in 8.11 and fundamentally refers to judgment while here it applies to both "rights and duties." Samuel was forthright in setting forth such *mishpat* which didn't alter the elders decision in the least. Still, he had to present them to the people as a whole. Not only that, they had to be set down in writing for future referral, a constitution of sorts. If the people contested the *mishpat*, Samuel, Saul or any other future leader could refer them to the book. Note that he "laid it up" before the Lord, the verb being *nuach* found last in 6.18 with the connotation of to set at rest. What "before the Lord" meant here is uncertain though refer back to vs. 22 where the Lord seemed to have responded to a request by the people as though he were in their midst.

This *nuach* with its connotation of rest also signifies that the action of the day had been accomplished, and it was time for everyone to go home. Though the next verse says that Saul also left, he could have lingered there alone with Samuel. The two didn't exchange any words. The actions of the day were enough for now, and both knew full well they would meet again. Now the transfer of power from judge to king had been effected.

Vs. 26: Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched.

This verse intimates that Saul was the last person among the entire assembly of the twelve tribes to leave Mizpah. He didn't go home to Gibeah alone but with "men of valor" or *chayl* noted last in 9.1 as "man of wealth." Thus the idea is not necessarily warriors but men of influence who would play important roles in the new administration. Perhaps Saul's trusted servant who accompanied him on that fateful journey in search of the assessor was one such *chayl*.

So despite the somewhat chaotic and embarrassing events of the day, at least Saul went home with these men whose "hearts God had touched." The verb is *nagah* and here is indicative of intimacy; it also means to strike or to smite as in 6.9.

Vs. 27: But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.

The tumultuous process of choosing Israel's first king combines hope, fear and, Samuel's hesitation and, of course, the dubious character of Saul. All had emerged throughout most of Chapter Ten and signal the tone of events to come. Here the "worthless fellows," despite being such, were not entirely off the mark, at least in the long run. They bring up the issue the Philistines, the original reason why the people were so bent on choosing a king and why the Lord, despite his misgivings, gave in.

"Worthless men" is rendered *beney belyahal* or literally "sons of Belial," a way of expressing a wicked person. *Belial* consists of *bely* and *yahahl* or "not," "without" and "benefit" and found in last in 2.12 in reference to *belyahal*.

The question posed by these men of dubious character concerns the greatest present threat against Israel's existence, the Philistines. They brought up the issue of being saved from them, *yashah* (cf. vs. 19). Furthermore, the men...whose exact number isn't known..."despised" Saul, *bazah* (cf. 2.30), the reason which we don't know, but this sentiment nevertheless is less than encouraging.

Minchah is the word for "present" and often refers to an offering (cf. 3.14)

Chapter Ten did bring out positive sides to Saul's character, this last one being important for a ruler, namely, that he knew when to hold his peace. The verb here is *charash* noted last in 7.8 with a different meaning ('cease') and whose fundamental meaning is to cut into, to be deaf or to plow. Still, this chapter ends on an uneasy note, for we don't know if these so-called worthless men were truly such or were labelled so for resisting imposition of the monarchy, not necessarily Saul himself. Apparently they were too weak and too few to pose any challenge to Saul's reign, but surely he must have kept an eye on them.

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 spontaneous 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.

Teshuah 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 acknowledge 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" (*havah* 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 *rahah* (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 *arah* noted last in 1.8 with regard to *derek* (cf. 9.8) or "way" which is both good and right. Although this *arah* 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 niphah]. 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.