

## Chapter Thirteen

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

A sentence which is incomplete and in two parts: the age of Saul as well as “two years” concerning his reign. While obviously a gap in the text, we could take this deficiency as a sign of embarrassment with him as king. *Malak* is the verb for “to reign” which occurs twice in this verse and noted last in 8.11. The first instance has the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to it and can be rendered as “became king” whereas the second has the preposition *hal-* (on) with respect to Israel and can be put as “reigned.” In other words, one verb with two expressions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Vs. 4: And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to fight the Ammonites. Chances are that most people recalled that event and were so struck by Saul's leadership that automatically they went after him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. Surely the Philistines kept a close eye on Saul and Samuel, especially since both were at Geba, scene of their recent defeat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As a footnote in the **RSV** says, "The age of iron was just beginning in Palestine; the Philistines were superior to the Israelites in material culture." That explains the lack of "smith" or *charash*, a word usually applicable to an engraver or carpenter. "To the carpenters and to the builders and to the masons as well as for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house" [2Kg 22.6].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

were delighted upon finding that they had weapons. This must have energized the soldiers in a way that otherwise wouldn't have been possible.

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

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

Michmash is noted last in vs. 16, here with respect to a pass which would prove crucial in Chapter Fourteen (cf. vs. 4) when Jonathan sneaked into the Philistine camp.

### Chapter Fourteen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Galah* is the verb for “showed” as in vs. 8. Because it was in the dead of night, this showing could be by two means: speaking or making noise or with a torch, neither being specified. First the Philistine watchmen caught a glimpse of Jonathan and his armor bearer after which immediately then informed everyone else in the camp in case an attack was close at hand. However, the response from the Philistines was more one of contempt than alarm. *Hineh* or “look” conveys this disdain (cf. vs. 7). They figured that the two men were cowards who had cringed at the appearance of their army (cf. 13.6). Also the Philistines thought they were surrendering and possibly more Israelites might make themselves known. Never did it enter their minds that it was highly unusual...even suspicious...for people to approach a military garrison in the middle of the night.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Charadah* means “panic” or more properly anything which causes terror or fear. “Then Isaac trembled violently” [Gen 27.33]. Note the use of *machaneh* (cf. 4.5) which refers to the Philistine *matsav* (‘garrison,’ cf. vs. 1). Usually the former is temporary whereas the latter is less so, a contingent of soldiers within a city to provide security, etc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As noted in vs. 3, Ahijah was descended from the notorious Phinehas. Although Saul knew this, he was in desperate straits and knew, as many of those with him, of the ignominious defeat of Israel by the Philistines when the ark had been captured. Actually this is the first mention of the “ark” (*aron*) of God since 6.8 when it resided at Kiriath-Jearim while nothing is said about it accompanying Israel. The verse at hand says more accurately, “with the sons of Israel.” That means the ark had been present with Saul since the beginning of his kingship. We don’t know if it accompanied Samuel “all the days of his life” [7.15], but if it did and later changed hands into Saul’s guardianship, we can understand better Samuel’s hostility toward the new king. To make matters worse, the ark with in the care of Ahijah. He may have not had hostility toward Samuel but surely Samuel must have hated Ahijah. Obviously some jealousy on Samuel’s part plays a role here, but you would never hear about it openly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*’Alah* is the verb for “laid an oath” and has five other biblical references. For an alternate meaning, see Judg 17.2: “The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you about which you uttered a curse.” Bound up with this oath was a curse with respect to eating before

sunset which most likely followed the same pattern of observing Passover or the onset of twilight. The verb for “cursed” is *‘arar* as in 26.19: “But if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

consult him again. Perhaps by now he was starting to turn against Samuel and everything he stood for.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Pinah* is the noun for "leaders" which literally means corner, presumably because such men were corner(stones) on which the people depended. "The stone which the builders rejected has

become the head of the corner” [Ps 118.22]. Most likely such “corners” were close by to Saul and Ahijah when the two made the ritual inquiry of God. They too could see that the Lord failed to answer them by the downcast expression on their faces. To Saul’s credit, however, he wasn’t going to allow this get in the way from exercising his office as he saw fit.

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

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

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

**Vs. 40: Then he said to all Israel, “You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.”**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The last time the people were mentioned is vs. 40 when they concurred with Saul's decision to cast lots between him and his son. Throughout this drama they, along with the leaders (cf. vs.

38), acted as a chorus of sorts between Saul and Jonathan with Ahijah the priest as an unwilling mediator forced to cast the Urim and Thummim. Now as one man the people step in and take corporate responsibility, they being the ones responsible for having chosen Saul as king of Israel and therefore the ultimate arbiter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Panah* is the verb for “turned” and found in 13.17 though not mentioned there. In the verse at hand, *panah* complements *savyv* giving a picture of Saul standing in the center of Israel, if you will, easily turning this way and that with sword in hand as he was slaying all enemies who

dared approach him. At last a favorable picture of the man and a testimony that despite the odds against him, Saul had the best interests of his people at heart. Praise of him continues through the remaining verses of Chapter Fourteen.

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

This is the first mention of the Amalekites though 15.7 speaks of Saul defeating them. *Chayl* is the word for “valiantly” noted last in 10.26. As for “plundered,” the verb is *shasah* which occurs next in 23.1: “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.” Despite this strenuous effort, certainly at some personal cost by a man who didn’t chose to be king, is admirable. However, by any standard neither Saul nor anyone else could sustain this multi-faceted assault on enemies.

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

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

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

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

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

This rather succinct genealogy of Saul’s family ends with Kish. In a sense, he set in motion this whole chain of events starting back in 9.3 when he sent Saul out on an expedition to search for his lost asses. Surely in later years Kish must have regretted that decision. However, he is the one bright spot amid this familial tragedy. Kish dies, of course, but we don’t know if it had been

along with his sons at the hands of the Philistines. Something says no on the basis of 2Sam 21.14: “And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in...the tomb of Kish, his father.” The scene, while sad, has a comforting feel about it, intimating that long before his death Kish had prepared a tomb for himself and his family. Mercifully Kish wasn’t around to see that tomb fill up quickly.

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

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

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

## Chapter Fifteen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Go up” suggests that Amalek is located somewhere north of Saul’s present situation, most likely between Michmash and Aijalon, recent scene of the victory against the Philistines. This time Saul is to “utterly destroy all that they have” which means focus is to be upon their possessions, a way to get at their very source of support and hopefully force them to withdraw. However, David later on fights against the Amalekites (cf. 27.8) which takes place not long before Saul’s ignominious defeat and death at the hands of the Philistines. After David’s slaughter mentioned at the beginning of Second Samuel, threat from the Amalekites fades away; the Philistines, however, remain a perpetual thorn in Israel’s side. In the verse at hand, *charam* is used for “utterly destroy,” a verb with special significance in the sense to extirpate or engage in this total warfare for the glory of God. It occurs several times in Chapter Fifteen, the only instances being in First Samuel. “You shall beat in pieces many peoples and shall devote their gain to the Lord” [Mic 4.13].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The favorable relationship between the Israelites and Kenites goes back to Moses: "And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah...and they went and settled with the people." In other words, a strong bond between the two peoples existed because of Moses. Actually the Kenites

had the best of both worlds, at peace with the Israelites as well as the Amalekites. The same may have applied to the Philistines. As for the Israelites, the Kenites thus provided a good means of contact with these two other peoples.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Derek* is the noun for "mission" which means a road or way noted last in vs. 2. This "way" is one of *charam* (cf. vs. 15) or utter destruction of the Amalekites which Samuel pronounces as

“sinners” or *chata’*, a rather forceful statement you’d think he would apply to the larger threat from the Philistines. However, for Samuel the issue at hand was *charam*, something Saul wasn’t enjoined to do against that enemy. In his eyes failure to carry it out means that Saul wouldn’t do the same with regard to the Philistines. Another reference to *chata’* is 1Kg 1.21: “that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

cool throughout possibly because Samuel is his senior. That would change once David comes on the scene, i.e., his junior, a direct threat to his kingship.

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

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

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

Chances are that when uttering these words Samuel had in mind his childhood experience of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas in the Shiloh temple. For many years they had defrauded Israelites of their sacrifices and at last were made to pay the ultimate price of forfeiting their lives.

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

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

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

The second set is stubbornness = iniquity plus idolatry or *patsar* = ‘*awen* plus *teraphym*. *Patsar* is an infinite meaning to push, to press with six other biblical references. “But he urged them strongly” [Gen 19.3]. This negative trait is comprised of ‘*awen* or vanity and *teraphym* which

means images usually but not always in the negative sense of idols. Two references are: “Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity” [Ps 10.7] and “Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats hair at its head and covered it with the clothes” [19.13].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Probably during his time of worship just recounted Saul decided upon the fate of Agag, having been preoccupied with Samuel’s total condemnation. After all, something had to be done about him. Saul figured it was best to execute Agag on the spot in case the people thought he would spare their former foe, thereby setting an example. Apparently Agag had some freedom, for he comes to Saul on his own and does so “cheerfully” or *mahadan*, a noun which has three other biblical references. “Asher’s food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties” [Gen 49.20]. This attitude came from his life having been spared and perhaps more recently from reasonable

treatment which involved friendly conversations with some Israelites. So when he came on the scene, Agag said aloud that he wouldn't experience death's "bitterness," *mar* being an adjective and noted last in 1.10. Besides, Agag could have heard about Samuel's rejection of Saul which delighted him.

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

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

*Shasaph* is the verb for "hewed in pieces," the only occurrence in the Bible, as if that term had been reserved for Agag and his crimes. Note that Samuel does this himself and in Gilgal where the Israelites had sacrificed the livestock captured from the Amalekites (cf. 15.21). If the people committed what to Samuel's eyes was close to an abomination, why not execute Agag at the same place in a last minute attempt to ward off his rejection?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter Sixteen

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

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

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

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

Apparently Samuel had a “horn” (*qeren* noted last in 2.10 as ‘power’) at the ready, standing by for emergencies, if you will, for various purposes. He may have used the horn for other kinds of anointing when active as a judge. Although Samuel had an inkling of a new candidate for king (‘a neighbor of yours,’ 15.28), he knows only in part, that he belongs to the family of Jesse. In the meanwhile Samuel couldn’t help but get out of his mind who this mystery man was since as judge he had passed through Bethlehem many a time. So when the Lord said “go,” Samuel rushed to Bethlehem as quickly as possible. All this going from one place to another throughout First Samuel was mostly on foot. While making such arduous treks, the people as well as individuals like Saul and Samuel involved had plenty of time to reflect on what they were about to do and how they were to do it. Furthermore, seldom or even did people set out alone on a journey, so always they had company.

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

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

Samuel rightly makes this objection shortly after the hash words which had brought Chapter Fifteen to an end, that is, his separation from Saul. Indeed, Saul wasn’t going to let him off easily...not to kill him...but to keep close eye on his activity and the possibility that Samuel

would stir up trouble among the people. Among all Israelites he had the best grasp on what people thought and how they felt after having made so many circuits around the country as a judge. In other words, Samuel had earned the mantle of an elder statesman.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Samuel was fully aware that Jesse had one more son but was curious as to why he didn’t bring him along with the others. He had a feeling that this son, considered unimportant, was the right man. While Samuel was asking this more or less rhetorical question, the brothers who had passed before Samuel and had experienced rejection were more curious than ever as to

resolving this unusual test. While Jesse had each present himself, it isn't clear whether Samuel told them the reason for his action. Chances are they had a high opinion of Saul for having defended Israel and were not privy to Samuel's insight. If they had known this, no doubt they would run as far away as possible from assuming the mantle of kingship.

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

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

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

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

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

As soon as the brother heard the word *mashach* they realized David was set apart for something big, even king. This may have caused some consternation because Saul remains the legitimate ruler. Was Samuel setting up a rival in an attempt to divide Israel and therefore proclaim himself king? Although it isn't recorded, Samuel must have spent considerable time

explaining to Jesse and his brothers about the rejection of Saul. Perhaps some didn't buy his interpretation, seeing that it was Samuel, not the Lord, who had a grudge against their king.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The divine *ruach* (cf. vs. 13) which pounced upon David mightily (*tsalach*, cf. vs. 13) came, as it were, directly from Saul though David was unaware of this. *Sur* also means a turning aside as noted last in 12.21, a turning which never looks back. Almost immediately an "evil spirit" or a *ruach* which is *rah* (cf. 15.19) takes the place of the Lord's *ruach*. Surely Saul perceived this but couldn't quite grasp what was going on. He may have consulted the priest Ahijah (cf. 14.3) as he did in the past, but even he couldn't figure out what had happened. The manifestation of this

evil spirit was one of torment, *bahat* being the verb which fundamentally means to frighten or to terrify. “Ungodly men made me afraid” [2Sam 22.5].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Ra’ah* is the verb for “provide” which means to see(cf. vs. 7).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even though Saul as king could take anyone into his service according to the guidelines laid out in 8.11+, he is courteous enough to request Jesse's permission to serve (*hamad*, previous verse) him. *Chen* is the noun for "favor" (cf. 1.18). Saul doesn't go into any details about David being his armor bearer which would have frightened Jesse.

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter Seventeen

**Vs. 1: Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah and encamped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephes-dammim.**

*ʿAsaph* is the verb for “gathered” noted last in 15.6 with a different meaning, but the one at hand is more common where it is used twice, first as a general mustering and second as in a specific place. This re-introduction of the Philistines since the end of Chapter Fourteen is indicative that the threat never went away nor was it in any way likely despite Jonathan’s victory at Michmash. The concluding verse of that chapter sums it up well: “There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul.”

**Vs. 2: And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines.**

The same verb *ʿasaph* is used here as it is with regard to the Philistines in the previous verse. Such gathering of troops means each nation constantly had its eye on the other waiting for an appropriate time to make a move. Saul takes up his position in response to the Philistines and does so without any mention of the recent encounter with Samuel. That must have weighed him down considerably, let alone the “evil spirit from the Lord” that tormented him.

*Harak* is the verb for “drew up” mentioned last in 4.2, again with the Philistines.

**Vs. 3: And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side with a valley between them.**

This drawing up of two forces ready to do battle sets the scene for the drama to come, namely, the contest between David and Goliath. The very act of standing opposite each other like this implies such a contest. While both armies had their attention fixed directly upon each other, all were aware that the valley separating them would prove decisive for what was to come. It would be the scene of the contest between David and Goliath.

**Vs. 4: And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath whose height was six cubits and a span.**

So with two armies staring down each other across the valley, Goliath steps forth from among the Philistine ranks and takes a position at the edge of the slope of the valley, clearly in sight of the Israelites. His height is singled out which makes him even more formidable. Many Israelites recognized Goliath from previous battles though he isn't mentioned until now. He seemed set aside for one-on-one combat more than joining his fellow soldiers in battle. Reports of these displays of valor preceded Goliath, if you will, and when the Israelites saw him they had all they could do to maintain their position. As soon as this warrior stood out there for all to see, the Israelites knew he was demanding one-on-one combat in the valley below.

The Hebrew word for "champion" is *'ysh-habenyam*, literally a middle man, one who stands in the middle. Given the situation, the idea seems to be that Goliath was the best Philistine warrior and hence stood at the center or was a rallying point among his fellow soldiers.

**Vs. 5: He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.**

In this verse and the next we have a detailed description of Goliath's armament. The bronze helmet and coat of mail must have made him stand out all the more in the sunlight. Goliath took advantage of this, slowing walking up and down at the edge of the slope as he gleamed like some oversized jewel.

**Vs. 6: And he had greaves of bronze upon his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.**

The greaves and javelin, both of bronze, added to the drama. Bronze is a deep yellowish color tinged with orange which reflected brilliantly in the sunlight. Surely Goliath made the most of his display to the cheers of his fellow soldiers.

**Vs. 7: And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him.**

Although the Israelites were captivated by this imposing sight, all eyes were upon Goliath's spear, his primary weapon. It was up to his shield-bearer to lay out the path on which Goliath would parade, being instructed by his commanders to walk slowly in this direction and then in another, all along the valley's edge.

**Vs. 8: He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.**

*Qara'* (cf. 16.5) is the verb for "shouted" and has the fundamental meaning of calling or summoning. Until now Goliath hadn't uttered a word, figuring that the magnificent display he put on would be a prelude to what the Israelites knew he wanted, a one-on-one fight to the

death. Then Goliath taunts the ranks of Israel as being Saul's "servants," *heved* (cf. 15.16) which could be taken as his slaves, an alternate meaning of this word. Saul was present and listened intently. Probably he felt the men whom Goliath just named as slaves glowering at him. Although deeply concerned at the potential battle, Saul had plenty of experience with the Philistines, but this group of soldiers under his command?

Goliath continues his taunt, asking an Israelite champion like himself to a fight. He says "come down to me." He uttered these words as he made his way slowly yet deliberately down the slope to the valley where he was all alone, this time literally as a *'ysh-habenyam* or man who is in the middle ('champion,' vs. 4).

**Vs. 9: If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."**

Goliath uttered these words in full confidence that he would prevail over any warrior the Israelites would send against him. Note the use of the word "servants" (*heved*, twice and noted last in vs. 8) and the verb "serve" from which it is derived, *havad* (cf. 12.20). The reality is more servitude or slavery. Goliath is not uttering this taunt on his own but had been instructed by his commander. No doubt the Israelites were aware of this.

**Vs. 10: And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together."**

*Charaph* is the verb for "defy" which means to reproach or to scorn. It is found next in vs. 26 by David: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Goliath concludes his taunt as he stood exposed in the valley with the Israelites in front yet above him. Of course, he was aware that the Philistines were right behind him on the other ridge ready to attack should the Israelites attempt anything foolish.

**Vs. 11: When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.**

Surely this verse is the biggest understatement of First Samuel. The two verbs "dismayed" and "afraid" are *chatat* and *yare'*, the former being noted in 1.10 as "broken to pieces," and apt description for the situation at hand. The latter is found last in 12.24 and here had the adverb *me'od* (cf. 14.31) which connotes anything done to the excess.

**Vs. 12: Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah named Jesse who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.**

Here the conjunctive *w-* as "now" serves to make the transition from the display and taunts uttered by Goliath to David. The verse at hand describes David as an Ephrathite, Ephratha being the ancient name of Bethlehem.

The Hebrew for “advanced in years” is *ba’anashym* or literally “among men.”

**Vs. 13: The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; and the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the first-born and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.**

The three oldest of Jesse’s eleven sons may have been conscripted or went off to the battle on their own as volunteers to counter the Philistine threat. Chances are it was the latter because every able-bodied man didn’t need to be forced into arms in order to defend his home. Furthermore, they knew that Saul had taken their youngest brother David into service as an armor bearer and were concerned about his fate. En route they must have discussed the way Samuel had each of them pass before him and rejected all but the youngest. From the reports of David’s success in the court of Saul it became clear to them why David was anointed and taken into formal service. It meant he would never return home. At least the battle offered an opportunity to see David in action, as it were, as the king’s armor bearer.

**Vs. 14: David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul,**

A short verse which forms part of a larger sentence, vs. 15. *Qatan* (cf. 9.21) means “youngest” as well as the smallest. As for Jesse and the seven other brothers, they were left at home but full of anxiety as to the impending battle. Jesse feared the very real possibility he could lose four of his oldest sons, a devastating loss.

**Vs. 15: but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.**

An interesting little insert, if you will, which shows the freedom David had in his service as the king’s armor bearer and musician-in-residence. Saul wished to maintain good relations with Jesse and his large family of sons because the youngest who didn’t go out to battle remained at home and could be summoned up to military service later on. At first it may seem that the youngest brothers were lazy or good-for-nothing, that is, not tending the sheep. However, David may have had a special relationship with the herd, being able to sooth them and lead them from pasture to pasture due to his skill at playing the lyre.

As for the back and forth itself, it concurs with the protracted stand-off with the Philistines, the forty days mentioned in the next verse.

**Vs. 16: For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.**

The words “forty days” can be taken as an expression to convey a long period of time or an indefinite one. *Yatsav* (cf. 12.16) means “took his stand,” that is, first at the edge of the slope and later in the valley below. In the meanwhile the two armies hunkered down for the long

haul, seeing who would cave in the first. It looked as though Israel would since no warrior imitated Goliath by going out in front to taunt the Philistines.

**Vs. 17: And Jesse said to David his son, “Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers;**

This must have taken place during one of David’s trips from the battle array to back home. Given the tight-knit society of the time, it must have been common for family members to provide for their own men who were at arms. Jesse wanted his three eldest sons to get sufficient nourishment and used David’s apparently fairly frequent trips home to load them up.

**Vs. 18: also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them.”**

Jesse saves something as a treat for the commander which borders on a bribe of sorts that he may keep his three sons safe from harm as much as possible.

The Hebrew “see (how your brothers) fare” consists of the verb *paqad* which connotes a mustering in the military sense (cf. 15.4) and is used with the noun *shalom* (peace, cf. 16.4).

*Harubah* means “token” and derived from the verb *harav* which means to be surety. There is one other biblical reference, Pro 17.18: “A man without sense gives a pledge and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor.” Jesse simply requests a modest keepsake from Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah to make sure they are well. If battle with the Philistines had been engaged, Jesse would have known it by now. Despite the stand-off, the longer it dragged on, the more violent it would become.

**Vs. 19: Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.**

The Hebrew for “men” is singular (*’ysh*) which intimates that Saul and all men who comprised the nation of Israel were engaged in combat as a single entity with the Philistines, that is, in the valley of Elah (cf. vs. 2). This verse intimates that the situation was rather fluid and many soldiers were half-hearted. Perhaps an engagement took place here and there over the span of forty days (cf. vs. 16) while Goliath continued his strutting about on top of the valley’s slope. He wanted to join in the battle, but his commanders held him back for an opportunity to do single combat. Watching the various struggles below was an excellent opportunity to weed out the incompetent Israelite soldiers.

**Vs. 20: And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the encampment as the host was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry.**

The previous verse seems to be an interlude of sorts with David now at home. The word “provisions” is lacking in the Hebrew text but has the verb “took” referring to vs. 17-18. Apparently the distance between Bethlehem and Elah wasn’t far for David to be going back and forth with some frequency.

*Mahgal* means “encampment” which applies to a fortification constructed of wagons brought together or piled together, these vehicles probably having no further use once at the site of battle. “My steps have held fast to your fathers, my feet have not slipped” [Ps 17.5]. From this fortified area on top of the slope facing the Philistines Israel went as a “host” or *chayl* (cf. 16.18) which connotes the valiant nature of the troops.

The Hebrew for “shouting the war cry” reads literally as “shouting in war,” the verb being *ruah* noted last in 4.5. Apparently it was simply another engagement as intimated in vs. 19.

**Vs. 21: And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army.**

*Harak* is the verb for “drew up for battle” (cf. vs. 2) from which “army” is derived, *maharakah* (cf. 4.16), and refers more to a line of battle. Most likely after a series of minor engagements both sides decided they weren’t getting anywhere. Thus the Israelites and Philistines drew up for battle with the intent of having Goliath and someone from Israel’s side engage him in one-on-one combat. Hopefully that would resolve the on-again, off-again nature of warfare that has plagued both nations.

**Vs. 22: And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers.**

*Kely* is the noun for “things” and as noted last in 14.1, refers to armor or more generally as baggage as used a second time in this verse. Perhaps David brought back more than provisions of food such as armor and the like, and may even have had a servant or two from his father to accompany him for that purpose.

As quickly as possible David dropped what he brought along and ran to greet his brothers. He had to run up and down the soldiers strung out along the end of the slope in an effort to find them which got the attention of the Philistines on other side of the valley, wondering what he was up to. David’s greeting of his brothers was spontaneous which shows that he and they must have had a good relationship. Earlier when Samuel was choosing a successor to Saul and having Jesse’s sons pass before him there could have been some bad blood between them. If that were true, it doesn’t seem to be present now on the verge of an all-out battle.

The verb *sha’al* (to ask or to inquire, cf. 14.37) is used with the noun *shalom* prefaced with the preposition *l-* reading literally, “asked to peace.”

**Vs. 23: As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.**

As noted in the previous verse, David got the Philistines' attention while frantically searching for his brothers amid the rank of drawn-up soldiers which, in turn, made Goliath come out and continue his taunting, this time directed at David.

"And David heard him" is indicative of the soon-to-be combat between the two unequals. Most likely when David discovered his brothers they whisked him behind their protective shields and even may have attempted to block his eyes and ears, so frightening a sight was Goliath and the words he uttered.

**Vs. 24: All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.**

As in vs. 19 the singular *'ysh* (man) is used which can be taken as showing the unity of Israel when confronted with this grave danger. However, it was not to last long because this "man" fled. Obviously they saw Goliath often before and had engaged the Philistines in the valley of Elah, but this time there must have been something really frightful that made them "much afraid," *yare'* coupled with the adverb *me'od* (both words, vs. 11) signifying excessiveness.

**Vs. 25: And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and the man who kills him, the king will enrich with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."**

After Goliath once again threw confusion in the ranks of the Israelites and had fled (keep in mind another example of *'ysh* or singular man applied to Israel), they came across David who must have returned to the rear after having greeted his brothers. By reason of his youth and lack of military equipment he stood out among everyone which is why the troops addressed him, more perhaps because they were so agitated and afraid.

*Charaph* is the verb for "defy" (cf. vs. 10).

*Hashar* is the verb for "enrich" noted last in 2.7 meaning fundamentally to be straight and is used with the noun *hoshar* or "riches." In this verse, note the similar sounding words: *ha'ysh*, *'asher*, *yahshrenu* and *hoshar* (the man, who, will enrich him and riches).

When speaking of freedom with regard to one's house (*chaphash*, 'free'), it hearkens back to the rights and duties of a king Samuel communicated to the people in the first part of Chapter Eight. A reference to *chaphash*: "to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke" [Is 58.6]. Mention of one's father suggests that the freedom to be granted will endure as long as the family bloodline endures.

**Vs. 26: And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”**

David speaks here spontaneously to the men who had just broken ranks because of Goliath. He does so without encouragement or authorization from King Saul nor any of his commanders. And so all the soldiers must have been amazed at his fortitude and defiance which matched that of Goliath which he explains later derived from experience of protecting the sheep against marauding animals. The intimacy of the situation is touching, the way the soldiers stood by David or literally “with him,” an indication that he was beginning to rally the Israelites.

*Cherpah* is the noun for “reproach” noted last in 11.2 as “disgrace” and derives from the verb *charaph* (‘should defy’) used here (cf. vs. 25).

**Vs. 27: And the people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done to the man who kills him.”**

*Davar* (cf. 16.18) is the noun for way which means the soldiers concurred with David’s calm defiance of Goliath. However, no one volunteers to step forward.

**Vs. 28: Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down to see the battle.”**

As first born, Eliab felt he had the duty to rebuke David for words that to him seemed as insolent as Goliath’s. *Charah* is the verb for “kindled” (cf. 15.11) which reveals his attitude. Besides, Eliab felt embarrassed his youngest brother who was showing more courage than he and his other two siblings there in the ranks.

*Zadon* is the noun for “presumption” which also means haughtiness and swelling (of pride). “When pride comes, then comes shame” [Prov 11.2]. Adding insult to injury Eliab claims that evil lay in David’s heart, the preposition *l-* being used which reads literally “to his heart.” Both this presumption and evil led David to watch the battle from a safe distance irrespective of Israel’s fate, let alone that of his three brothers in the ranks. Such words amounted to bluster, for David fulfils his word and challenges Goliath while Eliab and everyone else remains safely behind their defensive positions.

**Vs. 29: And David said, “What have I done now? Was it not but a word?”**

David rebukes Eliab, the youngest to the oldest, which must have enhanced David’s reputation among the soldiers after his resound words in vss. 26-7.

**Vs. 30: And he turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.**

David felt that the threat from the Philistines was so pressing that this was no time for arguing. He turned away from Eliab most likely in anger with the Israelites gathered around the two brothers. They sided with David, the youngest over the oldest, simply by reason of his courage before Goliath which shortly would have dramatic consequences.

**Vs. 31: When the words which David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him.**

Apparently Saul didn't know what was going on, being preoccupied with the larger picture of facing off with the Philistines which consisted in a series of on-again, off-again skirmishes in the valley below. David's words about Goliath impressed the troops sufficiently, so they rushed off to inform their king. Anything at this stage is welcomed to break the deadlock that had been going on for forty days (cf. vs. 16). Although Samuel had anointed David recently...and it wasn't exactly clear if it was to be king...this wasn't on his mind.

**Vs. 32: And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."**

Earlier David has entered King Saul's service and became his armor bearer (cf. 16.21) though in this dialogue Saul doesn't seem to have prior knowledge of David. As a footnote to the **RSV** says, it's a matter of the so-called Early and Late Sources.

The situation at hand, of course, is extremely grave and has been going on for some time without resolution, hence the direct manner of David's address to the king whom he never before had met. So right away David gets down to business and volunteers to fight Goliath.

*Naphal* is the verb for "fail" which fundamentally means to fall down and is used with *lev* or "heart" (cf. 16.7) as found last in 14.45 though not mentioned there. David calls himself a "servant" (*heved*, cf. vs. 9), a typical form of address before royalty, etc. In other words, David doesn't ask for permission, just that he will get the job over and done with.

**Vs. 33: And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth."**

Obviously Saul is thinking of the larger picture, that if Goliath slays David according to the agreement in vs. 9, the Israelites will be reduced to slavery under the Philistines. At the same time Saul wasn't prepared just yet to say no to David. He wanted to feel him out some more before coming to a decision of not allowing this contest to take place.

**Vs. 34: But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion or a bear and took a lamb from the flock,**

David speaks of his work as shepherd in the past tense, as though he had left it behind which is true objectively now that he has come to the battle line. By speaking of lions and bears, David is intimating that he can handle Goliath. Actually he speaks with a matter-of-fact manner to the king which must have taken him by surprise.

**Vs. 35: I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him and killed him.**

David continues to speak to Saul not to impress him but to get the opportunity of engaging Goliath as quickly as possible. Going after a lion or a bear with prey in its mouth was the height of bravery, second after being in the vicinity of these animals with cubs.

**Vs. 36: Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.”**

Perhaps due to his prowess out in the field, David’s brothers didn’t offer any challenge when Samuel anointed him. They were fully aware that their youngest brother was the fiercest and bravest among them. This is being made evident to Saul as he sets forth his argument as to why he should engage Goliath whom he doesn’t call by name but as someone who is uncircumcised, a way of showing contempt.

**Vs. 37: And David said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!”**

*Natsal* is the verb for “will deliver” is noted last in 12.21. David’s little speech certainly impressed Saul who immediately sent him off to do combat with Goliath. During this first encounter between Saul and David there is no hint of the antagonism that will arise. We’re dealing with two men who have been anointed king. One obviously knows about it because he is such and the other doesn’t quite realize it.

**Vs. 38: Then Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.**

Saul is so impressed by David that he acts as armor bearer to his own armor bearer (cf. 16.21). In other words, the roles are reversed and can be taken as a sign of things to come. Saul was so anxious to have David encounter Goliath and break this stalemate that he didn’t take into consideration David’s diminutive size and young age.

**Vs. 39: And David girded his sword over his armor, and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them." And David put them off.**

*Ya'al* is the verb for "tried in vain" and noted last in 12.22 as "pleased" and fundamentally applies to being before or first as well as to wish. The image is of a young man not of full stature attempting to walk while weighed down with a the armor and weapons of a grown man. "He was not used to them" is a kind of understatement, the verb being *nasah* meaning to try or to prove. "All this I have tested by wisdom" [Ecc 7.23].

As stated in the previous verse, Saul himself had put all this equipment on David both in eagerness and in fear of the threats his army has been suffering from Goliath. To David's credit, he kept a cool head throughout this crisis, apparently the only person among the Israelites to behave thus.

**Vs. 40: Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's bag or wallet; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.**

*Maqel* means "staff" as well as a twig or spear and found next in vs. 43. "In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand" [Ex 12.11]. It was natural for David to take this staff, having been in charge of his father's sheep. Actually he didn't need it; perhaps he brought it along more or less as a companion of sorts, a means of support.

*Qelah* is the noun for "sling" and found next in 25.29: "And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling."

*Nagash* as "drew near" is found last in 13.9 which means he must have descended into the valley below with the Philistines and Israelites lined up at the very edge of the cliffs above.

**Vs. 41: And the Philistine came on and drew near to David with his shield bearer in front of him.**

Chances are the Philistine got to the valley floor before David proudly marching behind his "shield bearer." In 16.21 and in other places there is mention of an armor bearer whereas here it is someone...most likely a slave...bearing Goliath's shield. Both the Philistines and Israelites must have had some pity on this fellow, completely exposed to the single combat about to take place. The armor bearer was the only person close enough to witness the details and surely later capitalized upon this to gain some fame as he recounted his story...for a fee.

**Vs. 42: And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance.**

Two verbs pertinent to sight, *navat* and *ra'ah* (16.7 and 16.17), the former which implies beholding or having respect and the latter being the common verb to see. Both result in Goliath having disdain for David, *bazah* (cf. 15.9).

David as being “ruddy and comely in appearance” echoes 16.12 (‘ruddy and had beautiful eyes’). *Yapheh* as “comely” applies to the appearance of both men and women, this adjective being found in 16.12 but not mentioned there. Here it describes David’s overall “appearance” or *mar'eh* (cf. 16.7). Perhaps the shield bearer of Goliath had a more cautious opinion of David, but if he made it known, he would have suffered the same fate as Goliath intended for David.

**Vs. 43: And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.**

*Maqel* is the noun for “sticks” used in vs. 40 for “staff” which to Goliath in his conceit looked completely ridiculous.

*Qalal* means “cursed” noted last in 6.6 as “lightened.” The idea behind *qalal* is that cursing is a making light of a situation but in the negative sense. The form in the verse at hand is similar in sound to *maqel*, also as found in this verse, *bamaqloth wyegalel*. Goliath reflects the general, uninformed view of the Philistines that the Israelites believed in multiple gods as they did.

**Vs. 44: The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.”**

Here Goliath is called “the Philistine” which is true, but used in contrast to the proper name “David,” a way of denigrating him as he is doing presently the exact same thing to David. His words also could reflect a desire to get this contest over with and turn attention to the real business at hand, defeating the Israelites under Saul’s command.

**Vs. 45: Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.**

After having insulted Goliath as being over-armed, if you will, he corrects him (i.e., using ‘gods’ in vs. 43) by the “Lord of hosts” as well as God being the true leader of Israel’s armies. It is these armies (note the plural) which Goliath has “defied” or *charaph* (cf. vs. 26). Because Goliath and David were in the valley with the Philistines and Israelites drawn up on opposite cliffs above, probably they didn’t hear the two combatants but got a clear picture through their body language. Most likely the actual words came from David’s armor bearer as noted above. To both sides it looked as though Goliath was the obvious favorite. However, some may have looked at Goliath’s shield bearer and saw the fear in his face which revealed a different story.

**Vs. 46: This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,**

“This day” in the sense of right now, without delay, when the Lord “will deliver” Goliath over to David, the verb being *sagar* noted last in 1.5 meaning means to close as well as to shut up as you would close a gate and in the verse at hand, David’s hand acting like a trap ready to spring shut.

Not only will David slay Goliath standing relatively close to him but will precipitate the annihilation of the Philistine army or better, give them to birds and animals to devour. This slaughter about to happen is not just a potential military victory won by armed force but by the Lord. It seems that once the Goliath and the Philistines have been slain and eaten, the earth itself will “know” (*yadah*, cf. 16.18) that (literally speaking) “there is a God to (-) Israel.” Earlier the Philistines experienced a similar encounter with the divine or when their god Dagon was overturned by the Lord residing in the ark of the Lord (Chapter Five). Many of the Philistines present knew about that incident yet Goliath’s insolence and apparent invincibility gave them hope to put that incident behind them.

**Vs. 47: and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.”**

In addition to the earth itself knowing that God resides in Israel, the “assembly” or *qahal* will have the same knowledge or *yadah*. *Qahal* usually applies to the congregation of Israel but here can include everyone present. It makes sense here in that those whom David is addressing are like a gathering of people in an auditorium of sorts listening to a speaker which is true, given that he is in the valley with both armies lined up on opposite cliffs.

*Yashah* is the verb for “saves” as in 14.39. Here such saving will not take place by military might but by the Lord, the exact nature of which is known only to David. When he said that the “battle” (*milchamah*, cf. 16.18) belongs to the Lord, he seems to be referring only to the one-on-one combat with Goliath though the Israelites will pursue the Philistines immediately afterwards. Regardless, tension between the two armies were at their highest. If one side were to win, the other would become their slaves (cf. vs. 9). However, it remained to be seen if the defeated side would comply.

**Vs. 48: When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.**

*Qum* is the verb for “arose” (cf. 16.12) which means that after having taunted David, Goliath called here again in derogatory fashion as “the Philistine,” finishes his tirade and leaves for one-on-one combat. David, in turn, “ran quickly” which consists of two verbs, *mahar* and *ruts*. In

other words, David does not hesitate to engage Goliath who, despite his confidence, comes at David at a slower pace. *Mahar* is found first in 9.12 but not mentioned there; the same applies to *ruts* in 3.5.

The implied hesitation of Goliath is a hint that the outcome is assured for David. We get a similar feeling the fact that David ran towards the Philistines' battle line, that Goliath felt unsure of himself as he remained close by his comrades-in-arms. Since both armies faced each other on opposite sides of a valley, David's running to the battle line suggests that he descended the valley—the preordained spot of combat—and then up the other side to the drawn up Philistines, all this before Goliath had a chance to descend into the valley.

Both combatants “meet” each other in two different ways, *qara'* also meaning to shout as in vs. 8. Although this verb has two distinct uses, we may say that each man shouted as they drew near to each other.

**Vs. 49: And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.**

While running as quickly as he could, David reaches into his bag and grabs a stone (*'even*, found first in 6.14 but not mentioned there). He managed to lodge this stone in Goliath's forehead, that is, “to (*'el-*) his forehead,” this being preposition suggestive of David's accuracy. Immediately afterwards the stone “sank into (*b-*) his forehead.” In other words, first *'el* and then *b-*. Just as quickly as David aims and shoots, Goliath falls “on his face,” words with the same derisiveness as “the Philistine.” This achievement is all the more remarkable in that as vs. 48 says, Goliath was close to his own battleline. The Philistines could have killed David right there and then but were too stunned, just like the Israelites much further back, up on the hill looking down.

**Vs. 50: So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone and struck the Philistine and killed him; there was no sword in the hand of David.**

*Chazaq* means “prevailed” noted last in 15.27 as “laid hold of,” a strong word which is all the more stronger by use of the preposition *min*, literally “prevailed from the Philistine.” As for the actual slaying of “the Philistine” (again, held in too much contempt to be addressed by his name), the striking and actual killing are one and the same, separated, if you will, to increase the dramatic effect. The same applies to David not being armed with a sword.

**Vs. 51: Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.**

The verb *hamad* means “stood” (cf. 16.22) and is coupled with the preposition *‘el-*, literally as “stood to the Philistine.” Although the previous verse said that Goliath was killed, David wants to make certain. He also wishes to insult the Philistines—he was right there in front of their battle line, unprotected and unarmed—by running him through and then beheading him. David did this in slow motion for increased dramatic effect.

*Gibor* (‘champion’) is noted last in 16.18. In the fraction of a second that David slew Goliath, the Philistines must have thought of their man’s previous accomplishments, that they amounted to nothing before this youth. The original agreement between them and the Israelites was that whoever was victor in the one-on-one combat would mean one nation would be subject to the other. The Philistines showed not so much their fear but their cowardice which infuriated the Israelites all the more.

**Vs. 52: And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Sha-araim as far as Gath and Ekron.**

This sudden rally is a rising (*qum*) very different from that of Goliath in vs. 28, that is, “with a shout” or *ruah* (cf. vs. 2) from the other side of the valley which struck terror in the Philistines. Again, there is no mention of keeping the bargain, the victor quietly submitting to the victor. Surely Israel would do the same if the situation were reversed, indicative of the long standing enmity between the two peoples.

As vs. 23 reveals, Gath is the home of Goliath. It was as though the Philistines, still caught in disbelief that their champion had been slain by a mere youth, retreated to where Goliath had been born and raised. It might just offer the psychological refuge needed at the moment but to no avail. As for Ekron, it is first mentioned in 5.10 as one of the cities to which the Philistine lords had sent the ark of the Lord captured in battle, but it was afflicted by the tumors as had been the case with Ashdod.

**Vs. 53: And the Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.**

*Dalaq* translates as “chasing” but implying more a burning. “What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me” [Gen 31.36]? Obviously the Israelites were eager to inflict as much harm upon their enemies as possible but dared go no further than Gath and Ekron. If they assaulted those two towns, they risked being defeated by re-enforcements since they were exhausted after their pursuit and the tension that had built up between the two armies in the course of forty days (cf. vs. 16). So after the suddenness of David’s defeat of Goliath, the Israelites returned to the scene of the battle and “plundered” the camp, the verb being *shasas* which has five other biblical references. “And he (the Lord) gave them over to plunderers who plundered them” [Judg 2.14]. No information as to the spoils is given, but it must have been considerable, given the sudden and panicked retreat by the Philistines.

**Vs. 54: And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.**

This is the only mention of Jerusalem in First Samuel. Perhaps David had in mind even this early in his career that Jerusalem would be the capitol and center of worship. Where he placed it isn't mentioned but presumably in a public place for all to behold. And so David wisely began making Jerusalem the center he felt it should become.

Because of his victory, naturally David was entitled to do what he wished both with Goliath's body and any possessions found on him. Certainly his fearsome armor described in vss. 7-7 were valuable. One can just imagine the large items crammed into David's small tent.

**Vs. 55: When Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I cannot tell."**

Saul comes across as somewhat clueless with the recent dramatic events, here not even knowing David's identity. Regardless of the interpretation, this verse serves to introduce Abner who was allied with David in his kingship but later fell out of favor. Abner did not recognize David as a member of the army even though vs. 33 has Saul speaking with David.

*Nephesh* means "soul" and noted last in 2.35.

The name "Abner" is mentioned in First Samuel for the first time in 14.50 as Saul's uncle.

**Vs. 56: And the king said, "Inquire whose son the stripling is."**

*Sha'al* (cf. vs. 22) is the verb for "inquire," the verbal root for the proper name "Saul."

*Helem* means "stripling" and generally applies to a young man of the age of puberty. Compare it with the common *nahar* (cf. 16.18), a young man at the threshold of manhood. The only other biblical reference to *helem* is 20.22.

**Vs. 57: And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.**

This verse intimates that David did not join in pursuing the Philistines. He had accomplished more than enough and was entitled to his glory. Besides, the Israelites didn't want to expose David to further danger, for the Philistines now have a price on his head. Right away Abner whisked David away to safety and to the king with Goliath's head in his hand, certainly a humorous touch. They had to wait for Saul's return (he went off pursuing the Philistines along with the army). During this lull David and Abner must have had an opportunity to speak with each other

which enabled them to size up one other, hence the reason for David allowing Abner into his confidence at a later occasion.

**Vs. 58: And Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, young man?” And David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”**

Although we have here another instance of Saul and David not knowing each other even though other places say the contrary, it can be taken as a way of summing up the two men at an early stage in their relationship. It's amicable at this stage but soon will degenerate into open hostility. All the while David must have pondered his recent anointing by Samuel who passed out of the picture as quickly as he appeared. We don't hear about Samuel until 19.18 when David fled to him for refuge against the now hostile Saul.

## Chapter Eighteen

**Vs. 1: When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.**

Although Jonathan was introduced in Chapter Fourteen where he had fallen out of favor with his father, Saul, the words of this verse intimate that this never had been resolved and that major problems lay ahead. Although Jonathan is reconciled with Saul, the tension between them remained, and Saul's suspicions were rekindled when he saw the attraction of his son for David.

*Nephesh* is the noun for “soul” noted last in 17.55 and fundamentally means breath, the animating principle of the body and also can be translated as mind. In the verse at hand the *nephesh* of Jonathan and David are “knit” together, the verb *qashar* meaning to bind as well as to conspire. The preposition *b-* (in) is prefaced to this noun, “in David,” which makes for greater intimacy. *Qashar* is found next in 22.8 with this last sense: “that all of you have conspired against me?”

The result of the binding is *'ahav* or love between the two (cf. 16.21). Prior to David's victory over Goliath there is no mention of his relationship with Jonathan. Jonathan may not have known him earlier but was captivated by his appearance as well as bravery and ability to speak easily with his father with whom he did not get along well.

**Vs. 2: And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.**

Compare this rather forcible taking of David with 16.29: “Send me David your son who is with the sheep,” that is, for him to play the lyre and become armor bearer. Both instances are in line with the rights of a king in Chapter Eight. Surely David knew this possibility with the dangers involved, given Saul's tendency to violence, news of which was starting to spread around. However, he had Jonathan as an important ally and couldn't betray his trust.

**Vs. 3: Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul.**

The verb *karath* ('made') and the noun *beryth* ('covenant') are both found in 11.2, the two often being used. We have no information as to this covenant. Given that both Jonathan and David were military men, it could have been a pledge of sorts common among soldiers who had created a bond among each other.

Again, mention of *nephesh* (cf. vs. 3) and the noun *'ahavah* (cf. 20.17) is deliberate insofar as they reveal the close bond between the two. Perhaps knowledge of Saul's tendency to violence and depression had something to do with it, a way of watching each other's back.

**Vs. 4: And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David and his armor and even his sword and his bow and his girdle.**

*Pashat* means "stripped" which is more a putting off of a garment as well as a spreading and is found next in 23.27: "Make haste and come; for the Philistines have made a raid upon the land." The "robe" at hand or *mehyl* (cf. 1.19) is an upper garment or exterior tunic which is wide and long, reaching to the ankles. Perhaps it was a special garment indicative of Jonathan's rank and being son of the king.

It is one thing to give another person a garment, even if precious and significant, but quite another for a soldier or officer to give one's armor and weapons. These items are essential to the trade, if you will, and a powerful outward sign of that *qashar* or binding of souls between Jonathan and David.

**Vs. 5: And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.**

At this early stage of friendship between David and Jonathan chances are that Saul perceived their relationship was of no real threat to him nor to his kingly power. Right away Saul put David to work, for he had been "successful" or *sakal* which fundamentally means to look at in the sense of beholding and therefore having understanding as well as prudence. *Sakal* is found next in vs. 14: "And David had success in all his undertakings; for the Lord was with him."

This ability to *sakal* with regard to people elevated David to be "over" (*hal*) Saul's troops who are called "men of war," perhaps implying that these soldiers were an elite force of some sort. It met with approval of both the general population as well as Saul's servants though nothing is said of the soldiers' view of David.

**Vs. 6: As they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing to meet King Saul with timbrels, with songs of joy and with instruments of music.**

Mention of the Philistines here is rather casual, suggestive of the continuous give and take between Israel and their traditional enemy, almost as though fighting between the two people was commonplace and to be expected. After all, both lived in close proximity to each other, not in separate lands when two armies would travel some distance to clash. The incident in this verse isn't specified nor does it need to be, given this fact. However, what stands out is that women not just locally but "from all the cities" throughout Israel treated David as a hero. Besides, he was young and handsome, so they all tried to get as close to him as possible.

Ostensibly the women gathered from all around to meet king Saul, but he was simply an excuse for them to swoon over David. In the verse at hand already Saul is relegated, albeit in subtle fashion, to second place.

**Vs. 7: And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."**

Judging by vs. 6, half the population came out to greet Saul and David which meant that all the men of Israel were left behind. Surely a good number of these men...husbands...had a less than favorable view of what their wives were up to and could have been jealous of David. David, of course, realized this and knew if his fame increased, he would have to do something to assuage this attitude.

*Hanah* is the verb for "sang" noted last in 14.12 and connotes an answering or the giving of a response which fits in with the verse at hand insofar as the women formed a chorus or several choruses ('to one another'). In addition to this *hanah*, the women "made merry" or *sachaq* which means to laugh, often with contempt as well as to jest. "And I was daily his delight, rejoicing ore him always" [Prov 8.30]. Even if Saul slew more Philistines than David, the women would still prefer David hands down. Actually this verse represents the precise turning point or source of ill-will between the two men.

**Vs. 8: And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom?"**

*Charah* is the verb for "angry" and as the last reference in 17.28 reveals, also means to kindle. It is used with the adverb *me'od* ('very;' cf. 17.24) to indicate excessiveness. *Davar* means "saying" or the familiar noun for word as discourse found last in 17.27 which literally "was evil in his eyes," the verb being *rahaq* (cf. 12.25).

We don't know whether Saul uttered these words to himself or among close friends and advisors. Regardless, his son Jonathan picked up on a definite change of attitude and informed David to be very careful. Even if Saul asked the question in vs. 8 rhetorically as to the kingdom and decided to abdicate at this moment or shortly afterwards, things would have turned out very differently. As for the people in general, they hadn't a clue what was going on with their king and held him in high regard for his military prowess and choice of David.

**Vs. 9: And Saul eyed David from that day on.**

A short but ominous verse which signals a growing hostility ahead that could turn deadly. *Havan* is the verb for "eyed," the only use of this verb in the Bible. Saul may have kept a look-out on David through spies, courtiers, military people or even himself. Though we have no precise information about it, Saul even could have attempted to enlist his son Jonathan but to no avail. That raised Saul's suspicions every higher.

**Vs. 10: And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand;**

"On the morrow" shows how quickly Saul began to turn against David, that is, right after the women sang their praises and attributed more slain Philistines to David.

*Tsalach* is the verb for "rushed" along with the preposition 'el-, "rushed to Saul." The *tsalach* at hand is very different from 10.10 when "the spirit of God came mightily upon him (Saul), and he prophesied among them." Once this divine spirit which is "evil" (*raha*, cf. 16.23) took possession of Saul, he "raved" or *nava'* which fundamentally means to pour forth or bubble up words. It is found last in 10.5 when Saul was among the prophets. "Within (*qerev*, cf. 16.13) his house" or in the very center of his house is a haunting image of a man all by himself bubbling incoherent words while servants and attendants were way at the other end in case he turned violent. Only David could approach Saul with that same fearlessness he ran up to Goliath. Not only did David assuage Saul once but frequently, "day by day."

Even more ominous and scary than "within his house" are the words "spear in his hand." One can easily picture Saul sitting by himself almost howling aloud in a large room with no one except David playing on the lyre. All along the servants were cowering just out of sight.

**Vs. 11: and Saul cast the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.**

*Nakah* is the verb for "pin" and means more to kill or to slay as in vs. 7 though the verb isn't mentioned there.

The verb for “evaded” is *savav* (cf. 14.21) with *mipanayu* or literally “turned from his face.” This sudden threat of murder occurred not just once but twice. Surely he must have questioned his skill at soothing Saul on the lyre, that it wasn’t having a positive effect.

**Vs. 12: Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.**

Saul interprets the Lord as being with David through the women who came out to greet them both after the recent military victory. Now that Saul recognizes the words of Samuel as starting to come true, indeed he had reason to fear. Perhaps Saul wished he could pin Samuel to the wall as well.

“Departed” is *sur* (cf. 16.14) along with the preposition *min* (*min* prefaced to *ham*) reading literally as “departed from with Saul.”

**Vs. 13: So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.**

Despite the recent violent outbursts and Saul’s behavior trickling out to the people, he had to treat David carefully lest he have a rebellion on his hands. First Saul removes David (*sur*, cf. vs. 12) which implies he did this with some discretion and shortly appointed him as a “commander” or *sar* over a thousand troops. This was in accord with the precepts laid down by Samuel concerning the rights of a king, more specifically as in 8.12.

David’s going in and out before the people is another ploy by Saul. If he were to confine David, more suspicions would be aroused. Of course, David was fully aware of this yet made the most of his position both not to be rebellious towards Saul and to remain in the people’s favor.

**Vs. 14: And David had success in all his undertakings; for the Lord was with him.**

*Sakal* is the verb for “had success” as in vs. 5 and here is with respect to David’s “undertakings” or *derek* (cf. 15.20) which fundamentally means road or way.

The Lord being with David stands in sharp contrast to Saul’s degenerating condition who is drifting further and further away from the Lord. Surely Samuel was abreast as to these developments and was cheering him on, if you will, albeit discreetly. Those in close attendance to Saul and who were loyal to him from the beginning were starting to have second doubts.

**Vs. 15: And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in awe of him.**

Here *sakal* is used with the adverb *me’od* (‘great;’ cf. vs. 8).

*Gur* means “stood in awe” which means to tarry as well as to fear. “Who shall abide in your tabernacle” [Ps 15.1]? Such *gur* on Saul’s part is twofold: obviously fear that David was not intimidated and a certain admiration of the youth who not long before had slain Goliath.

**Vs. 16: But all Israel and Judah loved David; for he went out and came in before them.**

*’Ahav* is the verb for “loved” (cf. vs. 3) and here applies to every person under the jurisdiction of Saul. Such universal love sets the stage for David to succeed Saul as king. This is the second time David is described as both going out and coming in before the people, a way of saying that they had full access to him.

**Vs. 17: Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you for a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles.” For Saul thought, “Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.”**

The two men got together after an indefinite period of time, that is, when David became commander. Saul decided to take a more subtle approach, one that David himself would adopt by having Uriah put in the heat of battle to be slain in front of a besieged city (cf. 2Sam 11.16+).

For Saul to give Merab, that is, his first-born daughter (cf. 14.49), was an exceptional offer which reveals the treachery he had in mind for David. The condition was for David to “be valiant” and fight on behalf of the Lord. The former reads literally as “son of strength” (*chayl*, cf. 17.20). By now David grew in realization that his anointing by Samuel was intended to take over from Saul. How and when that occurred was puzzling now. To hear Saul speak of the “Lord’s battles” must have struck David with some irony, that the Lord had forsaken him. Still, for the remainder of First Samuel David remains faithful to Saul as the legitimate king of Israel.

It must have been difficult for Saul to keep a secret, that is, his intent to have the Philistines kill David in battle instead of doing it by an assassin. The text reads literally with regard to “hand,” “let...it be in (*b-*) him.” Chances are that Saul shared his plan not with Jonathan but some close advisors. His other children don’t seem privy to any such council, good or otherwise.

**Vs. 18: And David said to Saul, “Who am I, and who are my kinsfolk, my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?”**

*Chatan* as “son-in-law” also applies to a bridegroom or a connection by marriage and found next in 22.14: “Who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king’s son-in-law?” Without a doubt David could see through the deception of Saul; he also doesn’t seem to have an attraction for his first-born daughter. At the same time David had to watch himself carefully, mindful of being in the eye of “all Israel and Judah” [vs. 16].

**Vs. 19: But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.**

It seems as though Merab had been promised as bride to someone else, Adriel, so Saul was caught off guard by this rather poor deception. However, the misstep shows that Saul was losing it, and David had the upper hand despite anything Saul might throw at him.

**Vs. 20: Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David; and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.**

*Ahav* is the verb for “loved” as in vs. 16 although David doesn’t seem to have been aware of any affection shown by Michal. Perhaps she was among the women who came out to greet her father and David upon return from battle (cf. vs. 6). At the moment David doesn’t seem interested in having a wife, his mind being preoccupied with more urgent matters.

“They” is not specified but most likely Michal’s attendants who enjoyed gossiping about David. *Davar* means “thing” and noted last in vs. 8 and given the context, can refer to that gossip, i.e., talk.

*Yashar* (cf. 6.12) means to be straight which here suggests that the attendants’ suggest was accurate, something to follow up.

**Vs. 21: Saul thought, “Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David a second time, “You shall now be my son-in-law.”**

Saul continues his scheming, having no respect for his two daughters whom he viewed as means to an end, David’s death, and hence elimination of a threat to his throne. In fact, Saul goes so far as to consider Michal a “snare” or *moqesh* which also can be a ring put through the nostrils of a beast. “The cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me” [2Sam 22.6]. Also the (singular) hand of the (plural) Philistines will be “against” or in (*b-*) David.

In vs. 17 Saul presents Merab to David as a wife whereas here he more or less forces Michal upon him.

**Vs. 22: And Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David in private and say, ‘Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you; now then become the king's son-in-law.’”**

Given the bad blood between Saul and David, Saul bids his servants to approach David “in private” or *lat* an adjective with five other biblical references one of which is in 24.4: “Then David arose and stealthily cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe.”

When the servants are to say that Saul “has delight” in David or *chaphats* (cf. 15.22), David knows he is lying. Perhaps the servants were clueless as to the king’s intent; after all they were

simply messengers. They would approach David on his own turf, as it were, compared to David being in Saul's palace.

*Ahav* is the verb for "love" noted last in vs. 20.

**Vs. 23: And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and of no repute?"**

En route to David Saul's servants must have practised well the words they were to communicate to him as well as how to say it as convincingly as possible. "In the ears" suggests a direct, one-on-one contact where both parties pay close attention to each other.

*Qalal* is a verb for "seem a little thing" and as noted in 17.43, often suggests a curse.

*Ysh-rash* and *nigleh* means "poor man" and "no repute" or a man who is *rosh* or in want and one who is *qalah*. For the former, "Do justice for the afflicted and the needy" [Ps 82.3]. For the latter, "Then your brother should seem vile to you" [Dt 25.3]. Given the way David has comported himself since his introduction to Saul, such words of self-abasement are not a pretense but reveal David's basically humble spirit which is why he is loved by virtually everybody.

**Vs. 24: And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak."**

Apparently there is little time wasted between Saul's servants visiting David and David's response to Saul. Perhaps David had met Michal or at least had seen her and found her more attractive than Saul's first-born daughter, Merab. Regardless, marrying either one would put David firmly in the king's household, and that could be used later for political advantage. We get no clue that Saul had taken this into consideration. After all, David had proved himself successful in military ventures; chances were high that he would succeed yet again and have yet another advantage over Saul. Clearly Saul is too obsessed with getting rid of David and not thinking through all the ramifications.

**Vs. 25: Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no marriage present except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.**

David was quick in his response though nothing definitive is given, but apparently he consented. *Chaphats* is the verb for "delighted" as in vs. 22 which, of course, was partly feigned on Saul's part.

*Mohar* means "marriage present," one of three biblical references, the other two being Gn 34.12 and Ex 22.17, the former being cited here: "Ask of me ever so much as marriage present

and gift, and I will give according as you say to me.” David didn’t give a second thought to this *mohar* consisting of a hundred Philistine foreskins which must have unnerved Saul though he was careful not to reveal his intent. At the same time Saul had an inkling that David was on to his scheme. *Naqam* means “avenged” noted last in 14.24.

“By the hand” literally reads “in (*b-*) the hand” as in vs. 21.

**Vs. 26: And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired,**

Indeed, Saul was taken off guard by David’s willingness to accept the terms offered him. Now all his hopes were pinned on David getting killed in battle though that was uncertain. David could see through Saul’s intent; it made a deep impression, so much that later he had Uriah slain in a not dissimilar fashion (cf. vs. 17).

*Yashar* is the verb for “pleased” noted last in vs. 20.

“Before the time had expired” reads literally “and not was filled the days.” In other words, without hesitation David took up Saul’s offer. Since Saul’s daughter Michal was the reason for this, she found herself in a difficult position: on one hand her love for David and on the other, first-hand knowledge of her father’s treachery.

**Vs. 27: David arose and went, along with his men and killed two hundred of the Philistines; and David brought their foreskins which were given in full number to the king that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife.**

As noted in several instances earlier (cf. 13.15), *qum* (‘arose’) suggests the taking of action which here involves a loyal troop of men from among those thousand in vs. 13. David promptly returns not just with the required one hundred foreskins but double the number though chances are no one at Saul’s court was inclined to count them to make sure he was telling the truth. Just looking at them was proof enough for Saul to hand over Michal to David as his wife. She was relieved, of course, but must have felt contempt towards her father for being valued first at hundred Philistine foreskins, the number which David had doubled.

**Vs. 28: But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that all Israel loved him,**

*Ra’ah* and *yadah*: “saw” and “knew” as in 17.42 and 17.47 respectively. In the verse at hand they signify that finally Saul recognized Samuel’s prediction that someone would be favored over him as king. This isn’t explicit here but close to it. Some pity for Saul in his isolation is in order since the entire nation of Israel “loved” David (‘*ahav*, cf. vs. 22). In a sense, this nationwide adoration for David shows that the people are fickle when they had demanded a

king from Samuel. They were quick to abandon someone who fought long and valiantly on their behalf. Still there was time to resolve the situation if Saul would only abdicate.

**Vs. 29: Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.**

Two short sentences which are very appropriate almost at the conclusion of Chapter Eighteen. The verb *yasaph* translates as “still” (cf. 15.35) which indicates something that is ongoing or in the process of accumulating.

“Continually” is rendered literally as “all the days” which can be taken as suggestive that having adopted this attitude of fear and jealousy, Saul’s days were numbered.

**Vs. 30: Then the princes of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was highly esteemed.**

A wearisome verse, if you will, which brings Chapter Eighteen to a conclusion insofar as it demonstrates once more the unceasing state of war between Israel and the Philistines, that it would never be resolved until one exterminated the other. In many of the military encounters no specific place is mentioned which indicates this; they were too numbingly numerous to be counted. Besides, no one in particular was interested in keeping record, an indication that both sides were weary of interminable combat. As for the Philistines, now they had good reason to be angry because their champion Goliath had been slain. The same applies to Israel: the Philistines failed to keep their bargain of submission which Goliath himself had proclaimed so loudly and boldly before the two armies.

The conflict reaches a new intensity with mention of the Philistine “princes” (*sar*, cf. vs. 13 which there means ‘commander’). Because military situation at hand never had been resolved one way or the other, these princes can be taken as civilian leaders out for revenge and a determination that never would they become slaves to Israel. When David engages the Philistines, he does so simultaneously with Saul’s forces. There’s no hint yet of a tension reflected in these two groups which would be devastating to the nation as a whole, something the Philistines could exploit to their advantage. Perhaps a tacit agreement was made between Saul and David or between their representatives not to reveal this split.

*Yaqar* is the verb for “esteemed” or held in honor used with the adverb *me’od* (‘highly’) as in vs. 15.

## Chapter Nineteen

**Vs. 1: And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David.**

Another instance where the ubiquitous connective *w-* ('and') plays an important role at the beginning of a new chapter as we come off a series of dramatic events. It serves to give the impression that one incident is happening immediately after the next, leaving you breathless.

After a failed attempt to have David killed by accident, if you will, Saul knows this won't work. In fact, he must have entertained that idea seriously beforehand. Now he makes known his plan to a wider circle, Jonathan and his servants. Earlier Saul may have kept his intent completely to himself, but that would be difficult. In other words, probably he shared it with just a few very close advisers. We don't know the response of the servants, perhaps agreeing to save themselves but otherwise siding with David.

*Chaphats* is the verb for "delighted" (cf. 18.25) with the adverb *me'od* (cf. 18.30) as "much" or more to the point, excessively.

**Vs. 2: And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you; therefore take heed to yourself in the morning, stay in a secret place and hide yourself;**

This isn't news to David except that now he had direct access to what Saul was thinking and planning through his most trusted son, Jonathan. *Baqash* is the verb for "seeks" (cf. 16.16).

*Shamar* is the verb for "take heed" noted last in 13.14 which here means that David should be on guard about dealing with people in his confidence. Jonathan had more insight due to his closeness to Saul and could inform David instantly if a traitor were in the vicinity.

Jonathan advises David both to stay in a "secret place" or *seter* and to "hide" himself or *chava'*. A reference for the former is found next in 25.20: "And as she rode on the ass and came down under cover of the mountain." The latter is found in 10.22 but not noted there.

**Vs. 3: and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; and if I learn anything I will tell you."**

Judging by this verse, Jonathan had in mind a hiding place for David out in a gully or depression of sorts which provided natural shelter. At the same time it wasn't far from where Saul lived. The occasion at hand can be taken as a moment of relaxation when Saul went out for either an early morning or evening walk, the coolest times of the day.

Apparently Saul thought his son was trustworthy to confide his intent of killing David, and Jonathan would take maximum advantage of this trust. However, if he were discovered, Saul would put him to death as well. Words spoken earlier (14.44) were stuck in Jonathan's mind: "You shall surely die, Jonathan."

**Vs. 4: And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king sin against his servant David because he has not sinned against you and because his deeds have been of good service to you;**

Chances are these words (they continue through the next verse) were spoken in that field above and within earshot of David. Jonathan had to be careful with his father, keeping him away from David during their walk as well as keeping at bay any bodyguards that may have been in attendance.

Jonathan speaks rather forcefully using the word *chata'* or “sin” (cf. 15.30) with regard to David, a human being, this verb usually taken with respect to the Lord.

The adverb *me'od* (cf. vs. 1) is used for “good” or service which has been done excessively well.

**Vs. 5: for he took his life in his hand and he slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?”**

*Nephesh* is the noun for “life” and more commonly translates as soul as in 18.3.

*Teshuhah* means “victory” or more properly deliverance as in 11.13.

For the second time Jonathan reminds his father not to sin against David for killing him “without cause” or *chinam*, an adverb which also means in vain. It is found next in 25.31: “My lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause.”

**Vs. 6: And Saul hearkened to the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, “As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.”**

The verb “hearkened” or *shamah* (cf. 15.24) is used with the preposition *b-* prefaced to “voice” or *qol* (cf. 15.24) which reads literally “hearkened in the voice of Jonathan,” that is, Saul paid close attention to his son’s words.

While speaking within earshot of David, Jonathan was taking a considerable risk. However, he knew his father better than his siblings and used it to his advantage. Saul concurs in an almost matter-of-fact manner which pleased Jonathan (and David, hiding in the field). However, there is something not quite right...Saul is too compliant in light of his recent behavior and attitude, as though he were faking it even when invoking the Lord.

**Vs. 7: And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.**

When Jonathan calls David it was immediately after he was left alone in the field, barely able to restrain his excitement over his father's compliance. The verb *nagad* translates as "showed" and more commonly refers to the telling of something (cf. 10.16) which in the verse at hand is *davar* (cf. 18.20) or "things," that which Saul had just spoken.

Jonathan felt confident enough to bring David into Saul's presence "as before" which means that Saul restored him to his earlier position as commander of a thousand as well as being on hand to play the lyre. Nothing is said of this encounter which suggests a tension and loose alliance between the two. Certainly those Israelites who got wind of this apparent reconciliation were delighted, for it showed a unified front against the Philistines.

**Vs. 8: And there was war again; and David went out and fought with the Philistines and made a great slaughter among them, so that they fled before him.**

The key word here is "again" which takes the form of the verb *yasaph* (cf. 18.29) meaning an increase or repetition. Given its use relative to the Philistines, *yasaph* is indicative of weariness of what almost was becoming a habit and tradition of fighting them on a regular basis. We don't hear how the Philistines handled this continual warfare but seems it was less draining on them, having more resources and perhaps alliances with other tribes.

Use of the word *milchamah* as "war" (cf. 17.47) is indefinite, deliberately so, to reflect this state of affairs. Apparently David did a lot of damage which caused the Philistines to flee...but unfortunately to regroup for yet another encounter.

**Vs. 9: Then an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand; and David was playing the lyre.**

A verse essentially mirroring the same condition in 18.10-11 where the Lord is the corrupting influence, if you will, with that *ruach* ('spirit') which is *rahah* or "evil," both as in the two verses being cited. As there, the presence of evil is heightened by Saul sitting alone, possibly in the evening, with spear in hand.

The words "and David was playing the lyre" obviously heighten the sinister atmosphere though David is on guard after his earlier brush with death. The type of song isn't specified, but David must have chosen it deliberately to sooth the king. And so these notes drifted on the night air throughout the house where others nearby picked them up creating a melancholy atmosphere. Yet it was tempered by the fact that Saul could run his spear through David at any second just as he tried to do earlier.

**Vs. 10: And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear; but he eluded Saul so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped.**

In 18.11 Saul “thought” to carry out his action which uses the verb *‘amar* (to speak) whereas here for “sought” the verb is *baqash* (cf. vs. 2). In other words, the first incident seems less impulsive and thought-through than the second.

*Patar* is the verb for “eluded” meaning to split, to burst forth or to go free and has six other biblical references. “The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quite before the quarrel breaks out” [Prov 17.14].

The second sentence with two similar verbs where one would be sufficient can be taken as a way of assuring us that David was okay.

**Vs. 11: That night Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, “If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.”**

“That night” is not in the Hebrew text. However, given Saul’s intense desire to get rid of David, he must have sent these messengers that very night when under the influence of the evil spirit. Thus the imagery of night, Saul sitting along, spear in his hand and dispatching these messengers all make for one of the most ominous scenes in the Bible. *Mal’ak* is the noun for “messengers” noted last in 11.4.

Once the messengers arrived at David’s house...it must have been at night or well before dawn...they took up positions to watch him (*shamar*, cf. vs. 2). Since they couldn’t see clearly who was in the house, these messengers or essentially assassins had to wait until dawn.

We don’t have information as to how Michal discovered the plot. Either one of the messengers caved in or more likely her brother Jonathan sent word to her, outrunning the messengers...and just in time.

**Vs. 12: So Michal let David down through the window; and he fled away and escaped.**

This escape must have taken before dawn or before the messengers could see anyone moving around. When Michal got word of the assassination plot as noted in the previous verse, the person who brought this news must have spied out the location of Saul’s messengers around the house. Thus Michal could pick out a blind spot, if you will, allowing her husband to get away.

The two verbs *barach* and *malat* (‘fled’ and ‘escaped’) work hand in hand. It turned out that David made his way to Samuel at Ramah (cf. vs. 18).

**Vs. 13: Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes.**

*Teraphym* is the noun for “image” noted last in 15.23 though not always in the negative sense of idols as used here. In other words, Michal hastily made some kind of dummy to place in the bed in order to mislead the so-called messengers.

**Vs. 14: And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, “He is sick.”**

Most likely these messengers approached David’s house in the usual way instead of stealthily coming in through a window or unlocked door. They had to keep up the pretense of paying a visit in the name of the king so as not to arouse suspicion among the neighbors.

**Vs. 15: Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, “Bring him up to me in the bed that I may kill him.”**

This verse intimates a second group of messengers only this time with Saul himself accompanying them. To see her father making such a demand must have horrified Michal, daughter of Saul. Surely she and her brother Jonathan were determined more than ever from this point on to assist David even if it meant in eliminating her father. Perhaps Michal and/or Jonathan consulted Samuel as what to do. If they didn’t directly, they could have done it through intermediaries.

**Vs. 16: And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed with the pillow of goats' hair at its head.**

The previous verse intimates that Michal knew the intent of her father’s messengers whereas here they seem to have forced their way to the bedroom. All Michal could do was follow them upstairs with Saul at the head. Perhaps he had some of his so-called messengers restrain Michal downstairs which he prepared to kill David. All this, of course, had to be done as quietly as possible that they don’t wake up David. In the meanwhile Michal was bracing herself for what would happen when her father discovered the trick.

**Vs. 17: Saul said to Michal, “Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go so that he has escaped?” And Michal answered Saul, “He said to me, ‘Let me go; why should I kill you?’”**

*Ramah* is the verb for “deceived” and fundamentally means to cast, to throw and from which derives the hometown of Ramah. The verb is found next in 28.12: “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul.” Michal conveys her husband’s words to Saul, that he doesn’t wish to kill him. At least Saul doesn’t do harm to his daughter. If he did, those around him would get word out, and all Israel would revolt.

Behind the restraint which David showed through Michal lay his awareness of having been anointed by Samuel. As pointed out several times, that anointing presumably was for him to be king though it was not specified as such. The anointing was a kind of sacrament which had a lasting effect, and David is clearly proof of this. As for the ambiguity about his anointing, it was

left for David to figure out on his own, especially when reflecting on how he had comported himself in difficult circumstances.

**Vs. 18: Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt at Naioth.**

To play it safe, David didn't inform Michal about his intended destination of Ramah in order to consult Samuel. Given her position as daughter of the king and her love for David, she wasn't disposed to comprehend her husband's relationship with Samuel. Besides, Michal was too young to know Samuel first hand though certainly she heard of his fame as the last judge of Israel. We can be almost certain that this knowledge was colored by her father's rejection, so indeed Michal would have had mixed emotions if David told him of his destination.

Given Samuel's position as retired senior statesman, he must have been informed to all that was going on, of how David was attempting to discern the meaning of his anointing. He knew that one day David would pay him a visit, so now was the opportunity. Both men decided not to stay in Ramah but move to nearby Naioth because of the spies in hot pursuit. Saul knew that most likely David would head for Samuel, so rightly he anticipated this move.

**Vs. 19: And it was told Saul, "Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah."**

No precise information is given as to who informed Saul about David's location. Because David was known throughout Israel, surely some of Saul's supporters found this out. Then again, perhaps some of the Philistines got the information and were all too willing to help out.

**Vs. 20: Then Saul sent messengers to take David; and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.**

Saul doesn't waste any time going after David, his messenger-assassins following his orders. Upon reaching Naioth they see a "company" of prophets or *lahaqah*, this being the only occurrence in the Bible. The "prophesying" or *navy'* (cf. 10.13) most likely means a kind of babbling instead of coming forth with predictions or warnings associated later with prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. It must have been quite a sight for these would-be assassins to behold Samuel "as head" or *natsav* (cf. 15.12) over (*hal-*) these men, the number of which isn't given. All were making what most likely was a loud, incoherent noise, at least to an outsider.

Samuel could have been in their midst or more precisely, on a rock or platform overseeing the event. The occasion for such prophesying isn't given and could have been a ruse in order to confuse Saul's messengers. Whether or not this is true, they joined in thereby defusing the threat of assassinating David.

**Vs. 21: When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied.**

Those who informed Saul perhaps weren't the first batch of messenger-assassins who remained with Samuel but other persons in the vicinity who had witnessed this unusual sight. Saul sends two further groups who similarly joined in prophesying. During all this Saul recalled his earlier experience of coming under the spell of prophecy. He must have thought of what became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" [10.12] and didn't want that to interfere with his deadly intent. This intent trumped his confrontation with a memory of divine intervention which could have changed everything, and this is the real tragedy of Saul.

**Vs. 22: Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great well that is in Secu; and he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And one said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah."**

After all this strange behavior Saul himself goes to Ramah to get a first hand assessment of the situation. The well in Secu, as well as Naioth, are either within Ramah proper or adjacent to it. Saul made sure those accompanying him were not meant to assassinate David but simply to gather information. At least Saul knew David's whereabouts and could track him down once he left the protection of Samuel at Ramah. Besides, the last person Saul wanted to see was Samuel.

**Vs. 23: And he went from there to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah.**

Most likely this descent of the *Ruach* of God was something Saul wished to avoid (cf. 10.10). If it did, Saul might be converted, and David would become king. Thus Saul preferred hanging onto his kingship more than being possessed by the Lord...in other words, two different types of attachment. In the verse at hand, this prophesying was continuous as Saul moved along, making for an astonishing sight which must have confused and frighten people, let alone those who are in his company.

**Vs. 24: And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Hence it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"**

Apparently Saul was not aware of coming into the presence of Samuel as he prophesied naked before him. Nothing unfavorable is recorded about this since it was taken as more or less normal behavior for a person under the Spirit's influence. Obviously there came a time when Saul ceased his prophesying (i.e., the next day), rose and apparently gave up his search for David. Chances are Samuel looked at Saul with complete disgust yet didn't say a word. The same applies to David, for he has remained at Naioth in Ramah as the first verse of the next chapter indicates.