**1 Samuel Commentary**

**1 Samuel Chapter 1**

1Sm 1:1

**“Now there was a certain man.”** The book of 1 Samuel opens up in a way that reveals to us that this record, like the other records in the Bible, is not an invented, “Once Upon A Time” story. It is real history. It involves real people, real places, and a real God who is interested in, and involved with, people’s lives. The first verse of 1 Samuel opens by naming a place and setting it in a geographical location, and also by naming the man Elkanah and grounding him with four generations of ancestors and by saying he was from the tribe of Ephraim. Romans tells us that the records in the Old Testament were “written to teach us,” and we can understand how and why that is. The God who cared about the people of the Old Testament cares about us and is involved with our lives, and God does not change. In learning about the events and people in the Old Testament, especially as we study them through the lens of the New Testament, we learn about God, life, and ourselves.

**“Ramathaim.”** A dual name for the town of Ramah (cf. 1 Sam. 1:19 where Ramah is said to be Elkanah’s home, and 1 Sam. 7:17 where it is said to be Samuel’s home). But the town of Ramah was associated with at least three different hills which are right next to each other, so Ramah here could be expanded “Ramathaim.” The name *zophim* is related to Zuph, the man in the verse, such that Ramathaim-zophim could be the Ramah that was founded or occupied by the family descended from Zuph. Also, since Ramah was associated with different hills, it is possible that the descendants of one family, the Zuphites, primarily occupied one hill while other families occupied other places in Ramah. All this would have been well-known at the time of Samuel, but the details are lost to us now.

**“Elkanah.”** Likely a Levite living with the tribe of Ephraim, and he is in the priestly line in 1 Chronicles 6:27-28.

**“an Ephraimite.”** Elkanah was a Levite, but he lived in the tribal territory of Ephraim so here he is called “an Ephraimite.” However, the town of Ramah is not technically in Ephraim but in Benjamin. It is possible that since the tribe of Benjamin was reduced to 600 families, that people from Ephraim expanded south into the tribal area of Benjamin. In this early part of 1 Samuel, the action occurs in the central hill country of Israel. The Bible tells us that Elkanah was a Levite.

1Sm 1:2

**“Hannah.”** Her name means “grace” or “mercy.”

**“Peninnah.”** Her name means “pearl.”

1Sm 1:3

**“worship.”** The Hebrew verb is *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), and it is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.” The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. *Shachah* is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“Yahweh of Armies.”** 1 Samuel 1:3 is the first time in the Bible that the name of God, “Yahweh of Armies” is used. The Hebrew is translated “LORD of hosts” in many English versions, but very few people today think of a “host” in reference to an army, making that translation unclear at best. The English word “host” in the phrase “Lord of hosts” is derived from the Late Latin *hostis* “stranger; enemy” (same basic root as in “hostile”), and referred to an army or an orderly multitude. Thus, the “heavenly host” is the orderly army of spirit beings, and also the orderly “army” of stars in the sky, while “Yahweh of hosts” refers to God’s army of spirit beings and, in the Old Testament, Israel.

The word “host” is confusing because the English word “host” also means a person who entertains guests, but the Latin root of the entertainment type “host” is *hospes*, not *hostis*. It is too bad that both *hospes* and *hostis* developed into the English word “host,” but that is the situation. To properly understand the Bible, the student of Scripture must know that “Lord of hosts” does not refer to God’s entertainment of guests, but rather to His being the God of His “armies.”

Andrew Steinmann writes: “In military contexts, ‘armies’ in ‘Yahweh of armies’ can refer to Israel’s army (1 Sam. 17:45). The noun צָבָא [*tsaba'*, “army”] is often used for the army of Israel or for an enemy army (e.g. 1 Sam. 12:9; 14:50; 17:55). In this phrase with יְהֹוָה [Yahweh], the noun is always used in the plural צְבָא֖וֹת. The plural is never clearly explained in the OT, but 1 Samuel 17:45 indicates its military significance by using another plural in parallel to it: David refers to “Yahweh of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel”….The plural may denote that Yahweh commands a heavenly army (the angels; see BDB, s. v. צָבָא, 1 b; cf. 2 Kings 6:17) as well as an earthly one (Israel’s army). The stars and other heavenly bodies can also be called an ‘army’ (Gen. 2:1; Isa. 40:26; 45:12; BDB, 1 c). In that case, it probably refers to the apparent regimented alignment of the stars like the alignment of soldiers in the army’s ranks (i.e., the stars are grouped in constellations where each has its specific place and each appears in the sky in the proper season; see Gen. 1:14).”[[1]](#footnote-30224)

Although the meaning of the name “Yahweh of armies” is not specifically stated in the Bible, that should not surprise us because we are not told the specific meaning of any of the names of Yahweh in the Bible, we learn their meaning from the vocabulary itself and the contexts in which the name is used. In this case, “armies” is a well-known word, and there is plenty of biblical context to understand that God has enemies and that He commands armies who fight for Him and with Him. For example, when the Israelites left Egypt, God referred to them as “my armies” (Exod. 7:4), and Exodus also says, “Yahweh is a man of war” (Exod. 15:3). When God came to help Israel leave Egypt’s control, He came with thousands of angels (Deut. 33:2). Also, the warfare between enemy angels, while not a major subject in the Bible, is nevertheless certainly present (Dan. 10:13; Jude 1:9), as is the warfare between God’s angels and God’s enemies on earth (Gen. 19:12-13; Josh. 5:13-14; 2 Kings 19:35). In fact, the angel who appeared to Joshua introduced himself as the commander of Yahweh’s army (Josh. 5:14). Furthermore, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, will lead armies and destroy God’s enemies (Ps. 2:6-9; Isa. 11:4; 63:1-5; Rev. 19:19-21).

The fact that 1 Samuel 1:3 says that Elkanah went yearly to Shiloh to worship “Yahweh of Armies” tells us that although this is the first time we see that name for God in the Bible, it was not new in the culture. God may have revealed the name to some prophet in Israel, or it may be in the wars that Israel was fighting, God’s help and presence were so powerfully manifested that “Yahweh of Armies” was invented as a fitting name for Him. We can see that people were comfortable enough with the name “Yahweh of Armies” that it was used to directly address God in prayer, as Hannah did: “O Yahweh of Armies, if you will see…” (1 Sam. 1:11). Once it was introduced here in Samuel, the name “Yahweh of Armies” was commonly used in the Bible, occurring almost 250 times in the Old Testament.

God has enemies with whom He, His angels, His human armies, and His Messiah are at war. This is very solid evidence that God is not in control of everything that happens on earth. If God were in control of both sides of the conflict between good and evil, then His kingdom would be divided and would fall, just as Jesus said, “And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom is not able to stand” (Mark 3:24, cf. Matt. 12:25-26; Luke 11:17-18).

[For more on the war between God and the Devil, and that God is not in control of everything that happens, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“this man would go up...to worship...at Shiloh.”** Shiloh was about 16 miles from Ramah as the crow flies, and a few more miles when traveling by roads, so the journey could be made in one day, although it would take most of the day.

1Sm 1:5

**“gave a double portion.”** The Hebrew is difficult, more literally “one portion of double faces (or “of double noses”) but what does that mean? Most commentators assume the two “noses” means a double portion and from the context and the fact he loved Hannah that may be correct. But following the Septuagint here, other versions focus on the word “one.” For example, the RSV reads, “although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb.” But the context does seem to indicate that Hannah got special treatment in some way.

1Sm 1:6

**“her rival.”** Hannah’s rival was Penninah, Elkanah’s other wife. As we see in other places in the Bible (such as when Abraham took the slave Hagar as a concubine), and in history, the wives of a polygamous man often did not blend into “one happy family.” In fact, it was often the case that the two wives would each have their own tent, and the husband went back and forth between them.

**“to irritate her.”** The Hebrew is related to the word “thunder,” and Fox (The Schocken Bible) has “making her complain.” Penninah would purposely torment Hannah, making her complain; to irritate her.

1Sm 1:8

**“Am I not better to you than ten sons.”** Elkanah was trying to be helpful, but his question almost certainly did not help. So much of a woman’s social life was just among other women, and between feeling cursed by God and scorned by other women, Elkanah was not better than having sons. Elkanah’s ignorance of Hannah’s situation shows up in the fact that he does not even seem to be aware that Peninnah was cruel to Hannah.

1Sm 1:9

**“the temple of Yahweh.”** The word “temple” is being used generally, as the place of God’s residence. At this point in history, God lived in a tent, the “Tent of Meeting,” often referred to in Christian circles as “the Tabernacle.”

1Sm 1:10

**“wept, yes, wept.”** The verb is doubled for emphasis in Hebrew, and is the figure of speech polyptoton. Hannah “wept, yes, wept,” meaning she wept deeply, freely, bitterly.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16, “eat, yes, eat.”]

1Sm 1:11

**“see, yes, see.”** The Hebrew text has the figure of speech polyptoton. Hannah wanted Yahweh to really see her and her situation and intervene on her behalf.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16, “eat, yes, eat.”]

**“remember me.”** In this context, “remember” is being used idiomatically, meaning to act on one’s behalf. Hannah was not asking for God to simply mentally remember her, but to support her and act on her behalf.

[For more on the use of “remember,” see commentary on Gen. 8:1.]

**“male child.”** The literal Hebrew is “seed of men.” While “male child” may be the correct meaning in this context, there may also be a deeper meaning: the use of the word “seed” can indicate that Hannah wanted a child who could then reproduce other children down through the generations.

1Sm 1:12

**“continued a long time praying.”** The Hebrew text is more literally something such as, “as she multiplied (or ‘made many’) to her praying.” Hannah was desperate. This was not a short “said and done” prayer. She took a long time in petitioning Yahweh for what she so badly wanted. Godly men and women throughout the Scriptures pray a lot, and they realize their weakness and inability to accomplish their desire apart from help from God. There is no prideful “I can make it happen” attitude in Hannah, and no thought that if she “just had faith” she would gain her desire. Hannah knew what all Christians should know: she could not force God’s hand; she just had to rely on His grace and mercy. She came to God with humility, honesty, passion, and brokenness—a way that every Christian should pray. Her future was in the hands of God.

[For more on faith and trust, see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

1Sm 1:13

**“Eli thought she was drunk.”** At first blush, we can see that Eli may have thought that Hannah was drunk because most people did not pray that long or move their mouth without discernably saying something when they prayed. Prayers in the ancient world were either said out loud, or said to oneself in the heart, they were not usually spoken in such a way as Hannah was doing. Nevertheless, it is a sad situation when the High Priest’s first thought is that Hanna was drunk. Eli had many faults, and here we see one of them: assuming the worst about someone before finding out the facts.

1Sm 1:14

**“Put away your wine from you.”** Eli was so quick to judge some people’s sins, but would do nothing about his own sons who committed horrific sins, and right at the Tent of Meeting itself! But so many people are that way—they excuse their own sins and/or the sins of their family and friends, but are harsh towards other people.

1Sm 1:16

**“a daughter of Belial.”** Being a son or daughter of Belial is to be a child of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

**“the abundance of my concern and my being provoked.”** The concept of “abundance” is being distributed to both Hannah’s concern and her being provoked.

1Sm 1:18

**“May your servant find favor in your eyes.”** The High Priest represented Yahweh.

**“So the woman went her way.”** There is much in a seemingly unimportant sentence. The text does not name Hannah, but says, “the woman.” It was Hannah as a woman, a wife, and a potential mother that was at stake here, and she had just been blessed by the High Priest. As a woman, Hannah went forth, grasping onto the blessing of Eli as the Word of Yahweh that she would have a son, and she was no longer downcast. Hope had been given, joy had been restored.

1Sm 1:19

**“worshiped before Yahweh.”** That is, worshiped at the Tabernacle, almost certainly in the presence of the High Priest. In that sense, they did worship before (or “in the presence of”) Yahweh. This is the same word for worship as in 1 Sam. 1:3.

**“Elkanah knew Hannah his wife.”** An idiom for sexual intercourse. See commentary Matthew 1:25.

**“remembered her.”** “Remembered” is an idiom for “acted on her behalf.” See commentary on 1 Samuel 1:11.

1Sm 1:20

**“in the course of time.”** The Hebrew is an idiom, “at the revolutions (or “circuits”) of the days” and it is about the circuit of the days or the sun, or about a year later. The Hebrew idioms about the turning of days were a godly reminder of the “wheel of life”—birth, growth, death—that is the essence of life on earth (cf. James 3:6). Here, the days turn and Samuel is born. Eventually, he will grow, marry, and have children of his own, then age and die. Samuel’s godly mother Hannah also aged and died, but she is not mentioned again after 1 Sam. 2:21.

The context lets us know that here in 1 Samuel 1, the “course of time” (“circuits of days”) for Hannah to give birth was about a year, because the following year, when Elkanah and his family went to offer their yearly offering at the Tabernacle, Samuel was already born (1 Sam. 1:21). So it would have been very soon after Elkanah and Hannah got back to their hometown of Ramah that Hannah got pregnant, and when Elkanah took his family to the Tabernacle the following year, Samuel would have been only a few months old at best.

**“Samuel.”** There is much discussion on the name “Samuel.” Although in its present form in the Hebrew text it seems related to “God heard,” it is much more likely that it is related to the Hebrew *shaal* (“ask”) and *el*, God, thus “asked of God.”

1Sm 1:22

**“…until the child is weaned.”** Hannah’s sentence starts with “until,” which is more accurate than “after” or “once,” which many versions have. This is an emotional time. Hannah envisions herself giving up her beloved baby boy to the High Priest and then only seeing him again once a year. She does not speak in a complete sentence. She speaks in a plea, with her eyes, her tone of voice, perhaps with the shake of her head. She looks at her husband Elkanah, who had the authority in the house to force her to go, and silently asks, “Can I wait.” “Can I wait...until the child is weaned?” Elkanah, who loved her and no doubt saw her pain but understood her resolution to keep her commitment to give Samuel to be a Nazirite and serve God throughout his life, agreed to her request.

**“appear before Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “appear *before* the face.” Hannah may have also had in mind Exodus 34:23, that the males appear before the face of Yahweh three times a year.

**“stay there forever.”** The Hebrew is the figure hyperbole, meaning for his lifetime.

1Sm 1:23

**“may Yahweh fulfill his word.”** In this case, the word of God refers to the blessing of Eli, the High Priest, who blessed Hannah, saying may God grant her request that she requested (1 Sam. 1:17), and also to the fact that what Hannah had requested was a boy, whom she would then give to God as a Nazirite to serve God throughout his life (1 Sam. 1:11). Here, Elkanah shows that he understands the promise that Hannah has made and that the High Priest blessed, and he reminds Hannah of her commitment as he left on his annual journey to Shiloh to worship. So Elkanah allowed Hannah to stay home but reminded her that there would soon come a time when she would not be able to stay home, but would need to fulfill her vow. Hannah, godly and faithful, did indeed fulfill her vow once little Samuel was weaned (1 Sam. 1:24).

**“until she weaned him.”** Women weaned later in ancient times than they generally do today. In part, because baby formula and other foods young children usually eat today were not available, so a weaned child generally had to eat whatever was available for the parents to eat. If 2 Maccabees 7:27 is any guide, weaning around three years old was common.

1Sm 1:24

**“three bulls.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads “three bulls,” but “three-year-old” is the reading of the Septuagint and the Qumran scroll, and many scholars think that is the correct reading and that the Masoretic text is corrupted. The fact is that either sacrifice, a bull or three bulls, was much more than the Law required for the redemption of a firstborn son (Lev. 12:6) and likely reflects the wealth of Elkanah. Gordon Wenham writes in support of there being three bulls: “One bull was for the burnt offering, one for the purification offering that was expected after childbirth (Lev. 12), and the third for the peace offering in payment for her vow. An ephah of flour (1 Sam. 1:24) is approximately three times the normal quantity of flour to be offered with a bull (Num. 15:9), which supports the idea that three bulls were in fact offered on this occasion.”[[2]](#footnote-32304) However, something unexplained in Wenham’s argument is that a bull was not required after the birth of a child, but a year-old lamb was (Lev. 12:6). It has been suggested that Elkanah brought much more than the Law required because it would help offset the expense of caring for Samuel, after all, most families that offered sacrifices did not leave babies to take care of when they left the Tabernacle.

**“skin-bottle.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

**“the child was a child.”** This apparent tautology is actually the figure of speech antanaclasis (“word clashing”), in which the same word is used in a sentence (or in very close proximity) with different meanings, and the antanaclasis catches the reader’s attention and brings an emphasis to the text.[[3]](#footnote-18207) Perhaps the most famous English example of antanaclasis was in the speech that Benjamin Franklin made to the early Continental Congress about the American Revolution in which he addressed the division among them and the danger of that division in the light of their treason against England: “Gentlemen, we must all hang together or most assuredly we shall hang separately.” Other examples could include: “We were driving all day in a driving rain,” and “I wait on tables while my customers wait on me.” There are many biblical examples of antanaclasis, for example, Matthew 8:22 says, “Let the dead bury their dead,” i.e., let the spiritually dead bury their physically dead relatives. Romans 2:12 says, “For as many as have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law,” i.e., those people who sinned who did not have the regulations of the Law will perish but not because they were judged by the judgments in the Law. Romans 9:6 says, “For they are not all Israel, who are *descended* from Israel.” The meaning is that not every Israelite by birth is a part of the true believers of Israel who will be part of the resurrection of the Righteous and receive everlasting life. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB) says, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.” In this antanaclasis, the Greek word *hamartia* (#266 ἁμαρτία), which can mean “sin” or “sin offering,” is used with two different meanings, and the REV catches the sense: “He made him who did not know sin *to be* a sin offering on our behalf” (cf. CJB, NLT). Other examples of antanaclasis include Judges 11:27; Ezekiel 20:9. There are times when a word in a general context has different meanings but it is not the figure antanaclasis, it is simply the fact that most words have more than one meaning (see commentary on 1 Sam. 14:16, “multitude”).

Here in 1 Samuel 1:24, the word “child” has two different meanings, “the child (little boy) was a child (very young),” but the antanaclasis catches our attention and emphasizes that Samuel was very young when taken to the Tabernacle. This was a great sacrifice for Hannah, and showed her love for God and her dedication to Him.

[See figure of speech “antanaclasis.”]

1Sm 1:25

**“the bull.”** The Hebrew reads the singular, “bull,” but it sometimes occurs that a singular noun is used in Hebrew as a collective singular (cf. Gen. 15:9-10, “bird” is singular in Hebrew). Or, since this bull is associated with bringing Samuel to Eli, it may be that this was the bull specifically associated with Hannah’s vow.

**“and brought the child to Eli.”** For Eli to have sons he would have had to have had a wife and likely daughters, and would have lived with a large family contingent, so there would have been women who would oversee the care of Samuel. Death frequently came so suddenly and unexpectedly in the ancient world that having a large extended family living together provided security and protection for all. That way, if a father or mother died, the family took care of each other.

1Sm 1:26

**“as your soul lives.”** This phrase occurs in other places as well (cf. 1 Sam. 17:55; 20:3; 25:26; etc). It was a way of placing yourself under an oath that you were telling the truth. The phrase, “as Yahweh lives” was very similar (cf. Judg. 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam. 20:3; etc.).

1Sm 1:27

**“request that I requested.”** The Hebrew text uses the noun and the verb of the same word.

**“requested from him.”** The Hebrew is written in such a way as to indicate that what Hannah requested came from God’s supply of blessings. It could more literally be translated, “requested from with Him.”

1Sm 1:28

**“And he worshiped.”** This refers to Samuel and is a summary statement showing that Hannah’s prayer and promise had come to pass. This is the same word for worship as in 1 Sam. 1:3.

**“lend...lent.”** The Hebrew has a wordplay on “ask.” “Ask” is *shaal*, and “lent” is from the same Hebrew root. But “lend” or more accurately “lend on request,” contains the idea that what is “lent” was asked for, and that is why there is the lexical tie between “ask” and “lend,” and the Hebrew text picks up on the lexical tie between the two words. We do not normally think of “lending” a child to Yahweh, especially since Samuel was “lent” for his whole life (“as long as he lives”) so Hannah would never expect to get him back, but the idea was not to be accurate in that way but rather to emphasize the fact that via Hannah’s vow, Yahweh in a sense asked for Samuel. This may also help Elkanah’s statement to Hannah, “May Yahweh fulfill His word.” Also, if Hannah felt that Yahweh in some manner asked for the child, along with her vow, that may have helped her let go of Samuel at such a young age.

**1 Samuel Chapter 2**

1Sm 2:1

**“Hannah prayed and said.”** Hannah’s prayer is a wonderful example of a praise prayer. Although most prayers are asking for something, prayer can be praise as well.

**“My horn is lifted high in Yahweh.”** Hannah is using an animal metaphor (hypocatastasis; see commentary on Rev. 20:2), when an ox or other horned animal was feeling strong, free, and full of life their horn was lifted up.

**“My mouth speaks boldly against.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “my mouth is enlarged over my enemies.” Hannah had been derided for years because she was barren, now she can speak boldly against her enemies and rejoice in Yahweh’s deliverance.

**“salvation.”** This is not everlasting life salvation, but temporal salvation on earth; deliverance from her enemies.

1Sm 2:2

**“There is no one other than you​.”** The “you” is second-person singular. Yahweh alone is God. Hannah speaks of Yahweh in the first and third phrases, but to Him in the second phrase.

1Sm 2:3

**“so high, so high *and mighty*.”** The Hebrew is “so high, so high.”

**“arrogance.”** The word “arrogance” is a noun form in Hebrew. “Arrogance” means “arrogant speech.”

1Sm 2:4

**“bows...are shattered.”** This is a difficult sentence for a couple of reasons. Some versions say, “bow...is broken,” while other versions have “bows...are broken.” The reason for the difference is that the word “bow” is singular in Hebrew, while the verb translated “are broken” is plural. The noun-verb disagreement is likely a case where “bow” is being used as a singular because it is being used as the class of weaponry, i.e., “the bow,” and it is not being used as a single bow.

We should note that the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “broken” can also be “terrified, dismayed.” This verse could also be saying that the mighty bowmen are terrified while those people who used to be weak are armed with strength. C. F. Keil translates the verse, “Bow-heroes are confounded,” and writes, “The thought to be expressed is, not that the bow itself is to be broken, but that the heroes who carry the bow are to be confounded or broken inwardly.”[[4]](#footnote-10142)

1Sm 2:5

**“seven sons.”** The word seven is masculine, indicating seven sons. The number seven is used in Hannah’s poetry to refer to a perfect number of sons. She herself had six children, Samuel and five other children (1 Sam. 2:21).

1Sm 2:6

**“and brings up,”** At face value, this is a reference to resurrection.

1Sm 2:7

**“makes poor and makes rich.”** The Hebrew uses causative verbs, so “makes poor” is one verb and “makes rich” is another.

1Sm 2:8

**“refuse heap.”** The Hebrew is a general reference to a refuse or garbage heap. Although the word gets translated “dunghill” in some older translations, there is no specific reference to “dung” in the word. The poor are scavengers and live off of things that the rich people don’t want. The same thing is true today in many third-world countries.

**“For the pillars of the earth are Yahweh’s.”** Yahweh upholds the physical earth and implied is that in the same way He upholds the moral and ethical standards on earth such that justice is eventually done for all.

1Sm 2:9

**“the wicked will become silent in darkness.”** The wicked will “become silent” (die) in darkness, the darkness of death and the tomb. This verse adds to the evidence that when a person dies they are dead in every way and not alive in any form. The wicked dead are not “suffering in Hell,” they are dead and silent. Eventually, they will be raised from the dead for the Day of Judgment and will be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will burn up and be annihilated—silent and gone forever.

[For more on the dead being dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“for no man will prevail by strength.”** This likely refers to prevailing over death, but it can include the idea of prevailing in this life by human strength.

1Sm 2:10

**“shattered.”** The meaning of the Hebrew word translated “shattered” can also be “terrified, dismayed.” This fits well with the context that God thunders against them.

**“his anointed one.”** In Hebrew, the word “anointed” is “messiah.” Hannah looked forward to the future Messianic Kingdom, ruled by the Messiah. The reign of the Messiah was foretold even in Genesis and it would be glorious. Here in Samuel, Israel was not yet a kingdom, so Hannah is not ultimately looking forward to just another earthly king, but rather to God’s appointed king and Messiah. Nevertheless, she would have almost certainly known the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy 17 that there would be earthly kings of Israel before the Messianic reign, so she would have been anticipating an earthly monarchy, which we know to be the Davidic Monarchy. It is also likely that she also thought, due to the circumstances of her pregnancy, that her son would somehow play a role in that monarchy, which indeed he did, anointing first Saul and then David himself.

[For more on the “anointed one,” see commentary on 1 Samuel 12:3].

1Sm 2:12

**“sons of Belial.”** “Belial” is a name of the Devil and the “sons of Belial” are children of the Devil. There is much debate among scholars as to what “Belial” means. The Hebrew is *beliya`al* (#01100 בְּלִיַּ֫עַל). Recent scholars have placed the meaning in the category of “worthless.” However, it is recognized by the way the word is used in the OT that it refers to a person “whose activities include those that would quickly destroy the moral fiber of a society….”[[5]](#footnote-31531) Although the etymology is debated, *beliya`al* seems to come from something related to Satan or the underworld. Some scholars argue that it comes from the word “Baal.” Other theories are that it comes from an Akkadian goddess of the underworld, or that it means “those who throw off the yoke [of God], or that it refers to those “without benefit,” or that it refers to a personified enemy. The Arabic cognate word has to do with being entangled or to harm, injure. In the Qumran texts and the Jewish pseudepigrapha, the word is used in a personified manner, which is the way that the NT uses a similar word, “Belial” (2 Cor. 6:15; “*Beliar*” in the Greek text).[[6]](#footnote-25600) The phrase, “man of Belial” seems to be used in the OT of people who have a relation to Belial as an evil god, and it is also used to describe the attributes of those people (cf. Deut. 15:9). Thus, we can assert that a man of Belial is a man in league with the Devil, knowingly or unknowingly, as the children of the Devil are in the New Testament.

The Bible never says when or why, but at some time in their lives, Eli’s two sons had made the Devil their god (most likely by making something that the Devil controls and offers, such as money or power, their “god”).

Although everyone sins, and some people sin horribly, the Bible shows that there is a difference between most sinners and some sinners who have actually made the Devil their god, and the Devil has become their “father.” Some of the religious leaders that Jesus dealt with had done that (John 8:44). Also, Elymas the sorcerer whom Paul dealt with was a “child of the Devil” (Acts 13:10). The children of the Devil reflect the nature of the Devil and are consistently evil and against God, and the Devil helps them and supports their evil work.

The phrase, “son of Belial” (also, “children of Belial;” “sons of Belial;” “man of Belial;” KJV) is a phrase the Bible uses to communicate the special relationship between the “father,” the Devil, and the “son” (or “child”). Although the Bible does not describe the exact nature of the relationship between the Devil and his children, we know from the scope of Scripture that it is a spiritual relationship and an unbreakable bond and that Jesus referred to it as the unforgivable sin (Matt. 12:31).

“Belial” occurs 16 times in the Old Testament (Deut. 12:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 25:25; 30:22; 2 Sam. 16:7; 20:1; 23:6; 1 Kings 21:10; 21:13 (2x); 2 Chron. 13:7). The Hebrew noun *beliyaal* is a name for the Devil and it means “worthless,” and also in Jewish literature, it was a name for the Devil. The New Testament also uses it as a name for the Devil: “What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:15). Every “name” of the Devil has a meaning, and the names God gives the Devil are “mini-portraits” that show us what he “looks like” and reveal how he acts. The Devil is “Worthless,” and people who are children of the Devil are “worthless” to God; in fact, worse than worthless.

The Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 2:12 reads, “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial,” and some English versions read that way (cf. DBY, Douay-Rheims, KJV, WEB). However, because the Hebrew word *beliyaal* means “worthless,” many English translations miss the spiritual significance of “Belial,” and translate it as if it were an adjective describing a person’s character. Although it is grammatically possible to take the phrase “son of worthless” as a phrase describing a worthless person (cf. “Eli’s sons were wicked men” (NIV); or “Now the sons of Eli were worthless men” (NASB)), that is not the truth that the Word of God is trying to convey. The phrase “son of Belial” shows the special spiritual connection between the Devil and the person such that the person has become a child of the Devil, so when an English version takes the noun *beliyaal* as if it were simply an adjective, the reader misses the vital lesson the Bible is teaching about the kind of people that children of the Devil are and how they behave.

Jesus knew a lot about the Devil and his children, and he learned it from the Old Testament. The Old Testament shows that the sons of Belial are enemies of God and they reflect the Devil’s nature. Like Cain, they are envious, murderers, liars, and show no genuine godly concern for humankind (Gen. 4:8-9; 1 John 3:12). They lead people away from God and into idolatry (Deut. 13:13); they rape and murder (Judg. 19:22-28), and get people involved in ungodly wars that cost thousands of innocent lives (Judg. 20:11-14); they do not “know” God, but defame God and the things of God (1 Sam. 2:12-17); they can be involved in blatant and harmful sexual sin (1 Sam. 2:22); they resent godly leadership and work to weaken it (1 Sam. 10:27; 2 Sam. 20:1); they sow division (1 Sam. 30:22; 2 Chron. 13:7); they lie even when it results in the death of the innocent (1 Kings 21:10, 13), and they must be dealt with by spiritual power, not just the “hands” of the flesh (2 Sam. 23:6). The New Testament adds more to what the Old Testament says. They do the works of the Devil (John 8:44) and as the enemies of God they always try to pervert the ways of God (Acts 13:10). For example, they twist the words of God and make God’s ways hard to obey (Matt. 15:3-9; Luke 11:46).

God authored the Old Testament with the Messiah in mind, and Jesus gained insight from the Old Testament as to what kind of people he was dealing with when he encountered the children of the Devil. No wonder he told his disciples not to try to win over the Pharisees (Matt. 15:14). While he constantly spent time with “regular sinners” such as prostitutes and tax collectors and worked to turn them from error to truth, when it came to the religious leaders he was dealing with, he told his apostles, “Leave them alone! They are blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). What we see from the Bible is that the children of the Devil are unswervingly evil and have to be dealt with by force and the law, which is why it is important to have godly laws like the Law of Moses, such that much of what they do is illegal.

[For more on the children of the Devil and the unforgivable sin, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

1Sm 2:13

**“Now the rule of the priests.”** This “rule” had nothing to do with the Law of Moses, yet by this time it had become a custom. This is more evidence of priestly greed. The fork with three prongs could bring out a lot of meat.

**“while the flesh was boiling.”** It was the custom, and tied to the Mosaic Law, that when a person offered certain kinds of sacrifices, the fat was burned, the priests got a share, and the rest of the meat was eaten by the person who brought the sacrifice, who then most often would share the meat with others, particularly with his family if they were present (e.g., Lev. 7:15-20; 1 Sam. 1:4-5; Prov. 7:14)

1Sm 2:14

**“All that the fork brought up the priest would take.”** Now we see why the fork had three teeth, to be able to bring up more meat.

**“This is what they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites.”** The priests were taking advantage of the people.

1Sm 2:15

**“burned...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

1Sm 2:16

**“Let the fat first be burned, yes, burned into smoke.”** Many of the worshipers knew enough of the Law of Moses to know that what the priests were doing was not according to the Law, but the priests would have had a small army of priests and Levites at the Tabernacle and had the manpower to bully the worshipers. For the translation, “burned into smoke,” see commentary on Exodus 29:13.

1Sm 2:20

**“Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife.”** Eli was apparently thankful for Samuel and would bless Elkanah and Hannah when they came to the Tabernacle. Here, Elkanah’s “wife” is Hannah, not Peninnah.

**“to his place.”** This reflects the custom that it was the man who would own the property. The couple’s house was, in the culture, the man’s house.

1Sm 2:21

**“Yahweh visited Hannah.”** Yahweh had intervened and blessed Hannah so she got pregnant. It does not mean Yahweh was somehow personally present but rather that Yahweh “visited” through the circumstances of Hannah’s life.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

1Sm 2:22

**“the women who served.”** There were women who served at the Tabernacle (Exod. 38:8).

**“at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** Which “entrance” this is, is not specified. It seems unlikely that the women would be allowed into the courtyard where the altar was, but perhaps they were; many other Laws were being broken. Or they could have been outside the Tabernacle enclosure helping people with their offerings, etc.

1Sm 2:25

**“they did not listen to the voice of their father.”** One of the problems with the Levitical system was that the priesthood was attained by heredity, not by being qualified for it. Eli’s sons were clearly not qualified to be priests because of the way they acted, but since the priesthood was hereditary, they could not be removed from it.

**“therefore Yahweh desired to put them to death.”** Although most versions translate the Hebrew *ki* in this verse as “because” (CJB, KJV), “since” (NAB, CSB), or “for” (ESV, NIV), the word “therefore” is to be preferred in light of the Scope of Scripture, which tells us that people can make free will decisions and that God then relates to them based on those decisions. The Bible is full of examples of this. Adam Clarke’s explanation for translating the *ki* as “therefore” accurately captures what we believe to be the meaning of this verse:

“The particle כי *ki*, which we [i.e. the KJV] translate *because*, and thus make their continuance in sin the effect of God’s determination to destroy them, should be translated therefore, as it means in many parts of the sacred writings. See Noldius’s Particles, where the very text in question is introduced: Sed non auscultarunt, &c.; IDEO voluit Jehova eos interficere; “But they would not hearken, &c.; THEREFORE God purposed to destroy them.” It was their not hearkening that induced the Lord to will their destruction.”[[7]](#footnote-24404)

1Sm 2:26

**“continued to grow in stature and in favor.”** This is similar to Jesus (Luke 2:52).

1Sm 2:27

**“a man of God.”** The man is not identified, and as far as we can tell from Scripture he never is spoken of again. This makes a powerful point. God has many people who are “visible;” they are well-known and do a lot of very noticeable things for God. But God also has a lot of people, like the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal that Elijah did not know about (1 Kings 19:18), who are not well-known and are behind the scenes but are doing great work for God.

**“reveal, yes, reveal.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in *slavery*.”** God revealed himself to the ancestors of Eli (“the house of your father”) when they were still in Egypt, and that house included Amram, Moses, and Aaron; Eli was a descendant of Amram and his son Aaron, the first High Priest.

1Sm 2:28

**“and choose him.”** This most likely refers to Aaron, the first High Priest and lineal ancestor to Eli, the High Priest.

**“the offerings *that are* made by fire.”** This refers to the priest’s responsibility over all the offerings and sacrifices that were burned on the altar.

1Sm 2:29

**“you all.”** The “you” is plural. Eli and his sons.

**“kick”** This is idiomatic for “scorn, despise.”

**“sacrifices and at my offerings.”** The words are singular in the Hebrew text, but they refer to categories and not a singular sacrifice or offering, so we would use the plural for clarity (cf. CJB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NLT, NRSV).

**“to make yourselves fat.”** This was both figurative and literal, because Eli was fat (1 Sam. 4:18).

**“the best.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the beginning.” The priests got the first choices and therefore the best parts.

1Sm 2:30

**“said, yes, said.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis, doubling the word “said.”

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“would walk before me forever.”** This seems to go back to the High Priestly line that came from Aaron.

1Sm 2:32

**“You will see trouble in *my* habitation.”** This “trouble” no doubt included having the ark of the covenant leave the Tabernacle, never to return there again. When it finally came to Jerusalem, David set up a special tent for it.

1Sm 2:35

**“And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest.”** This priest was not Samuel. Samuel was a priest, but there is no evidence that he ever did what most priests did, serving in their local areas, then serving in the Tabernacle under the High Priest during the annual Feasts of Israel such as Passover or Pentecost. The priest might be Zadok, who was not of the same priestly line as Eli. This change in the priesthood did not happen immediately, but it certainly was made more possible when Eli and his two sons, one of whom would have certainly followed Eli as High Priest, died.

**“and in my soul.”** The Hebrew translated “soul” is the word *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), and *nephesh* has a wide range of meanings. Here it refers to God’s thoughts and desires, which is why many English translations say “mind.”

[For more on *nephesh* and soul see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“he will walk in the presence of my anointed one.”** The “he” is the priest, and he will live in the presence of “my anointed one,” i.e., the king. Here the prophet speaks about the future when God will set up a king over Israel. But at this time it would be many years before there was a king.

1Sm 2:36

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“loaf of bread.”** A “loaf” of bread was quite like a pancake.

**“piece of bread.”** Cf. Judges 19:5.

**1 Samuel Chapter 3**

1Sm 3:1

**“the word of Yahweh.”** In this context, “the word of Yahweh” refers to direct revelation.

**“visions were not frequent.”** This refers to revelation, which was often given as a vision, but as we see in the context, audible revelation from God was also recognized, even by Eli, who likely had not gotten any in a while (1 Sam. 3:4, 6, 8). At this time in Israel’s history, due to the sin in the priesthood and among the people, revelation from God was rare and thus not frequent. However, there were still some prophets around (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27). We should also note that the Hebrew can be “not widespread” as well as “not frequent,” and both meanings are likely correct.

We should notice however that the reason that revelation was rare was due to the sin and disobedience of the people. God always wants to speak to His people and guide and bless them, yet sin separates people from God: “your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he does not listen” (Isa. 59:2). Loving God involves working diligently to obey Him, and that will yield the wonderful benefit of being in greater communication with God.

1Sm 3:2

**“at that time.”** The Hebrew is literally, “on that day,” so the meaning could be “on that day that Eli was lying down,” but the word “that” (on that day) seems to refer to the time when visions were rare.

1Sm 3:3

**“and the lamp of God had not yet gone out.”** So it was very late in the night but not yet the morning, as we might say, “in the wee hours of the morning.” The menorah lamp in the Tent of Meeting (the “Tabernacle”) was lit every night and gave light until the olive oil ran out about morning (Exod. 27:21; 30:8; Lev. 24:2-3; 2 Chron. 13:11). So this tells us that God appeared to Samuel some time before dawn.

Since Eli’s eyes were growing dim (1 Sam. 3:2), it makes sense that Eli could not see at night and would call Samuel for assistance if he needed help, and old men often wake up at night for various reasons. So when Samuel heard his name being called, and never before having heard the direct voice of Yahweh, it makes perfect sense that he would assume that Eli was calling him (1 Sam. 3:4-8). Since it was fairly close to dawn it also makes sense that after Yahweh appeared to Samuel, he could not get back to sleep and lay awake until the dawn (1 Sam. 3:15).

**“the temple of Yahweh.”** Here, and in a few other places, the Tabernacle is referred to as a temple.

1Sm 3:10

**“Yahweh came and stood.”** This Scripture only causes confusion because people are taught that no one can see God, but that is not the case. God loves people and occasionally comes into concretion in human form to relate to His creation just as angels, who are normally invisible to us, sometimes make themselves visible. Just like we see God described as a person in Daniel 7:9-14, he comes into human form in other places as well. Here he came to Samuel in human form.

[For more on God appearing to people, see commentary on Acts 7:55.]

1Sm 3:11

**“I am about to do a thing in Israel.”** God’s message is spoken to Samuel but is about Eli. Much of the time a message for a person is spoken to that person, but there are times when others will bring a message from God to the person.

1Sm 3:13

**“cursing God.”** The sons of Eli, by their actions, were cursing God. However, the idea that God could be cursed was onerous to the early scribes, who changed the text to the current reading of the Masoretic Hebrew text. The text note in the NET explains what happened: “The MT seems to mean ‘they were bringing a curse on themselves’ (cf. ASV, NASB). But this meaning is problematic in part because the verb *qll* means ‘to curse,’ not ‘to bring a curse on,’ and in part because it takes an accusative object rather than the equivalent of a dative. This is one of the so-called *tiqqune sopherim*, or ‘emendations of the scribes.’ Why would the ancient copyists alter the original statement about Eli’s sons cursing *God* to the less objectionable statement that they brought a curse on *themselves*? Some argue that the scribes were concerned that such a direct and blasphemous affront against God could occur without an immediate response of judgment from God. Therefore they changed the text by deleting two letters א and י (*alef* and *yod*) from the word for ‘God,’ with the result that the text then read ‘to them.’ If this ancient scribal claim is accepted as accurate, it implies that the MT here is secondary. The present translation [the NET] follows the LXX (κακολογοῦντες θεόν, *kakologountes theon*) and a few MSS of the Old Latin in reading ‘God’ rather than the MT ‘to them.’”

**“restrain them.”** The Hebrew can be “rebuke.”

1Sm 3:14

**“forever.”** The word is used hyperbolically. Sometimes *olam* has a time limit.

1Sm 3:15

**“and opened the doors of the house of Yahweh.”** It seems that by this time in Israel’s history, there were more permanent buildings around the Tabernacle, and they would have had doors.

1Sm 3:17

**“word.”** The Hebrew *dabar* can mean “word, message, thing.”

**“God do the same to you, and even more.”** This is a form of a curse. The fact that Eli would call a curse over Samuel at this time only further reveals his weak character which tended to be evil, as this curse was. Eli knew Yahweh had spoken with Samuel, but he also knew that what God spoke to people could be a private message.

1Sm 3:18

**“And he said.”** That is, Eli said.

**“He is Yahweh.”** Eli is at least honest enough to admit that Yahweh spoke to Samuel. He did not try to explain away what Samuel heard as a dream or delusion. And Eli was well aware that Yahweh can and does speak audibly to people. Eli says, “He is Yahweh,” in essence, “He is God, so He can do whatever He wants.

**“whatever is good in his eyes.”** That is, whatever seems good to Him.

1Sm 3:19

**“he let none of his words.”** That is, God let none of Samuel’s words “fall to the ground,” that is, fail to come to pass. God called Samuel as a prophet, and a hallmark of a genuine prophet was that what he said comes to pass. So God supported Samuel by backing up what he said and making sure his words came to pass. This interpretation is also supported by 1 Sam. 3:20, because all of Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet. How? Because his words came to pass.

**“fall to the ground.”** An idiom for “go unfulfilled.” 1 Samuel 9:6 makes the point that Samuel’s words come to pass.

1Sm 3:20

**“established.”** The fact that Samuel’s words came to pass showed that he was established as a prophet. Interestingly, the word “established” can also mean “trustworthy,” and although that is likely not the primary meaning here, the fact that Samuel was trustworthy when the rest of the priests were not certainly set Samuel apart.

1Sm 3:21

**“by the word of Yahweh.”** Yahweh revealed Himself to Samuel “by the word of Yahweh,” so Yahweh revealed Himself by speaking His word. The words we speak reveal who we are, and God’s words reveal who He is, which is why it is so important to try to translate them as accurately as possible.

**1 Samuel Chapter 4**

1Sm 4:1

**“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”** This should have been the last sentence of chapter 3.

1Sm 4:3

**“so that he will come among us and save us.”** The Israelites understood that God dwelt over the ark between the cherubim (see commentary on Num. 7:89), and if they brought the ark, “He” would come too, and then He could save them. There is a breakdown in logic here on the part of Israel. If Yahweh struck them down, why would they want Him to be with them? It would seem they would want to distance themselves from Him. This is where superstition is not logical.

This also shows that God is not at our beck and call. He is God and we are His subjects and servants. God moves first and we follow. This is a very similar problem with the Word of Faith movement, which says “If I just have faith, God will do what I am having faith for.” Trusting God works if God gives the revelation and guidance first, but just “having faith” does not make God act just as bringing the ark of God into the camp did not make God act.

1Sm 4:4

**“sits *enthroned* between the cherubim.”** The Hebrew does not have the preposition “between” (or “on,” “above”), the text just says “sits cherubim.” However, “sitting” was associated with ruling, so many versions say “enthroned,” as the REV does. Yahweh dwelt (lit. “sits”) “between” the cherubim over the atonement cover of the ark of the covenant. Exodus 25:22 says, “I [Yahweh] will meet with you there, from above the atonement cover—from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony.” Numbers 7:89 then says that Yahweh spoke, and Moses, “heard Yahweh’s voice speaking to him from above the atonement cover that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim.” Several English versions read “between the cherubim,” instead of “above” or “on” them (e.g., BBE, CSB, Geneva Bible, KJV, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT). Although many English versions read “above” or “over” or “on” the cherubim, the word “between” is most accurate (see commentary on Num. 7:89).

1Sm 4:7

**“For there has not been such a thing before.”** Although the ark of the covenant had traveled with Israel, this was the first time the Philistines had to deal with it in battles with them.

1Sm 4:8

**“with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.”** The Philistines seem to have their story mixed up. God did smite Egypt with plagues, but in Egypt, not in the wilderness. “All kinds of plagues” is literally in Hebrew, “every plague,” but “all kinds of plagues” gets the sense better in English.

1Sm 4:9

**“you have to serve the Hebrews.”** The word “serve” is a verb, it is not “servants.”

1Sm 4:11

**“And the ark of God was captured.”** The ark was “captured” (the Hebrew word is more literally “taken,” that is, it was taken away from the Israelites, but in this context “captured” is a clear translation (cf. CJB, CSB, ESV, JPS, NIV, NLT, NRSV). Reality reveals the powerlessness of superstition. The ark not only did not protect the army and give them victory, it was captured by the Philistines. Sadly, the influence of superstition is usually so great that even when the belief or ritual fails over and over, somehow excuses are made or blindness covers it over. For example, homes that are supposedly protected by statues of angels or saints, or have other protective symbols have just as many problems as those homes that have no such “protections,” but the belief in the protective power goes on in spite of that.

God and the power of God should be enough for people, even though God does not promise us health and happiness in this fallen world. But sadly He is usually not enough for most people and so they turn to fake advantages given by various superstitions and then ignore the fact that the superstitions do not really work.

**“and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.”** Thus fulfilling the prophecy of 1 Sam. 2:34.

1Sm 4:12

**“and came to Shiloh the same day.”** The run from the area of Aphek to Shiloh would basically be a marathon run, 26 miles, and mostly uphill. Thus the text adds, “the same day.”

1Sm 4:13

**“And when the man came into the city.”** The main entrance to the city of Shiloh was on the south. It seems that the messenger arrives at Shiloh and goes into the city, telling people as he went. Eventually, the man would reach Eli. The Tabernacle was likely on the north side, and since many people would be going to Shiloh to worship, the Tabernacle would have a road going to it, and Eli was sitting by that road.

1Sm 4:14

**“the noise of the shouting.”** Eli heard the noise of the shouting, but did not as yet know whether the news was good or bad.

**“tumult.”** This is the noun from the same root as the verb “shook” in 1 Samuel 4:5.

1Sm 4:15

**“98.”** It is noteworthy that Eli was 98, and still the High Priest, and he did not die of natural causes.

**“had failed.”** The Hebrew uses an idiom to express that Eli was now blind.[[8]](#footnote-31990) Sometime earlier, in 1 Samuel 3:2, Eli’s eyes were dim. Now he is totally blind.

1Sm 4:18

**“by the side of the gate.”** The gate to the Tabernacle.

1Sm 4:19

**“came *suddenly* upon her.”** The Hebrew text reads more literally, “were turned upon her.” Her labor was brought on prematurely, apparently brought on by shock.

1Sm 4:20

**“And about the time of her death.”** So her son was born an orphan into a priestly family. Both his father and mother, and his grandfather also, died that day.

1Sm 4:21

**“Ichabod.”** The Hebrew can mean, “Where is the glory,” or it can mean, “No glory” [the glory has departed].

**“departed.”** The word means “exiled.”

**1 Samuel Chapter 5**

1Sm 5:2

**“the house of Dagon.”** That is, the temple of Dagon.

**“Dagon.”** Dagon shows up as a god in the ancient Near East long before he appears as one in the Bible, and his worship was quite widespread. Dagon is mentioned in Mari texts, was the chief deity of a pantheon of some 200 gods at Ebla, is occasionally mentioned in early Sumerian texts, had a temple at Ugarit, and is sometimes used in royal names in Mesopotamia. Dagon appears in Assyrian and Phoenician artifacts as well. In the Bible, Dagon is mentioned in Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, and 1 Chronicles, and figures prominently in 1 Samuel 5 and had a temple in Ashdod. It was once thought that Dagon was a fish god because a possible root of the name was related to the word “fish.” However, the name “Dagon” is more likely related to one of the words for “grain,” and Dagon was a god of agriculture and grain, and by extension fertility. The evidence is that Dagon was worshiped as a fertility god in Ebla, Assyria, Ugarit, and by the Amorites. The identification of Dagon as a fish god led to associating him with other gods such as Merman and Oannes that were sometimes portrayed as part fish but those associations may not be accurate.[[9]](#footnote-18328)

1Sm 5:4

**“Only Dagon’s *torso* remained.”** Cutting off the head and hands was occasionally done to enemies killed in battle. The word “torso” comes from the Septuagint.

1Sm 5:5

**“Dagon’s house.”** The Temple of Dagon.

1Sm 5:6

**“But the hand of Yahweh was heavy on the people of Ashdod.”** The hands of Dagon had been cut off and he was powerless, but the hand of Yahweh was “heavy” (or glorious) upon Ashdod.

**“tumors.”** The scholarly consensus is that this disease could have been bubonic plague which involves swelling of the lymph nodes. The Septuagint adds that there were mice, and in the Bible there was an offering of mice, so mice may have been involved, adding to the idea that there was likely some kind of plague.

1Sm 5:10

**“to us to kill us and our people.”** The Hebrew is “to kill me and my people” The Ekronites saw themselves as one.

1Sm 5:12

**“went up to the heavens.”** The meaning of this idiomatic phrase is that the cry of the people reached God.

**1 Samuel Chapter 6**

1Sm 6:1

**“territory”** The Hebrew word is literally “field.” It refers to the territory. The writer likely saw the area as still belonging to Israel by God’s grant.

1Sm 6:2

**“the priests and the diviners.”** Note that the people now go to the religious people for answers. The “lords” of the Philistines made suggestions, move the ark from place to place, but that did not work out.

**“What should we do.”** This could also be translated, “What are we to do” (CJB).

1Sm 6:3

**“return, yes, return.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis, repeating the root word “return.” The idea is to “be sure to” return the ark with a gift—don’t forget the gift.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

1Sm 6:4

**“they said, ‘Five gold tumors...’”** This is the Philistine priests and diviners speaking and giving the solution. This seems like something they made up, there certainly is not anything in the Mosaic Law about it. The fact that the Philistines made gold mice is likely due to the fact that the plague that the Philistines were experiencing had something to do with mice (or rats). In fact, some of the early Greek translations include that the plague was carried by mice, although there is no such information in the Hebrew texts.

1Sm 6:5

**“to give glory to the God of Israel.”** This does not mean that the Philistines would start worshiping Yahweh. Rather, giving glory to God in this context is giving recognition of His power (cf. Rev. 11:13).

1Sm 6:6

**“Why then do you harden your hearts.”** There is a wonderful irony here as the pagan Philistine priests and diviners reprove the Philistine leaders for hardening their hearts against Yahweh. So the Philistines recognized Yahweh as a god, but not that he was one of their gods or a top god. It is noteworthy that the pagan Philistines remembered that Yahweh had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, while the Israelites, the people of Yahweh, forgot Him and turned to pagan gods and worshiped and served them. People do what they want to do and make up reasons for not doing what they don’t want to do. Yahweh required a kind of service that many of the Israelites apparently did not want to do, while the pagan gods offered things like ritual sex that was very attractive to many Israelites.

1Sm 6:8

**“send it away, that it may go away.”** This is the same basic language that was used of the Egyptians sending Israel out of Egypt (1 Sam. 6:6).

1Sm 6:9

**“If it goes up to Beth-shemesh.”** The Philistines are making very sure that what has happened to them was indeed the hand of Yahweh by even picking the city that the cows had to walk toward.

**“the road of his territory.”** That is, the road that is in Yahweh’s territory, as we see as the sentence develops.

1Sm 6:12

**“lowing as they went.”** This is perhaps God’s way of announcing His coming, using the cows as his trumpeters. It was common that a king would have people go ahead of him with trumpets and fanfare announcing his coming.

1Sm 6:13

**“The people of Beth-shemesh.”** The city of Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city (1 Sam. 6:15).

**“reaping their wheat harvest.”** So this is late May or June. If the ark of the covenant had been with the Philistines for seven months (1 Sam. 6:1), then the battle in which the ark was captured occurred in November or December, seven months earlier.

**“in the valley.”** The Hebrew could also be, “on the plain.” This was the Sorek Valley, which had a wide, flat plain in the valley. From Ekron to Beth-shemesh is up the Sorek Valley.

1Sm 6:15

**“The Levites took down the ark.”** Joshua 21:16 says that Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city, so the presence of the Levites would be expected.

1Sm 6:19

**“70.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text, which is normally used for the translation of the Old Testament, reads “fifty thousand, seventy,” but in this instance, as in some other places in the Old Testament, there was an obvious copyist’s error. Beth-shemesh was one of the Levitical cities scattered around Israel, and it was in the tribal area of Judah (Josh. 21:16). Today, Beth-shemesh is a seven-acre tel (a tel is an ancient city mound), so Beth-shemesh was not a large city; the entire population of Beth-shemesh did not number 50,000. When the ark showed up at Beth-shemesh, it was totally unexpected, and some of the men of the town were harvesting wheat (1 Sam. 6:13). The people of the town celebrated when the ark was recovered, and some of the men looked into the ark and subsequently died. Given the size of the town and the fact that its arrival in town was a surprise, 50,000 people could not even have come from the surrounding area.

Furthermore, there was no way a number as large as 50,000 people could reasonably look into the ark. It seems clear that it was 70 people who died. The original reading of “70” is preserved in a few Hebrew manuscripts. Some scholars have proposed that the original text read 70 men and 50 oxen, which was then misunderstood as 50,070 men, but there is no proof for that, even if it is a reasonable attempt to explain how 70 became 50,070.

It could perhaps be that the Hebrew, “70 men; 50,000 men” could possibly be an overall number of the people who died in the whole ark incident: 34,000 Israelite warriors (1 Sam. 4:2, 10), and obviously many Philistines died due to the war, plagues, and mice. So it is possible that in all, some 50,000 people were “struck” by Yahweh.

**1 Samuel Chapter 7**

1Sm 7:1

**“took up.”** That is, took it uphill from the Philistine country into the hill country of Judah. From Beth-shemesh to Kiriath-jearim is about ten miles.

1Sm 7:2

**“Kiriath-jearim.”** It is interesting that the ark stayed in Kiriath-jearim for so long since that city was one of the Gibeonite cities (Josh. 9:17).

**“that a long time passed.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the days multiplied.”

**“For it was 20 years.”** The ark was in Kireath-jearim for more than 20 years, but 20 years for Israel to lament and repent until Samuel spoke, then it stayed there longer until the time of David.

1Sm 7:3

**“And Samuel spoke.”** Samuel is now grown up. He was a child when the ark was captured, and it has been 20 years since that time.

1Sm 7:5

**“Mizpah.”** Mizpah is two miles north of Ramah.

**“I will pray to Yahweh for you.”** While Samuel was the mediator between God and Israel, Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humans (1 Tim. 2:5).

1Sm 7:6

**“and drew water and poured it out before Yahweh.”** Although the exact significance of this water ritual is not known, it was tied to fasting. It is possible that it was a way of adding sincerity to their fast: that they did not eat food or drink water, and wanted to demonstrate that fact by pouring water on the ground before Yahweh.

**“And Samuel judged the children of Israel.”** Here we see Samuel acting as a judge; he was the last of the judges in the Judges period.

1Sm 7:10

**“threw them into a panic.”** See commentary on Joshua 10:10.

1Sm 7:11

**“as far as below Beth-car.”** That is, as far as west of Beth-car. The location of Beth-car is unknown, but the Philistines were retreating to the west, and the territory went downhill from Mizpeh to the coast, so “below” Beth-car is to the west of Beth-car.

1Sm 7:12

**“took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer.”** The location of “Shen” is unknown. “Ebenezer” means “Stone of Help” and this Ebenezer is a different place from the Ebenezer in 1 Samuel 4:1. This is more than Samuel just putting a stone there. Samuel set up a standing-stone as a memorial to remind Israel of the help that God gave them against the Philistines.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18.]

**“Yahweh helped us here.”** The Hebrew can refer to time or place, but place seems more logical given the fact that Samuel just set up a stone in that place.

1Sm 7:13

**“the territory of Israel.”** God gave the whole Promised Land to Israel, but the tribes such as Dan never conquered the seacoast, and this verse shows that there is now a kind of status quo where the Philistines are on the coast to stay.

1Sm 7:14

**“from Ekron even to Gath.”** These are the inland cities of the Philistines. These inland cities went back and forth between Israel and the Philistines.

**“There was peace between Israel and the Amorites.”** The Philistines were enemies to both Israel and the Amorites, but this was a peace that was never supposed to occur.

1Sm 7:16

**“to Bethel.”** Samuel would have started in Ramah.

**“Gilgal.”** This is likely the Gilgal by Jericho.

**1 Samuel Chapter 8**

1Sm 8:3

**“his sons did not walk in his ways.”** The institution of government by God’s judges and elders had lasted for hundreds of years, but now it comes to an end because of abuse of the system. Ungodliness and abuse can bring an end to many godly institutions. Thankfully, when Christ rules the earth, ungodliness will come to an end. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (i.e., justice and right living on earth) because they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). This will start during Christ’s Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

1Sm 8:4

**“Ramah.”** Samuel’s hometown. Called “Ramathaim” in 1 Sam. 1:1 (see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:1).

1Sm 8:5

**“your sons have not walked in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us.”** The Israelites wanted a king. There was a multifaceted reason for that. One, as stated in 1 Samuel 8:5, was that Samuel’s two sons were evil (1 Sam. 8:3). To put that in historical perspective, that fact only added to the evil done by the previous judge and High Priest, Eli, who also had two sons who were very evil and were referred to as “sons of Belial” (1 Sam. 2:12; see the REV commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12). With the leadership seemingly passing from father to son (although Eli’s wicked sons were killed in battle) we can see why the people likely did not want any more evil leadership.

As much or more than that, however, was the increasing presence of the Philistines in Israel. They were a very real danger. They were an advanced society in that time and were well-armed and aggressive. Without any central government, Israel did not seem to have an effective way to deal with them. The Philistines could attack the Negev, and the people of Ashur and Naphthali up north might say, “Well, that’s your problem, Judah.” But we see that when Saul was king, when the Ammonites attacked Jabesh-gilead in the Transjordan, Saul mustered all the tribes to fight the Ammonites and saved the city (1 Sam. 11:1-11). God had foretold that Israel would eventually have a king (Deut. 17:14-20). God had in mind the everlasting kingship of the Messiah and had spoken of a king from the tribe of Judah some 600 years before Samuel’s time (Gen. 49:8-10). It is likely only because the people pressed Samuel at this time, and from God’s perspective there was no one from the tribe of Judah positioned to become king, that God chose Saul the Benjamite to be king. Eventually David, from the tribe of Judah, did become king and the legitimate kings of Israel were his descendants, including Jesus Christ, who will one day sit on the throne of David (Luke 1:32).

1Sm 8:7

**“Listen to the voice.”** This is the “pregnant sense” of the word “listen,” meaning to listen to what they say and do it (cf. 1 Sam. 8:9, 22).

1Sm 8:9

**“Listen to the voice.”** This is the “pregnant sense” of the word “listen,” meaning to listen to what they say and do it (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7, 22).

**“warn, yes, warn.”** God repeats the verb warn twice, using the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis. It means to emphatically warn.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“the way of the king.”** The “way” of the king includes his way of being, the extent of his power and the rights he claims as king, the judgments he makes, etc.

1Sm 8:11

**“he will take.”** This so well reflects what happens with the government. They take. The word “take” is used much in the next few verses.

1Sm 8:12

**“plow his ground.”** The Hebrew uses the root of “plow” twice; “plow (verb) his plowed field (noun)” but it translates well as “plow his ground.” The same is true of “harvest” but “harvest” works well in English because it can be a noun or verb depending on its use in the sentence, so “harvest (verb) his harvest (noun)” makes sense in English.

1Sm 8:14

**“even the best of them.”** That is, even the best of them all, not just the olive groves.

**“his servants.”** This refers to the officers and officials of the king, not his household servants/slaves.

[For more on “servants” being used for people of high position in the kingdom, see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1.]

1Sm 8:15

**“officers.”** Traditionally “eunuchs,” that is likely not its meaning here.

**“his servants.”** That is, the government officials. There is archaeological evidence of government officials referring to themselves as “servants” of the king (see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1).

1Sm 8:17

**“you yourselves.”** The Hebrew can read “you” or “you yourselves,” but given the fact that this is Samuel’s warning to the people, “you yourselves” seems to be appropriate.

1Sm 8:20

**“our king may govern us.”** The Hebrew word translated “govern” is *shaphat* (#08199 שָׁפַט), and its most basic meaning is “to judge.” Its meanings include “to judge, to decide between, to settle disputes, to administer justice, to rule, to be in authority, to govern.” In this context, it has the meaning of “to govern” with likely an emphasis on settling disputes. The Israelites were prone to ungodly behavior, and no doubt the decisions rendered by the elders of any given town were political and ungodly. Sadly, having a king instead of local elders and tribal leaders would not remedy that. Throughout history, people have been willing to give up their freedom and personal responsibility for being governed by others.

**“and go out before us and fight our battles.”** The people wanted a warrior king, and they got Saul, who was apparently a valiant warrior. However, as we learn more and more about Saul we see that he was not a particularly godly man.

1Sm 8:21

**“he spoke them into the ears of Yahweh.”** This is the figure of speech anthropopatheia,[[10]](#footnote-23020) giving God human characteristics, and it brings God closer to humankind and in this case places emphasis on the closeness of the relationship between Samuel and Yahweh. The figure “ears of Yahweh” occurs only here, but James 5:4 is very similar.

1Sm 8:22

**“Listen to the voice.”** This is the “pregnant sense” of the word “listen,” meaning to listen to what they say and do it (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7, 9).

**1 Samuel Chapter 9**

1Sm 9:1

**“Kish.”** Kish, the father of Saul, was the man described at the end of the verse as “a mighty man of valor.” So Saul had good breeding and likely some good training to be the king of Israel and do what the people wanted: “govern us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:20)

1Sm 9:2

**“a handsome young man.”** This section of Scripture is describing Saul’s outward characteristics.

1Sm 9:3

**“were lost.”** This was not uncommon. Donkeys would wander off if left untethered, this was common enough to be written about in the Law of Moses (Exod. 23:4).

1Sm 9:4

**“but they were not found.”** The switch from the singular pronoun “he” in the opening of the verse to the plural pronoun “they,” shows that the “they” refers to the donkeys.[[11]](#footnote-20867) It is not that the pronouns are confusing, as some commentators claim.

**“Shalishah...Shaalim...the land of the Benjamites.”** These locations have not been identified. Scholars have made some educated guesses, but that is all. Even the phrase “the land of the Benjamites” is only a possibility, because there are other ways to understand the Hebrew text. However, since Gibeah, Saul’s hometown, and Ramah, where Samuel was, are less than five miles apart, there is good reason to believe those names are names of specific local areas and thus Saul may have covered a lot of back-and-forth distance without going very far from his home.

1Sm 9:5

**“the land of Zuph.”** The “land of Zuph” is the name of a small territory in the vicinity of Ramah, where Samuel lived, but its exact boundaries are not known. It is because they ended their search in the land of Zuph near Ramah that they decided to see the prophet Samuel.

1Sm 9:6

**“But he said to him.”** But he [the servant] said to him [to Saul].

**“Look, there is a man of God in this city.”** The city that Samuel lived in was Ramah, so the city here in the record must be Ramah, also known as Ramathaim-zophim (1 Sam. 1:1).

**“comes, yes, comes to pass.”** The Hebrew doubles the word “come” for emphasis, thus using the figure of speech polyptoton.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

1Sm 9:7

**“But look, if we go, what can we bring the man?”** In this early section that introduces Saul, we are shown that Saul is not very spiritually sensitive or really cares about it. He lives in Gibeah, which is only two miles from Ramah, the hometown of Samuel, the Judge of Israel, yet Saul seems to know little or nothing about him. A spiritually astute or caring man would have known a lot about him.

**“gift.”** The Hebrew word occurs only here and the meaning is not exactly known, but it seems to be related to a gift that opened the door for one to be able to see the prophet.

1Sm 9:8

**“Look, I happen to have in my hand.”** The servant takes the focus on himself; the Hebrew text reads more literally, “Look, there is found in my hand...” as if the silver somehow was just discovered in his hand without any explanation about how it got there. There is a lot in that phraseology. The servant did not want to make Saul look bad as if the servant was prepared for the journey and Saul wasn’t, but it is interesting that the servant is more prepared for the journey than Saul is. This theme will come up later in Saul’s kingship, where those who serve him are more godly or better prepared than he is. Also, because the wording is such that the silver seems to have just miraculously appeared in the servant’s hand and was “found” there, we see the hand of God behind the scenes as if He wants Saul to meet Samuel and is providing the means for that to happen.

**“one-fourth of a shekel.”** One-fourth of a shekel is roughly one-tenth of an ounce (2.8 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

1Sm 9:10

**“Good idea.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “Your word is good.”

1Sm 9:11

**“the city.”** The city where Samuel lived was Ramah, which means “height,” so it would have been on the top of a hill.

**“young women going out to draw water.”** It was culturally the job of women, particularly young women, to draw water (see commentary on Gen. 24:11).

1Sm 9:12

**“for he has *just* come into the city today.”** If Saul and his servant had been one day earlier they would have missed Samuel. As with so many records in the Bible, we see God’s invisible hand arranging the time and getting Saul to a feast that he did not know about even though God scheduled him to be the guest of honor.

**“*city* shrine.”** See commentary on 1 Samuel 9:13.

1Sm 9:13

**“before he goes up to the shrine to eat.”** The Hebrew word translated “shrine” is *bamah* (#01116 בָּמָה), and the plural, “shrines,” is *bamot*. The Hebrew word *bamah* should not be confused with the Greek word *bēma* (#968 βῆμα), because the Greek word *bēma* mostly refers to a judgment seat (cf. Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12, 16, 17; 25:6; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), whereas the Hebrew word *bamah* generally refers to a place of worship, a shrine. The Hebrew word *bamah* referred to a place that was built up so that it was a little higher than the ground around it and then leveled out and then various idols and objects of worship were placed on it. Larger shrines even had temples to various gods on them. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52). Many of the “high places,” the shrines, were used in the worship of pagan gods, and it is even possible that originally this one in Ramah was too, but at this time it was used in the worship of Yahweh, although exactly how that fits into the Mosaic Law is unclear; it may have been a case where God simply accepted human weakness and was thankful that people want to sacrifice to Him. In any case, Samuel would never have had a part in pagan practices.

In the case of Ramah, it is unclear whether the city shrine was located in the city or outside of it. Ramah was located on a hill (note that Saul had to walk uphill to get to Ramah (1 Sam. 9:11)). So the city shrine could have been at a high location in the city or at a location just outside the city. The area is such that if the shrine was located outside the city wall, it would not have been far away. However, the fact that the shrine had a banquet room (1 Sam. 9:22) is evidence that the shrine was likely inside the city wall.

**“because he has to bless the sacrifice.”** In this context, the people wait for Samuel to bless the sacrifice. This is an ominous foreshadow against Saul, who did not wait for Samuel (1 Sam. 13:8-13, cf. 1 Sam. 10:8). We can tell from the context that this sacrifice was not a burnt offering, because the burnt offering was entirely burned up. But with most sacrifices, at least part of the animal was eaten, and that is certainly the case here. Thirty people besides Samuel, Saul, and Saul’s servant were invited to eat.

1Sm 9:14

**“behold.”** In this word we see the invisible hand of God making sure that the meeting between Samuel and Saul happened at the right time.

**“Samuel came out.”** The Bible does not tell us what Samuel came out of, but it could have been a street in the city, or a house, or something else. But it was not “out of the city,” because Samuel met Saul and his servant while they were “in the midst” of the city.

**“to go up to the shrine.”** See commentary on 1 Samuel 9:13.

1Sm 9:15

**“told Samuel in his ear.”** The Hebrew is more literally “Yahweh uncovered the ear of Samuel.” This idiom is used several times in Scripture (cf. 1 Sam. 20:13, “make known” is “uncover the ear.” Also, 1 Chron. 17:25). This is a phrase that indicates a level of intimacy and personal attention. That Yahweh spoke into Samuel’s ear is different from Yahweh speaking to a group of people. This was literally, “for your ears only” from God to Samuel.

**“a day before.”** This is literal. Just the day before. The Hebrew text has the word “one,” as in “one day before,” but because “one day” in English idiom sometimes means “someday,” that phrase was avoided to prevent introducing ambiguity into the translation.

1Sm 9:16

**“looked upon.”** In this context, “looked upon” means to see and to help. The Hebrew word is more literally, “seen.”

1Sm 9:17

**“who will restrain my people.”** The Hebrew verb translated “restrain” is *atsar* (#06113 עָצַר), and it means to restrain, refrain, retain, withhold.” The meaning here in 1 Samuel 9:17 is “restrain,” “hold back”; cf. “He it is who shall restrain my people” (ESV); “this one doth restrain my people” (YLT); “This one shall keep rein on my people” (Schocken Bible). While the translation “restrain” may seem unusual, that is only because in our modern culture we do not usually think biblically about government and so we do not often express that a primary function of government is to “restrain” the people from lawlessness. We realize from the laws around us such as speed limit laws, hunting and fishing regulations, laws against indecent exposure, etc., that government makes laws that restrain the people, but we do not usually think of a primary role of government as “restraining” people.

During the Judges period, before Israel had a king, every person did that which was right in his own eyes (Judg. 21:25), but now the king would “restrain” them. Humans have a sin nature, and it is simply a fact that if there are no laws or no enforcement of the laws, people take advantage of others, hurt and oppress others, steal from others, enslave others, and more. A major role of rulers is to make and enforce laws that restrain the evil behavior of ungodly people, and that point is brought out here in the Hebrew text. It is unfortunate that so many English versions do not use the word “restrain” even though that is the primary meaning of the Hebrew word and is a primary responsibility of government. While it is true that kings “rule” (CEB, CSB, NASB, NET, NLT) and “govern” (CJB, NAB, NIV, TNK), that is not the emphasis of the text here, and it misses the teaching point that a primary responsibility of government is to restrain people’s ungodly behavior.

We should note, however, that the word “restrain” can have either a negative or a positive meaning depending on the ruler. If the ruler is evil, the “restraint” is oppressive and hurtful. If the ruler is godly, then the restraint helps the people stay safe and thrive. The ‘restraint” under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel was ungodly and oppressive. Rulers such as Saul and Solomon did a little of both kinds of restraint: they helped in some ways and were oppressive in others. In the future, when Christ is king over the earth, he will “rule with an iron scepter,” and restrain the people’s evil intents and actions (cf. Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15) and his Millennial Kingdom on earth will be a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity, as many biblical prophecies show.

It is not well-known among Christians that Jesus Christ will conquer and rule the earth for 1,000 years, but it is a very important part of understanding what will happen in the future.

[For more information on Jesus Christ’s 1,000-year reign on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

1Sm 9:18

**“in the gate.”** This does not seem to be the outer city gate.

**“Please tell me where the seer’s house is.”** It is astounding that Saul did not know Samuel by face, even if he had never met him in person. Samuel had been the most powerful prophet in Israel for many years, and had been responsible for some notable miracles. For Saul not to know him points to the lack of spirituality in Saul’s life. At this point, we wonder why God would want such a person as king. The most probable answer is that Saul is the kind of king that the people wanted and thus he would be readily accepted by the people.

1Sm 9:19

**“everything that you are thinking.”** The Hebrew text reads, “all that is in your heart” but this is a case where a literal translation can lead the reader astray because the English phrase “all that is in your heart” does not mean what the phrase meant in Hebrew. The “heart” in Hebrew was the center of thinking, and that is its meaning here.

1Sm 9:20

**“do not set your mind on them.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “do not set your heart on them.” Here, as in 1 Sam. 9:19, “heart” refers to the mind.

**“For on whom is all the desire of Israel.”** Israel desired a king, and now all their desire was on that king whom they will soon find out is Saul.

**“and on all your father’s house.”** The people wanted a king to go out to war and lead them in battle, and the Benjamites were known for being fierce fighters, so even in that sense Saul and his family would make a good royal household.

1Sm 9:21

**“Am I not a Benjamite of the smallest of the tribes of Israel.”** Saul did not understand how Israel could desire him. At this time Benjamin was the smallest tribe in Israel because they had gone to war with the other tribes and lost, and most of their men were killed off (Judg. 19-21).

1Sm 9:22

**“*banquet* room.”** The Hebrew word refers to a room that is generally associated with the Temple.

1Sm 9:24

**“for I said, ‘I have invited the people.’”** To understand this we must see that Samuel said “to the cook” to set aside meat for Saul, because he had invited the people and they would have eaten it if it had not been kept by the cook.

1Sm 9:25

**“shrine.”** See commentary on 1 Samuel 9:13.

**“into the city.”** This could mean from outside the city into it, or from a further part of the city into the midst of it.

**“on the roof.”** The roofs of the houses were flat, and people talked and even slept at night on them.

1Sm 9:27

**“make known to you.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “cause you to hear.”

**1 Samuel Chapter 10**

1Sm 10:1

**“Saul’s head.”** The Hebrew text has “his head,” but the REV changes the pronoun to “Saul” here for clarity.

**“Is it not that.”** This is a rhetorical question. Samuel was explaining that he was anointing Saul because he was the new king of Israel.

1Sm 10:2

**“meet two men.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “find two men,” but that is misleading in English. In Hebrew, “find” can mean “meet,” and it does that here.

**“by Rachel’s tomb.”** Jacob set up a standing-stone on Rachel’s grave (Gen. 35:20), and it was likely still there in the time of Samuel and Saul, many centuries after Jacob set it up. However, Rachel’s actual grave is not likely in the well-known traditional location near Bethlehem of Judah (see commentary on Gen. 35:19).

1Sm 10:3

**“three loaves of bread.”** Biblically, a “loaf” of bread was like a thick pancake. It is not the standard loaf shape we have in the Western world today.

**“skin-bottle.”** The use of containers or “bottles” made from animal skins is a very ancient custom and was still practiced in the East until fairly recent times. The most common material that was used for skin-bottles was the skin of a goat or young kid. Bottles made from goatskin were used to hold wine, water, milk, and such.

It was important that the skin would not leak, so usually, the head of the animal was cut off, leaving as much neck as possible, and then the bones of the animal were sometimes broken so they would fit out the neck hole, and the animal was turned inside out with all the innards passing out through the neck hole. The animal was not cut open as is done when an animal is field dressed before being butchered. Once the animal was inside out, the skin was scraped so that the hide was clean and free from meat and fat. Also, the legs were cut off close to the hoof and then tied tight so fluid would not leak out through the leg hole, and the anus was sewn shut. Then usually the animal was turned hair-side out again and would hold fluid. Sometimes the hair was left on the animal skin, and sometimes it was scraped and coated with oil or grease so that it was thoroughly watertight, and also would not tend to dry out.

It was common with the smaller skins that the neck hole served as both the opening from which the skin-bottle was filled and the opening from which its contents were poured out. However, if a larger container was desired, even as large as a camel or ox, which were used as large containers and sometimes used on long journeys in the desert, often one leg was only tied shut with cord and that leg would provide the spout through which the fluid was poured.

It was common to keep the skin-bottles upright by tying a rope under the upper thighs of the animal and hanging it so it would not tip over, but sometimes a full skin could simply be set upright with the neck pointing up and tied shut. The rough and mobile life of many of the people of the East made skin-bottles a much better choice for liquids than earthenware pots, and they were much easier to seal. If a skin-bottle did get cut or tear, sometimes it could be repaired by sewing or tying it up (cf. Josh. 9:4).

When the skin-bottles were filled with wine, people had to be careful not to use old skin-bottles that had become hard and inflexible, because Eastern wine finished fermenting in the skin-bottles and would produce gasses that would cause the bottle to burst if it was sealed tightly. Jesus used that fact in his teachings (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37).

In 1855, Horatio Hackett wrote about skin-bottles, and how common they were.

“The use of skin bottles prevails still very extensively in all parts of western Asia…at Cairo I saw them at almost every turn in the streets, and on the backs of the water-carriers between that city and Bulak, its port on the Nile. After that I met with them [saw them] constantly, wherever I traveled, both in Egypt and Syria. They are made of the skins of animals, especially of the goat, and in various forms. They are more commonly made so as to retain the figure of the animal from which the skin is taken. The process is said to be this: they cut off the head of the goat, kid, or sheep, as the case may be, and then strip off the skin whole from the body, without cutting it except at the extremities. The neck constitutes the mouth of the bottle; and, as the only places that it needs to be sewed up are where the feet were cut off, the skin, when distended with water, is precisely the appearance or form of the animal to which it belonged. The bottles of this shape have been used in the Eastern countries from the earliest antiquity; that they were common in the days of the patriarchs and the Pharaohs, I had an interesting proof in one of the tombs near the Ghizeh pyramids. Among the figures on the walls I saw a goat-shaped bottle, as exactly like those now seen in Cairo as if it had been painted from one of them by a modern artist…Bottles are also made of leather, dressed for the purpose, and are of various sizes, from the pouch containing two or three quarts, which the traveler may sling over his shoulder, to the ox-hide in which caravans preserve their supplies of water on long journeys, when they meet with brooks or cisterns only at distant intervals.”[[12]](#footnote-20815)

In 1875, James Freeman wrote about skin-bottles, and included in his book a reproduction of Assyrian artwork in which a woman is giving fluid to her child from a skin-bottle, holding the skin by the forelegs and back and pouring out the fluid to the child through the neck hole of the skin.[[13]](#footnote-21209)

1Sm 10:5

**“Gibeah-elohim.”** This could be translated “Hill of God,” like some versions do, but it was not a reference to just any hill, it was the name of a hill with a garrison and village. The Hebrew text actually reads “Gibeath” instead of “Gibeah,” but it is common for the Hebrew to spell names slightly differently in different places, and to keep the continuity and so the reader can more easily follow the events at Gibeah, we used “Gibeah” here. The town is Gibeah of Benjamin, the native town of Saul (which would explain why Saul was heading in that direction), and it was often called “Gibeah of Saul” because Saul was the king and lived there (1 Sam. 11:4; 15:34; 2 Sam. 21:6; Isa. 10:29). That Saul was from Gibeah and was home explains how the people there knew him and his family, and were surprised when he prophesied and said, “What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?” It seems likely that the town of Gibeah is called “Gibeah-elohim” (Gibeah of God) in this verse because of the town shrine in or near the town where people would go to worship.

**“*town* shrine.”** Gibeah of Saul was built on a hilltop, and it would be the case that somewhere in the city would have been a shrine—a raised and leveled area on which were placed holy things such as an altar, a small temple, and if the town had more pagan leanings, which many did, statues of a god or gods.

[For more on local shrines, see commentary on Num. 33:52.]

1Sm 10:6

**“and will be turned into another man.”** In the Old Testament, when God wanted to empower a person with spirit power, He would put His gift of holy spirit (usually just called “spirit”) upon the person (cf. Num. 11:17, 25-29). When that happened the person had a line of communication with God that they never had before, and they also could manifest spiritual power in various ways, and they were especially known for being able to hear from God and prophesy, like Saul did right after he got the spirit. The presence of God’s spirit upon a person was so powerful and profound that when a person got holy spirit on them they were a “different person” than they had been without the spirit. Samuel understood that, and told Saul that when he got spirit upon him he would be turned into another man. David knew that too, and after he disobeyed God by committing adultery with Bathsheba and setting her husband Uriah up to be killed in battle, he prayed for forgiveness and that God would not take the gift of holy spirit away from him because he did not want to lose that special connection with God (Ps. 51:11).

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

1Sm 10:7

**“whatever your hand finds to do.”** This is an idiom, meaning, whatever the circumstances require; whatever you think is best in the situation. Once Saul had the holy spirit of God upon him and could receive revelation from God, he was in a position to deal with whatever circumstances life had in store for him.

1Sm 10:8

**“You are to go down before me to Gilgal.”** This event was to occur at some point in the future, not immediately. It happened later (cf. 1 Sam. 13:7-13).

1Sm 10:11

**“What is this that has happened to the son of Kish?”** The people are very surprised at the change in Saul. He had been more of a secular person before this.

1Sm 10:12

**“Who is their father?”** Although it is not completely clear why the man asked this question, it likely relates to the fact that perhaps Saul had been taken into the group of prophets by a recognized prophet that led the group, and was now in training to be a prophet. If people knew the “father” of the group, they could find out how Saul came to be prophesying among them. Since the men of the town knew Saul and his family, the word “father” is not being used literally, but instead is being used with the standard cultural meaning of “mentor” or “teacher.” In fact, the student-teacher relationship was usually so strong in the biblical culture that if the teacher died or went away, the disciples were referred to as “orphans” (John 14:18). The mature prophets often gathered disciples, who were known as the “sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1; Acts 3:25). Similarly, the “sons” of the Pharisees were not their real children, but their disciples (Luke 11:19).

1Sm 10:13

**“*local* shrine.”** The Hebrew word “shrine” is the Hebrew word *bamot*, and it referred to a place that was built up and leveled out and on which were generally placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52). In this case, there is no context indicating what might have been on that local shrine. Historically, the people of Gibeah were wicked, and some were even sons of Belial (children of the Devil) (Judg. 20:5, 13) so there could have been pagan gods on that shrine, but there might not have been. In any case, the shrine would have been old and historic, and the “new Saul” might have gone there to worship Yahweh as best he could.

1Sm 10:16

**“told, yes told.”** The Hebrew text uses the word “told” twice for emphasis, using the figure polyptoton (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“Saul did not tell.”** The Hebrew text reads, “he did not tell,” but the REV replaces “he” with “Saul” for clarity.

1Sm 10:17

**“Mizpah.”** Although there is more than one town called “Mizpah” in the Bible, this Mispah is almost certainly the one on the ancient north-south “Road of the Patriarchs,” that goes from Egypt north through Beer-sheba, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ramah, Mizpah, Bethel, Shechem, and on to the north. It is in northern Benjamin, and when the United Kingdom of Israel split into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, it was close to the northern border of Judah and served to guard the road between Judah and Israel. Also, at this time, it was close to, and looked down to the west upon, the territory of the Philistines, and so it was a perfect site to introduce Saul, the new king of Israel because Saul was a Benjamite and also because the people wanted a king to lead them into battle against their enemies (1 Sam. 8:19-20), and from Mizpah, the enemy territory could be seen.

1Sm 10:18

**“the kingdoms that oppressed you.”** In this case, the word “kingdoms” is likely put for “kings,” understanding that it was various Egyptian “kings” that oppressed Israel.[[14]](#footnote-18093) The Hebrew word “kingdoms” is feminine, but the word “oppressed” is masculine. It is also possible, however, that the verse is referring to kingdoms besides Egypt that oppressed Israel, such as Moab, Canaan, Midian, Ammon, and Philistia, all of which oppressed Israel during the Judges period.

1Sm 10:19

**“today.”** This is the cultural use of the word “today” that we see in Luke 23:43, where “today” is being used for emphasis. It had been some time since the Israelites formally rejected God and asked for a king, they did not just reject God “today” (cf. 1 Sam. 8:6-21). In many languages, including Greek, Hebrew, and English, words that we normally think of as being “time words” are often used for emphasis instead of to accurately report time. This happens with the English word “now” all the time. A teacher might say, “Now class, make sure you sign your test.” The purpose of “Now” in that sentence is not time, but emphasis, and that can be the case in both Hebrew and Greek as well (cf. Luke 11:39, Acts 13:11; 15:10; 22:16; 1 Cor. 14:26; James 4:13).

In the Hebrew culture, the word “today,” or “this day” was used for emphasis, and it is used that way many times in the Old Testament. “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,...” (Deut. 4:26); “know therefore today,...” (Deut. 4:39); “And these words, which I command thee this day,...” (Deut. 6:6). “I testify against you this day, that you shall perish” (Deut. 8:19). Similarly, Jesus used the word “today” for emphasis in Luke 23:43. A use that is very similar to Luke 23:43 is Deuteronomy 30:18, “I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish.”

[For more on the use of time words for emphasis, see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

**“thousands.”** The word may not mean a thousand here, but may refer to family groups or clans. In any case, it is a subdivision of a tribe.

1Sm 10:20

**“was taken.”** That is, Benjamin was “taken” by lot. This almost certainly involved the High Priest determining the will of God by means of the Urim and Thummim, stones that were kept in his breastplate pocket.

[For more on the Urim and Thummim and people being taken by lot, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

1Sm 10:21

**“clans.”** Although the Hebrew word can mean “families,” here it more likely means “clans.” Thus the tribe taken by lot was Benjamin, the clan was the clan of Matri, the family was the family of Kish, and then Saul was taken from the family of Kish. This long process of choosing by lot is abbreviated here in 1 Samuel 10:21. It seems most likely that Shimei was of the clan of Matri, as was the house of Saul (2 Sam. 16:5).

**“when they looked for him, he could not be found.”** It is noteworthy that the process of picking a specific person is so exact that it worked even when the person was not personally present. All the sons of Kish could have been asked about by the High Priest and all gotten a “No” from God, leaving only Saul, who then had to be the one God chose.

1Sm 10:22

**“Yahweh answered, “Behold, he has hidden himself.”** This kind of answer could not be given by the Urim and Thummim and by lot, so it had to be given by direct revelation from God. That revelation likely came to Samuel or to the High Priest.

**“he has hidden himself among the equipment.”** The Bible never gives us a reason that Saul hid himself. He knew that he was the one that was going to be chosen as king, because Samuel had told him that a while before (1 Sam. 10:1). Although there are likely a combination of reasons Saul hid, including not feeling ready to take on the responsibility to be king, this does give us some insight into the complex character of Saul. When he started out as king, he seemed to do a good job. He organized the tribes of Israel into a kingdom and put together an army. Then he successfully defended the town of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11), and attacked and defeated the Philistines and other enemies of Israel (1 Sam. 14:47-48).

In spite of that, however, throughout his reign, Saul showed signs of mental instability, insecurity, envy, and jealousy. Instead of maturing in his role as king, he allowed his doubts and fears to deepen and fester, and eventually he thus opened his mind up to an evil spirit, a demon (1 Sam. 16:14). The record of Saul should serve as a warning to all who aspire to leadership. Mental weakness and immaturity can lead to personal disaster and can destroy both one’s person and the people he or she is responsible for. We must recognize our weaknesses and work hard to overcome them and not let them dominate our thoughts.

1Sm 10:25

**“regulations of the kingdom.”** This is almost the same as in 1 Samuel 8:11, the “way of the king.” This is the “way of the kingdom,” but here it correctly applies to the regulations of the kingdom.

1Sm 10:27

**“sons of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

**1 Samuel Chapter 11**

1Sm 11:2

**“that all of your right eyes be gouged out​.”** The right eye was invaluable to the warrior because in order for the body to be protected in war the shield had to be mostly in front of the warrior, covering the left eye (the soldier held the sword in his right hand). If the right eye was blind, the warrior had to move the shield so far to the left to see to fight that the shield became essentially useless and the soldier would be vulnerable. In making his demand, Nahash was saying to the men of Jabesh-gilead that they would no longer be able to fight in battle and would be defenseless against any aggression.

1Sm 11:6

**“his anger burned exceedingly​.”** This is an idiom in Hebrew: his nose burned greatly.

1Sm 11:7

**“they came out as one man.”** This means the people had one singular purpose.

1Sm 11:11

**“and struck the Ammonites.”** The people of Jabesh-gilead never forgot this kind action of King Saul in rescuing them from the Ammonites, and years later risked their lives to take his body down from the wall of Beth-shean to keep it from being desecrated (1 Sam. 31:11-12).

**“survived.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “were left,” but the idea is “left alive” after the battle.

1Sm 11:14

**“let’s go to Gilgal.”** Gilgal was the first place Israel set up camp after they crossed the Jordan River (Josh. 5:9-10). So Gilgal was the first camp associated with Israel being a nation of united tribes possessing their very own land, the Promised Land. Up until then, they had not had a land of their own. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds and wandered the land without actually owning it, and then Jacob took his children and clan and went to Egypt. So Israel first actually became a nation with land when they camped at Gilgal under Joshua’s leadership. Now, hundreds of years later, the united tribes of Israel will morph into an actual kingdom, so crowning Saul as king, with everyone recognizing him as such, is very much a new beginning for Israel and so it is very fitting that it should occur in Gilgal.

**1 Samuel Chapter 12**

1Sm 12:2

**“the king walks before you.”** The use of “before” here means both “ahead” of you, and “in your presence.”

1Sm 12:3

**“before his anointed one.”** In this context, Yahweh’s “anointed one” is Saul, the new king. The Hebrew word translated as “anointed” is *mashiach* (#04899 מָשִׁיחַ), which gets translated as “messiah.” It is an adjective, so the word can be translated as “anointed one,” the “one” being the implied noun that the adjective is modifying. Jesus Christ was the Anointed One, but there were other “anointed ones” as well. For example, as we have here in 1 Sam. 12:3 and in 1 Samuel 24:6, Saul is called God’s “anointed one,” His “messiah.” In 2 Samuel 19:21, David is called an anointed one, a messiah. In 2 Chronicles 6:42, Solomon is called an anointed one. In Isaiah 45:1, the Persian king Cyrus is called God’s anointed one, God’s messiah. There are other anointed ones as well. The point is that just because someone was referred to as an “anointed one,” a “messiah,” did not mean they were the one and only “anointed one” that people were looking for who would rule the earth and bring justice to the world.

Knowing these facts becomes important when it comes to describing Jesus Christ as “messiah.” Since there were a number of “messiahs” in the Old Testament, the word “messiah” was not enough to identify Jesus as the Savior the people were looking for. There had to be other indicators as well. So, for example, when the angel was speaking to Mary, he made his point clear by saying about Jesus that “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,” and that his kingdom would last forever. By the time Mary lived, the throne of David had been vacant for well over 500 years, but God had promised David, “Your throne will be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). The fact that the angel said Mary’s son would sit on the throne of David during the time of King Herod, when the kingdom of Israel did not exist independently, but was a vassal of Rome, along with other things like Elizabeth getting pregnant, let Mary know that her son would be the messiah that she and every other Israelite believer was looking for.

1Sm 12:5

**“his anointed one.”** This refers to King Saul (see commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3).

1Sm 12:6

**“brought your fathers up.”** The singular verb in Hebrew shows that the reference is to Yahweh bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, not Moses and Aaron.

1Sm 12:8

**“brought your fathers out of Egypt.”** The verb “brought” is plural, so this is Moses and Aaron who brought Israel out of Egypt.

1Sm 12:11

**“Barak.”** The Septuagint has Barak and seems to preserve the original text here. The Hebrew text reads “Bedan,” but there is no such person anywhere else in Scripture.

1Sm 12:12

**“even though Yahweh your God is your king!”** Although some English versions read that Yahweh “was” the king, the Hebrew text is present tense and Yahweh still “is” king, it is just that now there is an earthly king under him.

1Sm 12:15

**“mouth of Yahweh.”** This is a metonymy for the commandments that come from the mouth of God, but in this case, the word “mouth” is both clear and graphic.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“as it was against your fathers.”** There is no compelling reason to follow the Septuagint here and have “king” instead of “fathers.” Saul was the first king, so the phrase “as it was against” makes little sense here.

1Sm 12:16

**“great sign.”** This was a sign that what Samuel said about Israel’s history and current rebellion against God is correct. The translation “great thing” has been avoided because rain in the harvest season could be hurtful to the farmers if the grain was lying on the ground already cut, so it was not “great” as we usually use “great” today. Drying out cut grain so that it would not mold would be quite an inconvenience. Also, a big thunderstorm in June in Israel is completely unexpected, and it seems that in this case it “came out of nowhere,” which from a natural sense it did. God made it happen as a sign.

1Sm 12:18

**“thunder.”** In Hebrew, “thunder” is plural, meaning that God sent a lot of thunders, which really got the attention of the people.

1Sm 12:21

**“Empty-*gods*.”** The Hebrew word is a noun that has many connotations, including “emptiness, worthlessness, uselessness, waste, formlessness (cf. Gen. 1:2), and confusion.” It was used as a derogatory word, title, or name for pagan gods. Fox (The Schocken Bible) translates the word “confusion-gods,” and that is certainly true also because demons are constantly causing confusion in the world.

1Sm 12:24

**“in truth.”** The Hebrew word can sometimes refer to faithfulness, thus, “serve Him faithfully” (cf. CSB; ESV).

**“with you.”** The Hebrew is “with you.” God works “with” His people; together with them.

1Sm 12:25

**“evil, yes, evil.”** The Hebrew text uses the word “evil” twice, using the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**1 Samuel Chapter 13**

1Sm 13:2

**“2,000 were with Saul in Michmash.”** Saul lost that hilltop to the Philistines, as we see by 1 Samuel 13:5. He retreated southeast to Gilgal (1 Sam. 13:4). Jonathan had to retake it (cf. 1 Sam. 14:5).

**“and 1,000 were with Jonathan in Gibeah.”** Verses such as this show that when Saul started to reign he was a mature man and had a fully grown son.

1Sm 13:3

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“throughout all the land.”** It is most likely that Saul sent messengers throughout Israel with the news of what had happened.

**“Let the Hebrews hear!”** The name “Hebrews” was more the name for the loose tribes of Israel before they became a nation, so it is an enigma that Saul is using it here.

1Sm 13:4

**“all Israel heard that Saul had struck the garrison of the Philistines.”** This seems to be a boast on the part of Saul. Although Jonathan did fight as part of Saul’s army, Jonathan was the crown prince and it seems he should have gotten the credit for what he had done.

**“to Gilgal.”** If Saul’s intent was to fight the Philistines, it is questionable as to why Saul went down to the Jordan River area to gather the troops.

1Sm 13:5

**“3,000 chariots.”** The Hebrew text reads 30,000, but it is well-recognized that this is a copyist’s error. A version of the Septuagint, and the Syriac version, reads 3,000, which is much more likely correct. Or it could be that the Hebrew word “thousand,” which can also refer to a fighting unit (“unit,” “squad,” “platoon”) could mean that here. In that case, the Philistines could have had 30 units of chariots. If there were ten chariots in a unit, there would be 300 chariots. One reason any chariots at all are in question is that the terrain between Gibeah and Michmash is hilly, rocky, very uneven, and basically impossible terrain for chariot warfare. This is foot soldier terrain.

**“and people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude.”** God promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the sand on the seashore in multitude (Gen. 22:17), but here the unbelieving Philistines are that numerous.

**“east of Beth-aven.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “in front of Beth-aven.”

1Sm 13:7

**“the Hebrews had crossed over.”** The Hebrew text seems to include an intentional image of a reversal of God’s purpose for them. The word “Hebrew” and “cross over” come from the same root. The Hebrews were likely so named because they were the ones who “crossed over” into Israel from the east, and now the “ones who crossed over” are crossing back, reversing God’s plan for them.

**“he was still in Gilgal.”** Saul had gone to Gilgal by the Jordan River, abandoning the central hill country and leaving it to the Philistines.

**“all the people.”** That is, all the people who were with Saul, i.e., his army.

1Sm 13:8

**“according to the time set by Samuel.”** The time was set in 1 Samuel 10:7-8, but Samuel did come on the seventh day (1 Sam. 13:10). Saul was impatient and disobedient, very characteristic of him at this stage in his life.

1Sm 13:11

**“you did not come during the appointed days.”** Here Saul makes a weak attempt to explain away his error. As Robert Bergen notes, Samuel “did in fact arrive on the seventh day.”[[15]](#footnote-24279) There are a number of incidents in Saul’s life before he was rejected as king (1 Sam. 15:23-28), that show Saul was unfit as king, and his lying about Samuel to cover up his weakness is one of them.

**“and that the Philistines were assembling themselves together at Michmash.”** This can be seen to be a hollow excuse, because Saul is at Gilgal in the Jordan Valley and Michmash is about 15 miles away and 3,000 feet up in elevation, so the Philistine “threat” was at least a day’s march away.

1Sm 13:12

**“I have not asked the favor of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “I have not made sweet the face of Yahweh.”

1Sm 13:14

**“will not continue.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “will not stand,” but it means “continue” in this context.

**“you have not kept what Yahweh commanded you.”** This almost certainly refers to much more than just that Saul did not wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifice. Saul had not had the heart of God for some years now.

1Sm 13:15

**“and went from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.”** Samuel left Gilgal and the Jordan River Valley and traveled westward into the hill country of the tribe of Benjamin. Samuel was apparently not afraid of the Philistine presence in the central hill country that Saul seemed to be so concerned about.

**“And Saul counted the people.”** This shows the hard-heartedness of Saul. There seems to be no remorse, repentance, or confession of wrongdoing at Samuel’s statement that Saul lost the kingdom.

1Sm 13:16

**“stayed in Geba of Benjamin.”** So between 1 Samuel 13:15 and 13:16, Saul and his men must have moved up from Gilgal by the Jordan River to Geba in the central hill country of Benjamin.

**“the Philistines encamped in Michmash.”** Michmash was a mile or so to the north (and slightly east) of Geba.

1Sm 13:17

**“The raiding parties came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies.”** The Philistines were overconfident and arrogant. They had a large enough army to attack Saul’s camp, and if they killed him and much of his army the rest of Israel might have fallen to them. Instead, confident of their future victory, they decided to harass Israel and demoralize them with raiding parties.

**“one company turned to the way that leads to Ophrah.”** This raiding party headed north.

**“land of Shual.”** Literally, the “land of the jackal” (or “fox”) the Hebrew word is the same for both jackal and fox. The exact territory is unknown, but it would have been a region in the vicinity of Ophrah.

1Sm 13:18

**“turned toward the road to Beth-horon.”** This raiding party went westward, very likely to secure their supply line; and eventually, the route they took would be the way the Philistines escaped from the Israelite attack.

**“the road of the territory that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.”** This third raiding party traveled southeast, and from the heights in Ephraim, one could easily look down into the Jordan Valley and thus “down on the Valley of Zeboim.” The Valley of Zeboim” was the “valley” (at that point more of a plain, much like the broad “Valley of Jezreel”) in which the town of Zeboim had been located; the exact location is unknown. The “wilderness” or “desert” was the “Judean Wilderness,” the desert area associated with the proximity of the Dead Sea.

**“Valley of Zeboim.”** Literally, the “Valley of the Hyena.”

1Sm 13:19

**“there was no blacksmith to be found.”** The right to be able to defend one’s life, family, society, and property is a fundamental right and essential to peaceful life on earth. The Devil knows this, and disarming people so that they are subject to bullying and terror by tyrannical and ungodly overlords and governments has occurred over and over throughout time. In this case, Israel was subject to the raiding parties sent out by the Philistines, who no doubt murdered, raped, stole, and destroyed with little or no resistance from disarmed Israel. For the average Israelite, daily life under the subjugation of the Philistines would have been a horror. Inserted where it is here, this verse is pointing to the failure of Saul’s rule. Instead of leading attacks against the enemies of Yahweh, Saul has been subjugated by them.

1Sm 13:20

**“sickle.”** The REV follows the Septuagint. The Hebrew text has a copyist’s error and reads “plow blade” a second time. The error is a dittography.

1Sm 13:21

**“two-thirds of a shekel.”** The Hebrew word is “*pim*,” and it occurs only here in the Old Testament. Older versions took an educated guess at the meaning and some have “file,” (cf. KJV), but that has proven to be wrong. The verse is saying that the Philistines charged for the service of sharpening metal instruments, and the price was not cheap for those times. Archaeologists have now found stone weights marked *pim* in some excavations, and the weights are roughly equal to two-thirds of a shekel, roughly 0.26 ounces (7.4 grams).

**“to set the goads.”** That is, to set the metal points on the ox goads.

1Sm 13:22

**“there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan.”** It has always been, and still is today, a tactic of the Devil to disarm people so that they cannot defend themselves against the governing force. Many countries today have disarmed their citizens, and none of those countries is the better for it. Death by firearm may have decreased, but government oppression, bullying, strong arm crime, and crimes like rape are rampant in those countries. As the End Times approach, violence, war, and random violence will increase. Jesus knew this and encouraged his men to have a weapon to defend themselves with (cf. Luke 22:36). In fact, smart people follow the advice Jesus gave his disciples in Luke 22:36 and have some cash on hand, some provisions, and a way to defend themselves in case there is some kind of emergency situation.

1Sm 13:23

**“And the garrison of the Philistines went out.”** It is likely that when the Philistines got news that Saul had gathered men together that they sent a group to guard the pass between Geba and Michmash and keep the roads open. It would not have occurred to them that the Israelites would attack them, but this is the garrison that Jonathan and his armorbearer attacked and defeated, leading to the rout of the Philistines described in 1 Samuel 14.

**“the pass of Michmash.”** A known pass that goes between Michmash and Geba (cf. Isa. 10:28-29).

**1 Samuel Chapter 14**

1Sm 14:1

**“That same day.”** The Hebrew vocabulary indicates that this is the day that the Philistine army came out to the pass at Michmash. Jonathan did not want the Philistine army to get dug in and become fortified.

**“on the other side.”** That is, on the other side of the deep valley that runs east to west between Geba and Michmash.

**“But he did not tell his father.”** It is possible that by this time Jonathan realized that Saul was making some very bad decisions and not getting guidance from God. In contrast, it is almost certain that at this point Jonathan was walking by the spirit and had revelation from God as to what to do. It is unlikely that he would have attacked an entire garrison of the Philistines on his own. There is a wonderful lesson here. It occasionally happens in life that someone who is in a higher position of authority (a leader, a boss) is not walking with God and is making bad decisions, and it takes great prayer and wisdom to go around them, so to speak, and do the right and godly thing. Believers must remember that the highest “boss” or “leader” is God, and that obeying Him takes precedence over obeying earthly leaders. There may be consequences in this life for obeying God, but that is the cost of living in a fallen world. The apostles defied the religious leaders of Israel and were whipped for it (Acts 5:40), but they had done the right thing and will be rewarded for their godly obedience in the next life. Jesus used this same kind of wisdom when he did things with some people and excluded others. He often took Peter, James, and John with him and left the others behind, and he sometimes made sure that others were not around when he did miracles, such as when he raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Mark 5:36-40).

1Sm 14:2

**“sitting.”** The Hebrew can also be translated as “staying,” but Saul was not camped out long-term on the outskirts of Gibeah, but he apparently regularly stayed there and performed his role as king, which seems to be indicated by the word “sitting’ That Saul was regularly there is likely, but in this case, it seems the emphasis is on the fact that Saul was “sitting” as king (cf. CEB, NAS, NET, NKJV). We see the same vocabulary in 1 Kings 22:10 when Jehoshaphat and Ahab sat on their thrones at the threshing floor outside the gate of Samaria (1 Kings 22:10), and Deborah sat as the judge under a palm tree (Judg. 4:5). Lucifer wanted to exalt his throne above the stars of God and “sit” (rule and judge) on the Mountain of Assembly (Isa. 14:13).

**“under the pomegranate tree.”** Likely mentioned to highlight Saul’s position as king, getting to sit in the shade while others would stand in the sun (cf. Judg. 4:5).

**“at the threshing floor.”** The traditional translation, “in Migron,” has always presented difficulty because it has never been located and besides, normally a town would not be located on the outskirts of another town. There is evidence that the meaning likely refers to a threshing floor. Threshing floors were usually large and flat, and thus a good place for a king to sit, and sometimes by the gate or outskirts of the city, as we see at Samaria (1 Kings 22:10). The translation “threshing floor” is espoused by David T. Tsumura and others.[[16]](#footnote-16595) If the threshing floor was large, it would not be unusual to have trees nearby to provide welcome shade since the grain harvest was always in the hot summer, and the trees could even be close enough to encroach upon the threshing floor itself.

**“and the people who were with him.”** That is, his soldiers.

1Sm 14:3

**“Ahijah was wearing an ephod.”** So Ahijah was the High Priest at this time, but this is somewhat ominous because Ahijah was a priest in the line of Eli whose descendants would lose the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:30-36), and they are serving a king who has lost his kingship. The genealogy of Eli to Ahijah is given here. Eli was the High Priest in 1 Samuel 1. He died in 1 Samuel 4:18 when he heard the news that in the war with the Philistines the ark of God had been captured. His sons were Hophni and Phinehas, and they died in that same war (1 Sam. 4:17). Phinehas’ son was Ahitub, as we see here in 1 Samuel 14:3, and Phinehas’ other son, who did not become High Priest, was Ichabod (1 Sam. 4:19-22). The son of Ahitub was Ahijah, as we see here in 1 Samuel 14:3. So the line of High Priests was Eli, Phinehas, Ahitub, Ahijah.

1Sm 14:4

**“Between the passes.”** There is one large pass, but it has some different options as to how exactly to cross the ravine.

**“a tooth-shaped cliff on the one side.”** This location is described in some detail in Josephus.

**“Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.”** Bozez means “shining,” and Seneh means “acacia,” and still to this day the valley below is dotted with acacia trees.

1Sm 14:5

**“in front of Michmash and the other on the south in front of Geba.”** This is very specific geography. The valley, the ravine, between Geba on the south and Michmash on the north is so steep that if you are in the ravine there is a cliff in front of you to the north and a cliff behind you to the south.

1Sm 14:6

**“It may be.”** Jonathan knew that God wanted victory over the Philistines, and he was a skilled warrior, so at this point, he was willing to risk his life in an attempt to save the fledgling Kingdom of Israel. Very soon after he seems much more confident that Yahweh will give him victory (1 Sam. 14:10). God’s people must be bold and be willing to risk to accomplish the will of God. We see the same kind of attitude in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:17-18. They knew God could deliver them, but they were not 100 percent confident He would.

In this record, we see part of the reason that Jonathan became so close to David. David was willing to risk his life for the kingdom too, and we see that when he fought Goliath (1 Sam. 17).

1Sm 14:10

**“if they say this, ‘Come up to us!’ then we will go up, for Yahweh has given them into our hand.”** Jonathan had to have revelation to say this because it would have been the natural thing for the Philistines to invite the Hebrews up to fight. The steep valley was apparently heavily wooded, which is why Jonathan and his armor-bearer had to “reveal” themselves to the Philistines, so the Philistines would not naturally descend the steep bank and lose the advantage of the high ground and also possibly risk being ambushed by other people hiding among the trees.

1Sm 14:11

**“The Hebrews.”** The Philistines use the term “Hebrews” because Israel was not yet thought of as a nation by the other nations around them. The “Hebrews” was more used for the group of associated tribes that descended from Jacob. It would take some time before the surrounding nations thought of “Israel” as a united nation.

1Sm 14:12

**“teach you a lesson.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, and the difficulty of bringing the idiom into English is why the English versions differ so much. The Hebrew text is more literally, “make you know a *dabar*” (#01697 דָבָר); *dabar* means “word,” “matter,” or “thing”). Young’s Literal Translation has “cause you to know something.” This could be easily translated as “teach you something,” but given the idiomatic nature of the statement, “teach you a lesson” is a better way to translate what the overconfident and arrogant Philistines were saying (cf. CEB, CSB, NAB, NIV, NLT, TNK, NET), and is the way we would usually say it in English.

**“Come up after me, for Yahweh has given them into the hand of Israel.”** Jonathan certainly had revelation from Yahweh as to what to do by this time, and speaks with the calm assurance of one who knows the will of God. We see the same confident talk when David challenged Goliath (1 Sam. 17:45-47). But God’s revelation does not guarantee victory, it must be accompanied by trust in God and willingness to do the hard work at hand. Jonathan and his armor-bearer still had to risk their lives and fight to win the battle.

We can see the courage that Jonathan and his armor-bearer had to have in this situation because this was not a “sneak attack.” The enemy was better armed, larger in number, had the advantage of higher ground, and had invited the attack and was expecting it. So this is one more biblical example where the hand of Yahweh is obvious. People act and risk, but Yahweh gives the victory.

1Sm 14:13

**“And they fell before Jonathan.”** Jonathan would likely have killed many and mortally wounded others whom the armor-bearer would then finish off, although the armor-bearer no doubt killed his share of the enemy. The Philistines, overconfident and unprepared for this bold and aggressive attack, were caught off guard, but were still trained soldiers and so killing them required skill and determination. This is an important lesson for believers: even if we are doing the will of God, we must be prepared to be bold and aggressive about it. Occasionally some Christian teacher will say that all we need to do to have God’s victory is trust (“have faith”) and pray. But the many examples throughout the Bible like this one, which shows believers accomplishing the will of God by bold and aggressive (and sometimes risky) action, is the true picture of what it takes to see God’s will done on this fallen earth.

1Sm 14:14

**“in, as it were, half a furrow *length* of a team *of oxen plowing* in a field.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic. Many English versions use the word “acre,” and the idea for that translation comes from the tradition that an acre of land was the amount of land that a team of oxen could plow in one day. Similarly, the Hebrew “furrow (“furrow’s length”) had the same basic idea; the length of a furrow that oxen would plow in a day if they went back and forth and plowed a plot of land. However, the exact area indicated by the Hebrew text is unclear because it is unknown how many times the farmer would go back and forth. If he went only a few times, the furrow could be quite long, while if he went back and forth many times the furrow would be shorter. So we really do not know the area in which Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some 20 men, but it would not have been very large, and perhaps very close to half an acre.

1Sm 14:15

**“and the earth quaked.”** God helped Israel by adding an earthquake at the very time of Jonathan’s attack, which added to the fear and panic among the Philistines.

**“it was a trembling from God.”** This great trembling (the Hebrew can also mean “panic”) came from God, who was now actively fighting for Israel. Occasionally the word “God” is used in Hebrew to express something that is large, excessive, or superlative, which explains why some versions read something such as “an exceeding great trembling” (ASV) or “a very great panic” (ESV). However, in this context, it seems most logical that the text is letting the reader know why, not just the Philistine garrison that was attacked by Jonathan, but the whole Philistine army, was suddenly struck with great fear and ran away. God sent a great panic on the Philistines.

1Sm 14:16

**“Gibeah of Benjamin.”** Situated on a high point, the watchmen in Gibeah could see Michmash and the Philistines running away.

**“multitude.”** The Hebrew word translated “multitude” is *hamon* (#01995 הָמוֹן, sometimes spelled הָמֹן cf. Ezek. 5:7(, and it can refer to a crowd or abundance as it does in 1 Samuel 14:16, or what happens in a crowd such as tumult, confusion, or it can refer to a sound made from a crowd, an uproar, sound, or murmur, as it does three verses later in 1 Samuel 14:19, where many versions translate it “uproar,” “tumult,” or “noise.”

Just like in other languages, Hebrew words often have several meanings, so although when a word appears more than once in a context it usually has the same meaning, it is not uncommon that the meaning would be different. There are many other examples: “regret” and “repent” (see commentary on 1 Sam. 15:11).

**“going back and forth.”** The Philistines were so confused and panicked that they ran back and forth, not sure of which way to go.

1Sm 14:18

**“Bring the ark of God here.”** The Septuagint has “ephod” instead of ark, and many scholars think that is the correct reading and the Hebrew text was miscopied at some point. However, it is possible that Saul did ask that the ark be brought to where he was.

1Sm 14:19

**“uproar.”** The Hebrew word is the same for the multitude of people and the sound—the uproar—that the multitude makes (see commentary on 1 Sam. 14:16).

**“Withdraw your hand!”** The statement “Withdraw your hand” indicates that the priest was using the Urim and Thummin in his breastplate to determine what was going on and what to do about it. This process could take a while because the “lot” that came from the breastplate could only say “Yes” or “No,” so a person such as the king would have to be clear about the questions he would ask. Apparently, King Saul felt that they did not have time to clearly determine what to do next, and joining the battle was the logical move.

[For more on the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

1Sm 14:20

**“every man’s sword was against his fellow.”** God so confused the Philistines that they began to kill each other. There are other battles in the Bible where God works such that the enemies of God kill each other. For example, when Gideon fought the Midianites (Judg. 7:22), and when Jehoshaphat fought the armies from the east (2 Chron. 20:23).

This was very helpful to Israel for a couple of reasons. For one thing, at that time the Israelites were not well armed, whereas the Philistines were (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-22), and also the Philistines killing each other allowed the Israelites to arm themselves with the now available weapons and armor.

1Sm 14:21

**“and who went up with them into the camp, they too turned around.”** The Hebrew text is difficult here, and the English versions vary. The REV translation follows versions such as the BBE, CEB, ESV, NAB, NIV, and NRSV.

1Sm 14:23

**“The battle crossed beyond Beth-aven.”** Beth-aven was east of Michmash, and the main battle moved westward, the Philistines fleeing back to their cities on the coast (cf. 1 Sam. 14:31). Actually, the battle went much further west than Beth-aven. But from 1 Samuel 14:23 we learn that when the Israelites first attacked, the Philistines ran in lots of directions, even to the east.

1Sm 14:24

**“distressed.”** The Hebrew can also be “pressed, hard-pressed, oppressed.” All of these fit the situation. There is a great contrast here between Yahweh, who saved Israel (1 Sam. 14:23), and Saul who distressed Israel. At a time when Israel should have been rejoicing, they were distressed. The king and leader, Saul, made a very pious-looking but ungodly curse, which greatly hurt both the people and Israel’s cause in getting free from Philistine domination and reoccupying the Promised Land. Jesus said that we would know evil people and actions by their fruit, and Saul’s fruit was bad.

**“I have avenged myself of my enemies.”** Saul’s pride shines through and he does not give any credit to Yahweh.

1Sm 14:25

**“all *the people of* the land.”** The Hebrew text uses metonymy, “all the land” represents “all the people of the land.” When Saul put that oath-curse on the people it did not just affect a few people but the whole army who faithfully followed and obeyed him.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“came into the forest.”** Coming down from the hill country and going toward the coast there are areas of woods punctuated with fields and meadows. The Israelite army had entered one of those areas.

**“honey on the open ground.”** This would be incredibly rare and was likely a provision of God for the army that Saul, by his oath-curse, kept them from receiving.

1Sm 14:31

**“from Michmash to Aijalon.”** This is downhill to the west.

1Sm 14:32

**“So the people rushed upon the spoil.”** The sun had now set and the people could eat, but they did not wait to properly slaughter and cook the meat.

1Sm 14:33

**“You have been unfaithful.”** It is Saul who has abused his power as king and led Israel away from the Law, and yet he accuses Israel of unfaithfulness to the covenant. This is typical of ungodly people: they accuse others of doing what they are doing.

1Sm 14:35

**“the first time he built an altar.”** Saul’s ungodly boldness is increasing. Saul had been told that he would no longer be king. The Hebrew is difficult to bring into English. The word translated “first” is a verb, expressing a verbal idea.

1Sm 14:36

**“take plunder from them.”** The Hebrew just uses a verb, “plunder them,” but that is very awkward English, and the text means “take plunder from them.”

**“But the priest said.”** The Hebrew can be “And the priest said,” or “Then the priest said,” as well as “but.” However, in this context, it seems that Saul and the people were going to rush down on the Philistines and the priest interrupted their hasty plan, so the word “but” is warranted.

**“Let’s draw near to God here.”** The reason to “draw near” to God was to inquire of Him. Some of the English versions read, “Let us inquire of God.” While that is an interpretation and not a translation, it does accurately represent what the priest is saying.

1Sm 14:38

**“all you “cornerstones” of the people.”** The leaders were the “cornerstones” of Israel, guiding and supporting it (cf. Judg. 20:2). Jesus Christ, however, is the chief cornerstone.

**“what sin has happened this day.”** Saul did not know what sin had been committed.

1Sm 14:39

**“die, yes, die.”** See Genesis 2:16.

1Sm 14:43

**“tasted, yes, tasted.”** The word “tasted” is doubled for emphasis, using the figure of speech polyptoton. Jonathan emphasizes that he only tasted of the honey, it isn’t like he ate a full meal (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“here I am, must I now die?”** The Hebrew can be taken as a fatalistic realization: “I will now die.” Or, as a question, “Must I now die.” Or, as sarcasm, “Here, I am about to die.” But the question seems to fit the best in this context.

1Sm 14:44

**“God do so and more also.”** Saul makes an incredibly emphatic statement here, showing he was totally blinded by religious zeal to the point of horrific ungodliness. First, he uses an oath-curse, “God do so and more also.” Then he uses the figure of speech polyptoton, repeating the word “die” in the same pattern as in Genesis 2:17.

[See commentaries on Genesis 2:16 and 2:17.]

1Sm 14:45

**“But the people said.”** Thankfully, the people of Israel intervened against the madness of King Saul. They emphasized their speech with a counter-oath to Saul’s oath, saying, “As Yahweh lives.” Then in an interesting blend of power and tact, they do not directly threaten the king, but speak in a way that firmly states their case without a specific threat. They say, “if one of his hairs falls to the ground….” This is technically the figure of speech aposiopesis, or “sudden silence,” when the speaker stops and lets the listener fill in the blank from their imagination. For example, if two children are fighting in the back seat of the car, the parent who is driving might say, “If I have to come back there…!” That is a threat of sorts, but it is unspecific so the children have to figure out what might happen if the parent had to stop the car and deal with them. Similarly, the people said to Saul, “if one of his hairs falls to the ground...,” leaving it up to Saul to imagine what might happen if Jonathan was harmed.

[For more on the figure of speech aposiopesis, see commentary on Luke 19:42.]

1Sm 14:47

**“taken the kingship.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “captured the kingship.” The emphasis seems to be on Saul’s work, not God’s gift.

**“he was victorious.”** This translation closely follows the Septuagint, but the Hebrew text can have the same basic meaning.[[17]](#footnote-20560)

1Sm 14:49

**“Ishvi.”** Also called Abinadab (1 Chron. 8:33).

1Sm 14:50

**“Abner the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle.”** Ner was Saul’s uncle and Abner was Saul’s first cousin and thus a very close relative. He was the commander of Saul’s army (1 Sam. 17:55).

1Sm 14:52

**“he took him to himself.”** That is, Saul drafted him into his army. Saul’s constant battles with the Philistines meant he had to keep his army manned and ready.

**1 Samuel Chapter 15**

1Sm 15:3

**“devoted to destruction.”** For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Joshua 6:17.

1Sm 15:5

**“to the city of Amalek.”** Scholars are not sure which city this is.

**“set an ambush.”** This translation follows the Septuagint, as most English versions do. The Hebrew, “and he contended in the valley,” seems to have lost a letter which changed the meaning.

1Sm 15:7

**“from Havilah.”** The location of Havilah is unknown, however, “from Havilah to Shur” is the Ishmaelite territory given in Genesis 25:18, so Havilah would have had to have been in southern Israel, likely south of the Dead Sea. That also makes sense because the Amalekites who lived there would have been in a good position to know when Israel left Egypt and to attack them as they traveled from Egypt toward the Promised Land.

**“Shur.”** This is the region on the northwest corner of the Sinai peninsula, just before you enter the Nile delta and Egypt proper.

**“next to Egypt.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “upon the face of Egypt,” meaning right next to Egypt.

1Sm 15:8

**“Agag the king of the Amalekites.”** Saul did not kill all the Amalekites and not even all the descendants of Agag, as we see from the book of Esther (see commentary on Esther 3:1).

**“devoted to destruction.”** Saul and his army killed all the people.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

1Sm 15:9

**“the best of the sheep and the cattle and the fatlings and the lambs and all that was good.”** Knowing Saul and the people, there was no intent at this time to sacrifice all these animals to Yahweh, even though that was what Saul said in 1 Samuel 15:15. The fact that Saul spared Agag showed he did not intend to keep the word of Yahweh; he certainly was not going to sacrifice Agag, and what would be the point of keeping him alive? By verse 15 Saul was just trying to make excuses for his disobedience. By that time he was just saying things that might convince others that he intended to fulfill the command of Yahweh even though that was not his real intention.

**“devoted to destruction.”** In this context, the phrase means “to utterly destroy.”

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

1Sm 15:11

**“I regret.”** The Hebrew word translated “regret” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and here it refers to God changing His mind about something He had done and regretting it or being sorry He had done it. God interacts with people and will sometimes change His mind about something He has done if things do not work out as He had planned. There is an apparent conflict between 1 Samuel 15:11 and 1 Samuel 15:29; see commentary on 1 Samuel 15:29.

[For more on God changing His mind or having regret, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

**“made.”** The verb is more literally, “make king,” so the reading would be something such as “I regret that I have made King Saul to be king,” but that is somewhat awkward English.

1Sm 15:12

**“Carmel.”** This is the town of Carmel in Judah, not Mount Carmel. Carmel in Judah is about seven miles south of Hebron. Given this context, the monument was to commemorate Saul’s victory over the Amalekites. One wonders if this could have been the place where the first battle against them started. Or it may just have been because it was on the road that he and his army would have taken south to engage the Amalekites. Carmel in Judah was the town of Nabal and his wife Abigail who became the wife of David when Nabal died.

1Sm 15:14

**“sound.”** The Hebrew word translated “sound” is *qol* (#06963 קוֹל qowl, also sometimes spelled קֹל), and it primarily means “sound” or “voice.” Although we would normally think in terms of the “sound” that sheep and cattle make, it is possible that here in this context Samuel meant *qol* to mean “voice,” as if the sheep and cattle were signs that were speaking up and witnessing the fact Saul had disobeyed God. The signs of God speak up in support of Him (cf. Exod. 4:8-9 and see commentary on Exod. 4:8).

1Sm 15:15

**“to sacrifice.”** This was likely a lie. God’s “sacrifice” was to destroy the animals. There is no reason to assume that Yahweh would have been happier with one type of sacrifice than the sacrifice of devoting the animals to destruction. It seems that Saul invented this to save face.

**“to Yahweh your God.”** It is interesting in this record in 1 Samuel 15 that Saul repeats the phrase “Yahweh your God” (meaning Yahweh, Samuel’s God) three times in this chapter (1 Sam. 15:15, 21, 30). Saul never just says, “to Yahweh,” or “to Yahweh our God,” but always, “to Yahweh your God.” It is unclear exactly why Saul did that, but it seems like he is somehow distancing himself from Yahweh, as if to say, “Yahweh and His commands are between Yahweh and you, while I am king over the people and must take care of them.” In any case, it is clear that since Saul made the statement three times in the conversation, that he was distancing himself from Yahweh and his responsibility to do exactly what Yahweh commanded.

**“devoted...to destruction.”** That is, destroyed them all.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

1Sm 15:16

**“Stop.”** The verb is imperative. Samuel has had enough of Saul’s lies and excuses.

1Sm 15:18

**“and Yahweh sent you on a mission.”** The Hebrew word translated “mission” is *derek* (#01870 דֶּרֶךְ), the common word for “road” or “way.” The Bible has a lot to say about the “road” that we are to travel on; the straight road, without turning to the right or to the left. Yahweh sent Saul on a “road” for him to follow, in this case, a specific “mission,” but Saul turned off the road and went his own way. In this case, the word “road” is translated “mission” due to its being a specific “road” to take (cf. CJB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NLT). Some versions translate the Hebrew as “journey,” but that does not catch the meaning as well as “mission.”

**“devoted to destruction.”** That is, kill them all.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

1Sm 15:19

**“but swooped down upon the spoils.”** The Hebrew verb indicates a quick and greedy action, and has been brought into English in different ways: CJB “seize the spoil”; CSB “rush on the plunder”; ESV “pounce on the spoil”; KJV “fly upon the spoil”; NKJV “swoop down on the spoil.” The NET has, “you have greedily rushed upon the plunder!”

It is obvious from what Samuel said and the way he said it that he knew that Saul and his army had no intention of killing all the animals they took as a sacrifice to Yahweh. The implication of greed built into the verb shows that the people intended to keep the spoils, or at least a lot of it, for themselves.

1Sm 15:20

**“But I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh.”** It is unclear here whether Saul is just a stubborn liar who cannot bring himself to be humble before Yahweh and admit his guilt, or whether Saul is so spiritually blind and ungodly by this point that he actually believes he obeyed God. At some level, he does know that the word of Yahweh was not fulfilled, because in the next verse, he shifts the blame to the people.

**“devoted...to destruction.”** That is, killed them all.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

1Sm 15:21

**“But the people.”** Here Saul shifts the blame for not fulfilling the word of Yahweh from himself to the people, but even so he does not admit that what happened was wrong or disobedient. He is just acting as if instead of killing the animals where they were in the camps of the Amalekites, he was bringing them back to Israel to sacrifice them.

**“to sacrifice to Yahweh your God in Gilgal.”** Saul is making it seem like he is fulfilling the word of Yahweh, but not wanting to do it where the Amalekites were, he wanted to complete the sacrifice in Gilgal, which had a long sacred history. But it seems clear that Saul is just making things up as he goes.

1Sm 15:22

**“to obey is better than sacrifice.”** Obeying God from a humble heart is much more important in God’s sight than sacrifices and offerings. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. An evil and arrogant person who has no real intention of obeying God cannot simply do a sacrifice, make an offering, or pray to God, and then be accepted by God. God is much more interested in obedience and a humble heart than in a person’s making sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Jer. 7:22-23; Hos. 6:6 [quoted in Matt. 9:13 and 12:7]; Mic. 6:6-8).

The Bible says that when a person is evil and unrepentant, the sacrifices and offerings he makes, including prayers, are simply rejected by God. God’s favor is not for sale (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:1-8; Jer. 6:20; 14:10-12; Hos. 5:5-6; Amos 5:21-23; Mal. 1:10; 2:13-14; James 4:6. Verses that specifically mention prayer include: Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3).

In this case in 1 Samuel, King Saul had flagrantly disobeyed God, then tried to make various excuses to cover his sin instead of humbly confessing his sin to God. God was not fooled by Saul’s excuses, and lost his kingdom because of his arrogance (1 Sam. 15:23). As we can see from v. 23, rebellion and being stubborn are very serious sins.

[For more on God being more concerned with love and obedience than sacrifices, see commentary on Matt. 5:24. For more on God not speaking much about sacrifices when Israel came out of Egypt, see commentary on Jer. 7:22.]

1Sm 15:23

**“teraphim.”** Teraphim were household gods, and were sometimes used for divination (see commentary on Gen. 31:19).

1Sm 15:24

**“the commandment of Yahweh.”** Literally, “the mouth of Yahweh.”

1Sm 15:25

**“forgive.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “carry away” my sin.

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

1Sm 15:27

**“edge.”** The Hebrew word also means “wing” or “hem.”

**“grabbed the edge of his cloak, and it tore.”** This was a supernatural sign. The outer cloaks worn by the people were very sturdy and could not be torn just by grabbing it.

1Sm 15:28

**“Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you.”** 1 Samuel 15:28-29 shows us that there is sometimes a space of time between what God does in the spiritual realm and what happens in the physical realm. Although David’s age at this time is not stated and not exactly known, he was shortly anointed king of Israel. However, in the flesh, Saul remained the king until his death, which was likely some 15-20 years after this.

**“this day.”** God is merciful and forgiving, but when someone consistently ignores and defies Him, often there will come a point in time when God simply moves on from that person and moves forward with His plan in another way. In the case of King Saul, that day came after He disobeyed God’s command concerning the Amalekites and then lied about it to Samuel. That was the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back,” and God took the kingdom from Saul, even though Saul remained the king in a fleshly sense until his death some 15-20 years later.

1Sm 15:29

**“change his mind.”** The Hebrew word translated “change his mind” and later in the verse “changes his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם). This verse has been considered difficult by some people because it seems to contradict what God has said in other places, but the resolution to that apparent contradiction is to realize that 1 Samuel 15:29 is spoken in a very specific context, the context of Samuel telling Saul that God does not change his mind—will not change his mind—about removing Saul from being the king of Israel.

It is important to see the specific context here in verse 29, because a few verses earlier, in 1 Samuel 15:11, God said He “regretted” making Saul king, and the Hebrew word translated “regret” is *nacham*, the same word that occurs here in verse 29. If we do not see the specific context of Samuel’s remark, then Samuel contradicts what God had said just a few verses earlier; God said He regretted making Saul king and changed His mind about it (*nacham*) in verse 11 but Samuel says God does not change His mind (*nacham*) in verse 29. Furthermore, there are other verses in the Bible where God says He changes His mind (cf. Exod. 32:14; Jer. 18:8; Jon. 3:10), and these would also contradict Samuel’s statement if it was a general one.

Although the apparent contradiction between 1 Samuel 15:11 and 15:29 would be easier to see if the English translation was the same as they are in the King James Version, which reads “repent” in all three places, most modern versions, including the New King James, translate *nacham* differently in verse 11 from the way it is translated in verse 29 because the context is different. Here in verse 29, Samuel is making a statement about God in the specific context of Saul being king and says that God does not change His mind because in that particular case, God was not going to change His mind; God’s decision was firm. However, there are many times when God’s decision is not firm, and He changes His mind when people have a change of heart and behavior. That is why God “regretted” (*nacham*) making Saul king and changed His mind (*nacham*) about other things as well.

[For more on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

1Sm 15:31

**“So Samuel went back with Saul.”** Samuel changed his mind and went with Saul. The text does not explain why Samuel changed his mind. He may have had personal concerns about Saul, or he may have felt the need to show unity between Saul the king and Samuel the representative of Yahweh so that the people would have confidence in their leadership.

**“Saul bowed down before Yahweh.”** The Hebrew word translated “bowed down” is *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), which is ordinarily translated “worship” when used of bowing down to Yahweh. *Shachah* indicates an action, not a posture of the heart. *Shachah* means “to bow down,” and when done in a godly way, the action of bowing down indicates the posture of the heart, so the translation “worship” usually catches the sense correctly. However, there are times when people “bow down” to Yahweh but it is insincere, it is just a show to impress people, and this is one of those cases. To translate the text as “Saul worshiped Yahweh” might be acceptable from a translational point of view, but it gives the reader the wrong impression. Saul did not restore his relationship with God, he put on an act to impress the people. In 1 Samuel 15:30 Saul wanted to be honored before the people, and that is all that “bowing down” before Yahweh did: it impressed the people. It did not change Saul’s heart toward God and did not change God’s position that He had removed Saul from being king, which is why Samuel anoints David king in the next chapter, 1 Samuel 16.

[For more on bowing down and “worship,” see Word Study: “Worship.”]

1Sm 15:32

**“Agag came to him confidently. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”** This is one interpretation and the most likely interpretation of the Hebrew text. But the Hebrew text can also read that Agag came to Samuel “trembling,” saying “the bitterness of death has turned,” but does that mean “turned away,” or “turned to come near.”

1Sm 15:33

**“slashed.”** The Hebrew word is only used here and is very rare, so the meaning is uncertain. In modern Hebrew the word, if used with “throat,” means to cut the throat. It may refer to a one-stroke decapitation. Cutting off the head of an enemy is something that occurs in the Bible.

1Sm 15:34

**“Ramah...Gibeah.”** The two cities are only a few miles apart, but the two men do not visit one another. This is indicative of the rift between them.

1Sm 15:35

**“regretted.”** See commentary on 1 Samuel 15:11, “regret.”

**“until the day of his death.”** That is, until the day Samuel died.

**1 Samuel Chapter 16**

1Sm 16:2

**“If Saul hears it, he will kill me.”** This shows the depths of evil to which King Saul had fallen. He never overcame his character faults, and he had now come to the place he was evil and opposed God.

1Sm 16:5

**“make yourselves holy.”** The people were to do what it took to make themselves holy in the sight of God (cf. Lev. 11:44).

[For more on “make yourselves holy,” see commentary on Josh. 3:5.]

1Sm 16:6

**“Yahweh’s anointed one.”** The Hebrew word translated as “anointed” is *mashiach* (#04899 מָשִׁיחַ), which gets translated as “messiah.” It is an adjective, so the word can be translated into English as “anointed one,” the “one” being the implied noun that the adjective is modifying. Jesus Christ was the Anointed One, but there were other “anointed ones” as well.

**“before him.”** This is understood culturally as “in His presence,” that is, in God’s presence. Samuel saw Eliab and thought that surely because of his kingly characteristics he must be God’s choice for the next king.

1Sm 16:11

**“flock.”** Though this word is most often used of sheep, it can refer to a flock of sheep and goats.

1Sm 16:12

**“with beautiful eyes and of good appearance.”** God had just said not to look on the outward appearance, but apparently it can be helpful to have a nice appearance.

1Sm 16:13

**“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him.”** The Bible does not say how old David was when Samuel anointed him, but he was likely in his early teens. He is still called a “youth” when he fought Goliath (1 Sam. 17:33). After Samuel anointed David, David went back to tending sheep, which was natural since he was a shepherd. Then he was called into the service of King Saul (1 Sam. 16:17-23). So David was likely in his mid to late teens when he fought Goliath. The fact that he was still not married supports that as well.

1Sm 16:14

**“terrorized​ him.”** The Hebrew is *baath* (#01204 בָּעַת), and in this context, it means “to startle, to cause sudden terror.” It is not as if Saul was in constant terror, but the demon would come upon him and cause him sudden terror. This might be diagnosed as panic attacks today, and no doubt some panic attacks are caused by demons.

1Sm 16:20

**“skin-bottle.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

1Sm 16:21

**“and he became his armor-bearer.”** It is possible that this is a summary statement that actually occurred later in David’s life. For one thing, the armor-bearer of the king needed to be an excellent fighter because he often carried a shield in front of the king, and also, when David fought Goliath, King Saul was not clear on who he was (1 Sam. 17:56), although it is possible that Saul had been so mentally exhausted from the stress of the war that he was just foggy-headed.

1Sm 16:22

**“Let David stand before me.”** That is, let David stay and remain in my service. In this context, the idiom, “stand before me” means to serve as an officer or official of the king (cf. Gen. 41:46; 1 Sam. 16:22).

[For more on sitting or standing before the king, see commentary on Isa. 14:13, “sit.”]

**1 Samuel Chapter 17**

1Sm 17:1

**“Ephes-dammim.”** A place about 16 miles (25 km) southwest of Jerusalem; the name means “Edge of blood” or “Edge of Dammim.”

1Sm 17:2

**“at the Valley of Elah.”** The Israelites were camped on the hills around the valley.

1Sm 17:3

**“the hills.”** Although the Hebrew word is singular, it can be used as a collective, and the armies were not just on the top of one “hill” but were spread out over the hills.

1Sm 17:4

**“champion.”** The Hebrew word is unique and idiomatic, and could be translated “man of the between.”

**“the camps of the Philistines.”** The Philistine army was spread out over the hill, and so is said to be in “camps.”

**“six cubits and a span.”** That is roughly nine feet, nine inches tall. We should note that the Septuagint, a Dead Sea Scroll, and Josephus say “four cubits” instead of six, but there is no reason to reduce the number in the Hebrew text.

1Sm 17:6

**“greaves.”** The technical term for armor that covers the lower leg, especially the shin. ​

1Sm 17:9

**“then will we be your servants.”** A hollow promise, because when David killed Goliath the Philistines ran away and remained enemies of Israel. Evil people make hollow promises, and the wise believer needs to be aware of that and not get fooled.

1Sm 17:11

**“they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”** The man the Israelites chose to lead them in battle is afraid.

1Sm 17:12

**“that Ephrathite of Bethlehem *in* Judah.”** That is, “that Ephrathite” was the one in chapter 16 whose son helped Saul.

1Sm 17:13

**“the three eldest sons of Jesse.”** Jesse had eight sons (1 Sam. 16:10-11; 17:12), but only the three oldest, Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah are named in 1 Samuel 16:6-9. Since David, the youngest, was almost certainly in his mid-teens, all seven of his brothers were probably old enough to have fought in the war. Jesse may have felt his fourth through seventh sons were needed to protect the family flocks, or they may have been away with some of the sheep (shepherds traveled long distances with their flocks), or Jesse may have been afraid that his sons would be killed in the war.

**“they had gone...had gone after Saul.”** The Hebrew text doubles the verb “had gone” for emphasis. Jesse’s three oldest sons had gone to fight the Philistines and Jesse was worried about them so he sent David to find out how they were doing.

**“and the names of his three sons.”** In the Hebrew text, the word “name” is singular, and is distributive here in 1 Samuel 17:13, and refers to each of the three sons.

1Sm 17:15

**“David went back and forth from Saul to shepherd his father’s flock.”** From Bethlehem to the battlefield was about 14 miles, so David could have gone back and forth even in one day if he hustled, but it would be more likely that he took two days, one day there and one day back.

1Sm 17:17

**“these ten loaves.”** The Hebrew uses the collective singular: “this ten bread.”

1Sm 17:18

**“bring these ten cut pieces of cheese to the leader of their 1,000.”** This gift demonstrates both respect and wisdom. It is proper to respect those who risk their lives in battle and are responsible for others, for example, when and where to attack, and when to retreat and try to save lives. It is also wisdom because that leader would make decisions concerning his army and who fought where in the battle. David used his ability to direct the placing of soldiers when he had Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, killed in the war against the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:14-24).

1Sm 17:19

**“because Saul.”** 1 Samuel 17:19 is a continuation of Jessie’s talking with David.[[18]](#footnote-29136)

1Sm 17:20

**“a keeper.”** The Hebrew word is related to “keep” or “guard.” The keeper was someone responsible for guarding the flock from harm and keeping it safe and healthy.

1Sm 17:23

**“came forward from the army of the Philistines.”** Goliath would leave the ranks of the Philistines and step forward toward the Israelite camp. Although many translations have “came up,” the Hebrew can also mean “come forward” or “advance.” The Philistines, like the Israelites, would have sought high ground for battle, so Goliath would not have been walking “up” when he came out of the Philistine army (cf. BBE, CJB, CSB, JPS, NIV, NLT).

1Sm 17:25

**“Have you seen.”** The “you” is plural, “Have you all seen…?”

**“king will enrich him with great riches.”** Saul now has to bribe people to fight, whereas warriors who trusted Yahweh would normally step forward on their own to defend Yahweh’s honor.

1Sm 17:27

**“That is what.”** This refers back to what had been said in 1 Samuel 17:25.

1Sm 17:28

**“Why have you come down.”** The geography is correct. Where the armies were in the Valley of Elah was lower in elevation than Bethlehem. From the inner hill country of Judah, where Bethlehem was, toward the Mediterranean coast, was downhill.

**“that little flock.”** This may well be a hyperbole. Eliab was angry and might have exaggerated. Although the flock David usually watched over may not have been huge, it may not have been very small either.

1Sm 17:29

**“question.”** The Hebrew is “word,” but here it refers to David’s asking a question.

1Sm 17:31

**“and he sent for him.”** The Hebrew is more abrupt and forceful; “and he took him.”

1Sm 17:34

**“flock...flock.”** The Hebrew uses two different words that mean “flock,” and can be a mixed flock of sheep and goats.

1Sm 17:37

**“paw.”** The Hebrew is just the word “hand.”

**“Go, and may Yahweh be with you.”** The Hebrew can also be, “Go, and Yahweh will be with you.”

1Sm 17:39

**“he was not used *to them*…I am not used to them.”** The Hebrew text is more literally that David had not “tested them,” but in English that makes it sound like the armor may have been faulty, which was not the case. David had not tested what it would be like to wear the armor, so we would say that he was not “used to” it (cf. BBE, CSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV).

1Sm 17:40

**“out of the brook.”** Normally the “brook” that runs through the Valley of Elah is dry, so this is just a dry streambed.

**“And he drew near to the Philistine.”** Although the distance between David and Goliath was not known, it would have been quite close, perhaps 15-20 yards.

1Sm 17:43

**“Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?”** In the ancient world, dogs were often wild and untamed, and could even be dangerous. There were many reasons that men typically walked with a staff or walking stick, and wild dogs were one of them. When Jesus sent the apostles two by two, he told them to take a staff with them (Mark 6:8).

**“And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.”** It was common in the ancient world to use curses to harm an enemy (cf. Num. 22:6, 11; Josh. 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34; Judg. 9:57) However, a righteous person living a righteous life does not have to fear being cursed, although sometimes a believer should pray against their effects (Prov. 26:2).

1Sm 17:44

**“the birds of the air.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

**“and to the animals of the field.”** In a culture where family ties were strong and family tombs common, to not have anyone bury your dead body was considered a terrible curse. In fact, many people believed (falsely, but it was a very widely held belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus the threat of not being buried but having one’s dead body eaten by animals, birds, and vermin was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection, both on this earth and in the afterlife (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

1Sm 17:45

**“I come to you in the name.”** The Hebrew text has “with,” using the same preposition as that Goliath came to David “with” physical weapons. David came to Goliath “with” the name of Yahweh, but in English we say “in” the name of Yahweh.

1Sm 17:46

**“the birds of the air.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

1Sm 17:47

**“he will give *all of* you.”** The “you” is plural. David is referring to all the Philistines.

1Sm 17:49

**“and he fell on his face to the earth.”** Goliath would not get into a posture of submission in his life, but he did so at his death.

1Sm 17:52

**“Shaaraim.”** Although its exact location is unknown, Shaaraim is likely a town about a mile northeast of Azekah. If that is the case, the road from Shaaraim went west and could be taken to either Gath or Ekron. Once David killed Goliath, the Philistines started to run back to their fortified cities, and the Israelites pursued them and struck them as far as Gath (about six miles) and Ekron (about seven miles).[[19]](#footnote-29146)

1Sm 17:54

**“and brought it to Jerusalem.”** This is a summary statement; David did not go to Jerusalem for a while. At this time David had not even conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem yet. David was still mainly living in Bethlehem at this time.

**“but he put his armor in his tent.”** It was customary that if a soldier killed someone on the battlefield, the armor of the enemy was kept by the soldier who had been victorious (cf. 2 Sam. 2:21).

1Sm 17:55

**“When Saul saw.”** The Septuagint does not have 1 Samuel 17:55-58,

1Sm 17:56

**“young man.”** This is a rarely used word for a young man.

**1 Samuel Chapter 18**

1Sm 18:1

**“when he had made an end of speaking to Saul.”** Here we see that the love between Jonathan and David started while they were still in the Valley of Elah.

1Sm 18:2

**“and did not let him return to his father’s house.”** At this point, David becomes part of Saul’s troops and supporters in Gibeah, Saul’s hometown.

1Sm 18:4

**“including his sword and his bow and his belt.”** This is the clothing of the crown prince, and it likely is a way that Jonathan acknowledged that David was the actual king.

1Sm 18:6

**“of the Philistine.”** After killing Goliath in the Valley of Elah, the Israelite army chased the Philistines all the way to Gath. During that time, word of David’s victory over Goliath spread, and so when David and Saul returned to Gibeah, the women came out and sang and danced.

**“musical instruments.”** The Hebrew word is related to the word “three,” so this word may be referring to a specific instrument that has three strings, or a triangle with three sides.

1Sm 18:9

**“that day.”** “That day” is the day Saul and David returned to Gibeah of Saul.

1Sm 18:10

**“on the next day.”** The day after Saul was angry about what the women sang.

**“the house.”** In this context, the “house” is the palace. There are a number of verses in the Bible where the palace is called the king’s “house.”

1Sm 18:15

**“even more afraid.”** The Hebrew word translated “afraid” in 1 Samuel 18:12 is *yare* (#03372 יָרֵא), the most common word for fear, while the word used here in 1 Samuel 18:15 is *guwr* (#01481 גּוּר), an intense word that some translations even translate as “dread,” and the REV and some other versions translate as “even more afraid.” The point in the text is that as David’s reputation and successes grew, Saul became increasingly afraid of David. Saul knew from Samuel’s prophecy that he had lost the kingdom (1 Sam. 15:28), but what Samuel did not say was who would get the kingdom after Saul. To Saul, it was becoming increasingly clear that David would end up ruling the kingdom after Saul, and in the biblical culture that often meant that at some time David would kill Saul. There were other ways David could be king without killing Saul—Saul could die from all sorts of causes, or he could just abrogate the throne—but Saul did not consider them. Instead, he became insanely jealous of David and wanted to kill him, as if killing David would somehow change Samuel’s prophecy. Jealousy blinds the mind, and we see that here with Saul.

1Sm 18:17

**“son of valor.”** A “son of valor” was a Semitic way of saying a valiant man.

1Sm 18:18

**“living relatives.”** The Hebrew specifically refers to relatives that are alive. David does not say, for example, that he comes from a long line of heroes.

1Sm 18:19

**“Meholathite.”** The town of Meholah was Elisha’s hometown. Adriel shows up again in 2 Samuel 21:8, in tragic circumstances.

1Sm 18:20

**“good.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “right, straight, correct.” But the phrase “right in his eyes” could be easily misunderstood.

1Sm 18:21

**“Through the second one.”** The position of the words in the sentence favors this reading. In this case, the word “second” occurs later in the verse, not near the verb “said,”[[20]](#footnote-28665) and it refers to the second daughter, Michal, and not that Saul “said a second time.”

1Sm 18:29

**“continually.”** The Hebrew is literally, “all the days.”

**1 Samuel Chapter 19**

1Sm 19:1

**“servants.”** In the context of killing David, Saul’s “servants” are his chief military men (see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1).

**“they should kill David.”** The Hebrew text does not use the common word for “kill,” it is more like “put David to death,” which might involve a plan or scheme.

1Sm 19:3

**“whatever I find out.”** The Hebrew is more idiomatic: “whatever I see.”

1Sm 19:5

**“So why would you sin against innocent blood to kill David without a cause.”** This is a Messianic theme and a parallel between David and Jesus Christ.

1Sm 19:7

**“as before.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “as yesterday and three days ago.”

1Sm 19:8

**“from before him.”** Or “from his face,” or “from his presence.” The idea is that they know David is there and they flee.

1Sm 19:9

**“came upon Saul.”** The literal is more like the evil spirit was “to Saul.” It came to him.

**“in his house.”** That is, in the palace. The “house” of the king was the palace.

**“playing *the harp* with his hand.”** Cf. 1 Samuel 16:16, 23; 18:10.

1Sm 19:10

**“And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear.”** This event is similar to 1 Samuel 18:10-12. The Hebrew is more literally that Saul “sought to strike David and the wall,” that is that Saul wanted to throw the spear through David and into the wall, but that is not very clear in English. Saul wanted to pin David to the wall.

1Sm 19:12

**“And he went, fled, and got away.”** Likely David “went” out the window, and then fled and got away.

1Sm 19:13

**“the teraphim.”** “Teraphim” were household gods. It seems out of character for Michal, David’s wife to have teraphim in the house. The fact it, or they, were there is simply stated in the text, it is never explained. It is certainly possible that Michal was not a wholehearted follower of Yahweh, after all, her father Saul certainly was not. When David married Michal there is no indication that he loved her, but rather he married her to be part of Saul’s extended family. Michal loved David, but there is no indication he loved her, it seems like a marriage of convenience, which was very common in the biblical culture (cf. 1 Sam. 18:20-29).

[For more on teraphim see commentary on Gen. 31:19.]

**“tangle of goats hair.”** The Hebrew word *kebyr* (#03523 כְּבִיר), translated “tangle” in the REV only occurs here and in verse 16 in the Bible and what it referred to is not known. It is possible that Michal had some goat hair around because it was used in making tents and perhaps some clothing (cf. “tangle” NAB). It is also possible, as some translations suggest, that *kebyr* referred to a kind of blanket or quilt of goat’s hair. It was common in the biblical culture to cover your head when you slept, and so it would have been possible for Michal to take a kind of blanket and cover the teraphim such that no one could tell it was not David.

1Sm 19:14

**“she said, “He is sick.”** Michal lied to the men who came from King Saul, and in so doing may well have saved David’s life. God allows people to act in self-defense and in the defense of others, and sometimes that requires telling untruths to evil people.

[For more on lying and civil disobedience, see commentary Exod. 1:19.]

1Sm 19:18

**“And David fled and escaped and came to Samuel to Ramah.”** This escape from Gibeah of Saul begins a long and arduous journey for David as he runs from Saul from place to place. The Bible chronicles his travels, which lead him further and further south in his attempt to be safe from Saul.

David’s journey: David flees Gibeah of Saul and goes a few miles north to Ramah, the home of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 19:18). David sneaks back to Gibeah and meets with Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:1). David goes to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. The location of Nob is unknown, but it might be near the Mount of Olives (1 Sam. 21:1). David flees west to the Philistine capital city of Gath to seek shelter from Achish the king there (1 Sam. 21:10). David flees from Gath to the cave of Adullam, southeast of Gath (1 Sam. 22:1). David went to Keilah, which is about 8 ½ miles northwest of Hebron, to protect their harvest from the Philistines (1 Sam. 23:1-5). David flees from Keilah and travels about southeast of there looking for a safe place to be (1 Sam. 23:13). He then goes to the wilderness close to the Dead Sea (1 Sam. 23:19). David and his men then go to the wilderness of Maon. Maon is likely a town some 9 miles southeast of Hebron, and the “wilderness of Maon” is the Judean wilderness associated with it and to the southeast of it (1 Sam. 23:24). David travels east through the Judean wilderness to the strongholds of En-gedi, which is in the east of the tribal area of Judah and just west of the Dead Sea (1 Sam. 23:29). Samuel dies, and without his spiritual leader, David travels very far south out of Judah to the wilderness of Paran, to be sure to be away from Saul (1 Sam. 25:1). David goes back to the wilderness close to the Dead Sea, where he had been earlier (1 Sam. 26:3; cf. 1 Sam. 23:19). David returns, now with his army and family, to Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam. 27:1-2). Achish gave him the city of Ziklag, where David and his men lived for a year and four months (1 Sam. 27:6-7). David was in Ziklag when Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle (2 Sam. 1:1). He asked God where he should go, and God said “to Hebron,” so David went to Hebron where he was crowned king of Judah and he reigned from Hebron for seven years and six months before he conquered Jerusalem and made that his capital (2 Sam. 2:1, 7, 11).

1Sm 19:24

**“he also stripped off his clothes.”** Under the power of the spirit of God, Saul removes his royal robes. It is unclear how much of his clothing he would take off, but he probably would not have become totally naked.

**1 Samuel Chapter 20**

1Sm 20:1

**“David fled from Naioth in Ramah.”** For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Samuel 19:18.

**“said to Jonathan.”** The Hebrew is literally, “said before Jonathan,” and that probably was to make it clear that David was in the presence of Jonathan and had not gotten a message to him through an intermediary.

1Sm 20:3

**“swore again.”** David apparently had sworn earlier, it may be part of the covenant of 1 Samuel 18:1-3.

1Sm 20:4

**“desires.”** The Hebrew verb is “says,” but it is sometimes used for desire.

1Sm 20:5

**“the new moon.”** Each new moon, the start of each month, was dedicated to God by special sacrifices and blowing of trumpets (see commentary on Num. 28:11).

1Sm 20:6

**“notices, yes, notices”** The verb “notices” is doubled in the Hebrew text for emphasis. It is the figure of speech polyptoton (see Gen. 2:16).

1Sm 20:7

**“that evil has been decided by him.”** In the Hebrew text, “evil” is the subject of the verb, so it is more like “evil has decided from (within) him.” Saul had decided upon an evil path so often that now the evil in him guides him in his decision.

1Sm 20:8

**“So deal faithfully.”** David refers back to the covenant between him and Jonathan and asks him to deal faithfully, according to the covenant.

1Sm 20:9

**“Heaven forbid.”** The Hebrew is an idiom, “Far be it from you,” that is, “This is far from you.”

1Sm 20:12

**“make it known to you.”** The Hebrew is an idiom: “uncover your ear.”

1Sm 20:16

**“the house of David.”** If David becomes king, “the house of David” will become enemies with “the house of Saul,” and so it seems that Jonathan did not want to be caught up in that clan conflict but wanted to clearly side with the house of David because he knew David was Yahweh’s choice for being king (see commentary on 1 Sam. 20:17).

**“seek it from the hand of David’s enemies.”** The Hebrew is obscure and idiomatic: “seek it from the hand.” The idea seems to be that Jonathan is making a covenant with David, knowing that David will be king because Saul has rejected Yahweh and thus become one of “David’s enemies.” David has not sought the kingdom for himself, but Yahweh has sought it from the hand of Saul to give it to David.

1Sm 20:17

**“And Jonathan made David swear an oath.”** The versions are divided as to whether David or Jonathan was the one to swear. However, it seems that Jonathan made David swear an oath. Jonathan knew that David was Yahweh’s choice to be king, and that Jonathan was not going to succeed his father Saul as king (1 Sam. 23:17). He also knew that once David was king there would be a lot of pressure on David to put his own people from the tribe of Judah into the important positions in the kingdom. Having David swear an oath was a way of cementing his relationship with David.

**“the love that he had for him.”** That is, the love that Jonathan had for David.

1Sm 20:18

**“you will be noticed.”** David will not be there, so it is actually his absence that will be noticed, and his place will be seen to be empty. There is no indication that people ate at tables and had “seats,” that is, chairs. But they did have “places” because the kingdom was very hierarchical. The king would be the center of attention, and then people would sit closer to him or further away depending on their position in the kingdom. David would have a set place and position at meals and festive gatherings, and if he was gone his “place” would be empty.

1Sm 20:23

**“Yahweh is between you and me.”** Their relationship with Yahweh was the foundation for their relationship with each other.

1Sm 20:24

**“at the feast to eat.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to the bread to eat,” with “bread” put by the figure of speech metonymy for the feast. The new moon (when the moon is not visible in the sky) ended the month and the first sighting of the sliver of the moon as it’s crescent shape began to become more and more visible in the sky started the next month. There was a Sabbath and feast at the New Moon (Num. 10:10).

1Sm 20:25

**“and Jonathan stood up.”** This is the reading of the Hebrew text. Some scholars have taken “stood” to mean something like “stood still,” in other words, sat still at his place. Other readings have also been suggested, for example, based on the Septuagint the reading “sat opposite him” has been suggested. However, the reading “stood up” may have a basis in Jonathan showing respect for Saul, and he likely sat down later in the meal.

1Sm 20:26

**“It is an accident.”** The wording of the Hebrew text indicates that Saul thought what likely happened to David was accidental ritual uncleanness, which would usually involve not being able to join the congregation for that day. The wording “Something has happened to him” may suggest to some readers that David may have come to some kind of harm, which is not indicated in the Hebrew text.

1Sm 20:27

**“empty.”** This is the word “noticed,” but it was noticed as being empty.

**“feast.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to the bread” (see commentary on 1 Sam. 20:24).

1Sm 20:28

**“asked, yes, asked.”** The Hebrew doubles the verb for emphasis, using the figure of speech polyptoton (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“to.”** The Hebrew is “as far as.” This may be an attempt on Jonathan’s part to let Saul know that David did not have blanket permission to go anywhere and do anything, but he could go “as far as” Bethlehem.

1Sm 20:30

**“You son of a perverse rebellion!”** In this statement, the word “son” is idiomatic and communicates character. Saul is saying that a “perverse rebellion” would produce a rebellious son like Jonathan. Although many English versions read “son of a perverse and rebellious woman,” the idea of “woman” is imported into the text in many English translations primarily because the nouns are feminine, but there is no necessary reason to import “woman” and the word “woman” does not occur in the Hebrew text. Saul was saying Jonathan was a son of a perverse rebellion, meaning the rebellion against Saul that his paranoia had made up in his mind; there was no such rebellion. Also, it does not seem like Saul would slander his wife here, when he seems to honor her later in the same verse.

**“to the shame of your mother’s nakedness.”** The meaning is, “to the shame of your mother who gave birth to you.”

1Sm 20:31

**“for he must die!”** The literal Hebrew reads, “for he is a son of death,” and it refers to having the character of death, which in this case, meant he would die.

1Sm 20:33

**“Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down.”** By this time the demon or demons inside Saul had driven him to the point of irrational anger and irrational behavior. Saul had allowed himself to think thoughts that were more and more evil, and now was out of control. God tells us to control our thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5), and engage in behavior such as forgiveness (Eph. 4:32) so that our thoughts do not spiral downward until we almost cannot stop from doing evil. 2 Timothy 3:13 warns us that people doing evil go from bad to worse.

1Sm 20:41

**“*of the stone* Ezel.”** The stone is mentioned in 1 Samuel 20:19.

**“face to the ground.”** The Hebrew is literally, “nose to the ground.”

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**1 Samuel Chapter 21**

1Sm 21:1

**“Nob.”** The exact location is unknown, but it is likely on the northeast ridge of the Mount of Olives. So David had traveled south from Gibeah of Saul. Why the Tabernacle ended up at Nob is unknown. How the Tabernacle got there, and where it went from there, are not known.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

**“to Ahimelech the priest.”** Although the text does not say why David went to Ahimelech and the Tabernacle, it is likely because people brought both grain and meat offerings to the Tabernacle and David thought he could get food there. David would normally have been correct about that, but for some unstated reason, Ahimelech did not have any food. It is possible that Saul had gone so far from God that he had somehow interfered with people’s giving sacrifices and offerings, and also made it so that the priests did not want to be anywhere near him, which would explain why they moved the Tabernacle to Nob.

Saul had had trouble with evil spirits in the past, and those spirits would have been constantly trying to work through Saul to make things difficult for the priests and the Tabernacle. That may also have had something to do with why Ahimelech trembled at meeting David. Something was wrong. Ahimelech may not have known what, but different possibilities suggested themselves. Did David come from Saul to cause trouble for Ahimelech? Besides that, why was David, a very valuable man in Saul’s kingdom, traveling in a vulnerable state without a contingent of his army? Things did not add up, and David’s lies did not help any.

1Sm 21:4

**“in my possession.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, “under my hand.”

**“the young men.”** Apparently, David had a few men with him, but so few that Abimelech referred to him as being alone (cf. Matt. 12:3-4). It is also possible but less likely that David acted as if he were going to take some food to his soldiers who were elsewhere.

1Sm 21:5

**“When I set out, the vessels of the young men were holy,”** David told the priest that when he “set out,” that is, came out of the town of Gibeah, Saul’s headquarters, the men were holy. In this context, the word “vessel” is used euphemistically and refers to the genitalia and thus the bodies of David’s men. Sexual intercourse made a person ritually unclean (Lev. 15), and Ahimelech was concerned that David’s men were clean before they ate the holy bread.

The evidence that “vessels” here refers to the bodies of the young men comes from the context and scope of Scripture. The priest wanted the men to be ritually clean, and there is no reason that David would then bring up weapons or equipment. Instead, David, lying, explains that the mission he was on was a “common journey,” meaning that there was no part of the mission that was supposed to require the men to be ritually clean, but now that he was at Nob being ritually clean was important. But, said David, it did not matter that he was on a common mission because as it turned out, the men were ritually clean even though that was not something they specifically intended, it just turned out that the men had not been with women for the last three days, so they were clean according to Leviticus.

There are problems with seeing “vessels” as weapons or provisions. For one thing, that makes no sense in the context. The priest was not concerned about any unclean provision or weapon, he was concerned about the men being ritually clean (1 Sam. 21:5). Furthermore, in order for “vessels” to refer to weapons or provisions, there would have had to have been some way that the weapons or provisions would have been ritually unclean that would have kept David and his men from being able to eat the holy bread, and it is unclear at best what that would have been. There is no reason to believe that David and his men, who were observant Jews, would have carried provisions that were ritually unclean, such as animal meat from an animal that died on its own (Lev. 7:24). Also, David’s argument that the “vessels” were holy when they left but would then be assuredly holy now was due to the fact that the men were supposedly on a mission and would not have been with women.

It is not unusual that a euphemism such as “vessel” would be used for the genitalia and by extension the body. The male and female sexual organs are often referred to euphemistically, for example, they are called “the thigh” (Gen. 24:2, 46:26), and “feet” (2 Kings 18:27; Isa. 7:20). Also, the human body is referred to as a “vessel” in the New Testament (cf. 1 Thess. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Pet. 3:7).

1Sm 21:6

**“the Bread of the Presence.”** The Bread of the Presence was large cakes of bread that were in the Tabernacle and Temple (see commentary on Exod. 25:30).

1Sm 21:8

**“with me.”** The Hebrew is “in my hand.”

1Sm 21:10

**“fled that day from Saul.”** The Hebrew is that David fled “from the face of Saul,” and the idiom means that David fled from the presence and sight of Saul.

**“and went to Achish the king of Gath.”** For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Samuel 19:18.

1Sm 21:12

**“took these words to heart.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic and is more like, “put these words to his heart,” but it means he took them to heart and thus took them very seriously.

**“and was very afraid in the presence of Achish.”** It was in association with this that David penned Psalm 56.

1Sm 21:13

**“changed his behavior before them.”** This event is mentioned in Psalm 34.

**“before them.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “in their eyes,” that is, while they watched.

**1 Samuel Chapter 22**

1Sm 22:1

**“David left there and escaped.”** That David “escaped” from Gath is good evidence of God’s protection and grace being on David at this time. It seems like the Philistines, especially the Philistines in Gath, the hometown of Goliath, would have killed David, especially when he showed up there alone and with Goliath’s sword. After all, David had killed Goliath and many other Philistines as well. Also, there is no explanation in the text as to why David would have chosen to go to Gath instead of another Philistine city or even just another city to the east or south, after all, he took his parents to Moab (1 Sam. 22:3). One possibility that has been suggested is that of the five capital cities of the Philistines, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath, Gath was the closest to Bethlehem, but in actuality, we do not know why David went to Gath.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

**“the cave of Adullam.”** Adullam was a Canaanite town now identified with the unexcavated Tell esh Sheikh Madhkur, about midway between Jerusalem and Lachish, and not far from the Valley of Elah. Adullam was in the tribal area assigned to Judah and was in the Shephelah, the rolling hill country of western Judah, and it controlled one of the principal passes from the northern Shephelah into the hill country of Judah. It was important enough to be fortified by King Rehoboam of Judah (2 Chron. 11:7). Biblically, Adullam is best known for a cave close to it, “the cave of Adullam,” where David hid after he fled from Achish, King of Gath (1 Sam. 22:1). At this time in Israel’s history it was in a kind of a no-man’s-land, close to the hill country of Saul to the east and the territory of the Philistines to the west.

1Sm 22:2

**“who was in debt.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “everyone who had a creditor,” that is, they were in debt.

1Sm 22:3

**“come out.”** That is, come out of Judea.

1Sm 22:8

**“conspired.”** Or “banded together.”

**“there is none of you who is sorry for me.”** The Hebrew word translated “sorry” is *challah* (#02470 חָלָה), and its meanings include to be or become weak, sick, diseased, sorry, or grieved. In this context, “sorry” fits the context and scope of Saul’s life. Here in 1 Samuel 22:8 we see another aspect of Saul’s emotionally out-of-control life. We have seen him make rash decisions, such as when he made the rash vow that kept his army from eating and so they were weak and faint and could not fight the Philistines with the vigor they should have had (1 Sam. 14:24-31). We have seen Saul be overly religious, such as when he was going to execute his son Jonathan for breaking a vow that he did not even know about (1 Sam. 14:37-45). We have seen Saul be stubborn, disobedient, and rebellious against God, such as when he did not obey God and kill the Amalekites and then made things worse by making a number of excuses to cover his sin (1 Sam. 15:1-26). We have seen Saul tormented in various ways by evil spirits that his weak mind and ungodly behavior allowed to enter his life (1 Sam. 16:14, 23). We have seen Saul have terrible outbursts of anger that could have easily resulted in murdering another person, even his own son (1 Sam. 18:8-11; 19:9-10; 20:30-33). We have seen Saul have irrational fear (1 Sam. 18:12-15). Now here in 1 Samuel 22:7-8, we see another side of Saul, paranoia and self-pity. Instead of being his usual self, the angry, stubborn king, Saul is now feeling all alone with everyone against him, whining and wallowing in self-pity. People with no control over their emotions go from one extreme to the other and usually cause trouble for themselves and others, just as Saul did.

Saul was a pitiful man, but we learn some important lessons from his life. One of them is that the human heart is always changing; something the Bible says in quite a few places. It can change for the better, from ungodly to godly, or it can change for the worse as we see with King Saul. Wise Christians take the commands in the Bible very seriously, and when the Bible says to do things like forgive others or put away anger, they make a diligent effort to obey, which changes their heart for the better. The record of Saul also shows us that we have to be careful and watchful when we deal with people who are weak-willed, disobedient to God, and overly emotional, and particularly so if we know they have had problems with demons. They can be your best friend one minute and turn against you the next, so wise Christians do what they can to help those needy people but in a way that still affords them some personal protection. Far too many people in society run their lives based on how they feel at the moment, rather than using wisdom to guide them, but the Bible says that wisdom is the principal thing, and to be wise (Prov. 4:7).

1Sm 22:11

**“and all his father’s house who were in Nob.”** So all the priests who came to Saul from Nob were from the house of Ahitub, and were under the curse spoken over Eli (1 Sam. 2:30-34; 3:12-14)

1Sm 22:14

**“commander over your bodyguard.”** There is disagreement among scholars as to the phrase in the Hebrew text, and what the letters and vowel points should be, and thus what the text is saying. The result is that the Hebrew can read quite like the REV (cf. BBE, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, RSV) or whether it means something more like the NKJV, “who goes at your bidding” (cf. CEB, CJB, JPS, KJV, NRSV).

1Sm 22:15

**“Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him?”** Ahimelech picked up on the fact that Saul was accusing him of inquiring of God for David, and was astounded at the accusation. According to what he said, he had inquired of God for David many times before, which makes sense because David seems to have enquired of God before he went into battle. So from Ahimelech’s standpoint, the fact he inquired of God for David was common, but from Saul’s paranoid perspective it was a betrayal of trust.

**“Be it far from me.”** The Hebrew is an idiom: “Far from me.”

1Sm 22:16

**“die, yes, die.”** The verb die is repeated in the Hebrew text for emphasis, and is the figure of speech polyptoton, see commentary on Genesis 2:16.

1Sm 22:17

**“guards.”** The Hebrew word “guards” is more literally “runners,” but it was used of guards, which is its meaning here.

1Sm 22:18

**“So Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests.”** Being an Edomite, Doeg would likely have had no particular feelings for the priests. Doeg likely thought that the whole “Yahweh thing” was just made-up religion. In fact, being an Edomite he may have even relished in the chance to help dismantle the religious system of Israel.

The enormity of Saul’s sin in killing the priests is hard to even calculate, and shows how evil a person can become. A man had to be born a priest to be one; he had to be born a lineal descendant of Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel. The fact that Doeg killed the priests of Yahweh (he was almost certainly helped by others), including women and children (1 Sam. 22:19), would have had an impact on what God wanted to accomplish through the priests for many generations to come.

1Sm 22:19

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**1 Samuel Chapter 23**

1Sm 23:1

**“Keilah.”** The town of Keilah was a fortified town about 8.5 miles (13.5 km) northwest of Hebron. It was in the Shephelah, and therefore much more exposed to an attack from Saul than where David was staying deep in the rough desert/wilderness of southeast Judah. It was an act of trust and bravery for David to take his men there knowing that Saul was hunting for his life. The people of Keilah should have repaid David for that with their faithfulness to him but they did not, they would have handed him over to Saul.

**“robbing the threshing floors.”** This tells us that this event took place in the late spring to early summer, because that is when the grain harvests were finished in Israel and the threshing floors were full. First came the barley harvest, which usually took place in our late April, the Israelite month of Nisan. Later came the millet and wheat harvests, the wheat harvest being concluded in late June or early July. The Bible does not tell us which grain harvest this was, but the Philistines waited until all the work of planting, caring for, and harvesting the crops was done then simply swept in to take the grain. That kind of attack was incredibly serious because if the Philistines were successful, it could well mean starvation for the people and animals in that area of Israel. Technically it was the job of King Saul to protect his people, and he had the army, but David loved the people and was in a position to help even though coming out into the open like that would expose him before Saul and could mean war and the loss of his men or even his own death. So he asked of God, and God told him to go and fight the Philistines, which he did.

Many times life presents believers with difficult choices like the choice David was faced with in this record. Should David stay in hiding and be safe, or should he expose himself to danger by coming into the open in order to help people? David did the right thing; he asked God and acted on God’s guidance, making the decision to help people. His men questioned his decision (1 Sam. 23:3), so in humility to the possibility that they were right, he asked God again (1 Sam. 23:4), but once he knew the will of God he led his men with boldness and confidence, and they trusted him and followed his leadership. David fought the Philistines and won, and saved the harvest in Keilah. Many leaders in Israel were not like David; even though they were told the will of God, they were too afraid to obey it (cf. King Zedekiah, Jer. 38:14-28).

Sadly, the people of Keilah would not have repaid David for his bravery and kindness, but had King Saul come to their city they would have betrayed David and revealed his presence (1 Sam. 23:12). The fact is that people are weak and they do in the moment what they think is to their best advantage no matter how it hurts or harms the people who have helped them. It is a real challenge for people, such as David, to not be bitter and unforgiving in those situations. After all, if someone risked a lot or gave a lot to help others it would be logical and godly that those people who were helped would then repay the one who helped them, but due to weak human nature and selfishness many times that does not happen. People who help others have to cast their cares on God and trust Him to deliver and prosper them, and not give in to feelings of bitterness. Believers who are thankful and forgiving always are victors in the long run, so it is important to just move on with life and keep a positive attitude like David did.

1Sm 23:5

**“So David and his men went to Keilah.”** For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Samuel 19:18.

**“led away their livestock.”** Armies often traveled with some livestock so they could eat well and keep their strength up as they moved forward in battle, and that seems to be the case here. In the ancient world, it was typical for the larger army, the one most likely to win, to have a whole host of “camp followers” who would follow the army and try to take advantage of the situation. For example, “camp prostitutes,” people selling necessities, and slave traders who would try to capture weak, fleeing, or wounded people, are some of those who would typically follow an army that was expected to be victorious.

1Sm 23:7

**“made him known.”** The Hebrew uses a rare word and possibly a rare idiom.

**“bars.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach.

1Sm 23:9

**“planning.”** The Hebrew word means to plow, as to plow ground, or to engrave, like one would engrave on metal. The point is that Saul is working hard at planning to kill David.

1Sm 23:10

**“to bring ruin to the city.”** Saul would kill the people just like he killed the priests at Nob. Saul would not likely “destroy the city,” as if he would knock the buildings down.

1Sm 23:11

**“He will come down.”** Here in 1 Samuel 23:11, Yahweh does not answer the full question of David, so David asks it again in verse 12.

1Sm 23:13

**“and went wherever they could go.”** David was not expecting the people of Keilah to betray him, so he had not thought through what to do if they did. In this case, he simply moved quickly out of the area to be safe, and formulated his plans on the run. It often happens in life that something unexpected occurs and people have to make decisions on a moment-by-moment basis, and in those situations, it is important to stay calm in order to stay clear-headed and make the best choice possible.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

1Sm 23:14

**“in the strongholds.”** These could be actual built structures or naturally occurring, easily defensible positions.

1Sm 23:15

**“the wilderness of Ziph.”** The location of Ziph is most likely the site of modern Tell Ziph, four miles southeast of Hebron, and so the “wilderness of Ziph” would be close to Ziph.

**“at Horesh.”** This is likely a proper noun, but the word refers to a grove of trees, and some scholars think that is what it refers to here. In any case, there were almost certainly trees there for David to take refuge in.

1Sm 23:16

**“Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David.”** The fact that Jonathan could find David, and Saul could not, shows us that there were people who knew Jonathan was trying to help David, and they fed him information that Saul and the rest of his men did not have.

1Sm 23:17

**“and I will be second-*in-command* to you.”** Sadly, this never happened. Jonathan died in battle with the Philistines (1 Sam. 31).

1Sm 23:18

**“went to his house.”** That is, back at Gibeah of Saul (see 1 Sam. 23:19).

1Sm 23:19

**“Then *some* Ziphites.”** The Ziphites were Judeans, and in their betrayal of David we see a potential type between David and Jesus in that they were both betrayed by their own people; the evidence is that Judas was from Judah.

**“Jeshimon.”** This is apparently the desert area in the east part of Judah going down to the Dead Sea. “Jeshimon” means something like “barren wilderness,” and it is possible that it is not a proper noun.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

1Sm 23:20

**“hand him over.”** The Hebrew is the same word that is translated “betray” in 1 Samuel 23:11-12.

1Sm 23:21

**“taken pity on me.”** Saul is in his depressed and self-pitying state (see commentary on 1 Sam. 22:8).

1Sm 23:22

**“the place where his foot is.”** This is an idiom, meaning where he is, but it is clear enough in English to have it in the translation. David had been moving deeper and deeper into the rough and rocky desert wilderness just west of the Dead Sea, and Saul had no desire to chase after David there without knowing more precisely where he was.

**“crafty, yes, crafty.”** The Hebrew repeats the verb “crafty,” using the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). This is the same word that God used to describe the Devil in Genesis 3:1. From Saul’s perverted, paranoid perspective, David was “crafty.” whereas from God’s perspective David was intelligent and wise in withdrawing from Saul. David did not want a civil war.

1Sm 23:24

**“wilderness of Maon.”** Maon is likely a city about 9 miles southeast of Hebron and the “wilderness of Maon” is the Judean Wilderness (or desert) close to Maon but in the Arabah “south of the desert,” that is, south of the large tract of desert from east of Jerusalem down past east of Hebron.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

1Sm 23:26

**“on this side of the hill.”** The area where David was hiding had very steep valleys that ran east-west and led from that area down to the Dead Sea. So there was a hill that had deep valleys on each side, and David and his 600 men were on one side, and Saul and his army were on the other side. This is only possible because of the unusual terrain in that part of Israel.

1Sm 23:27

**“made a raid on the land.”** It does not seem like the Philistines invaded the land as if they were going to stay there, but only made a raid to steal, destroy, and perhaps kidnap women and girls.

1Sm 23:29

**“and stayed in the strongholds of En-gedi.”** For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Samuel 19:18.

**1 Samuel Chapter 24**

1Sm 24:1

**“it was told to him.”** The text is not telling us who told this to David in this instance.

1Sm 24:3

**“to cover his feet.”** The act of squatting and defecating covered the feet, hence the idiom.

1Sm 24:4

**“the day of which Yahweh said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand.”** There is nothing like that saying in the biblical text, so it must not have been recorded.

**“and secretly cut off the corner of Saul’s cloak.”** It is possible that Saul had taken off his cloak and laid it down, or he might have been wearing it and preoccupied with his own thoughts and worries.

1Sm 24:6

**“my lord, Yahweh’s anointed.”** There were many “anointed” people in the Old Testament. In this case, the anointed one is King Saul. This verse could be translated as, “my lord, the messiah of Yahweh.”

[For more on the “anointed one,” see commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3.]

1Sm 24:8

**“kneeled and bowed down.”** This kneeling preceded bowing down to the ground. The two actions, kneeling and then bowing to the ground blended into one act of homage or worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. Also, instead of “kneeled and bowed down,” the text could be translated “bowed down and worshiped,” with “kneeling” being understood as part of the process of bowing down, and “bowing down” was the act of worship. The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship” and the REV commentary on 1 Chron. 29:20.]

1Sm 24:9

**“harm.”** More literally, “evil,” or “bad.”

1Sm 24:10

**“Yahweh’s anointed one.”** In this context, Yahweh’s anointed one is King Saul (see commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3).

1Sm 24:14

**“After.”** The purposeful repetition of “after” adds emphasis and technically is the figure of speech anaphora.

[See figure of speech “anaphora.”]

1Sm 24:21

**“and that you will not destroy my name from my father’s house.”** This is coming from Saul’s paranoia.

**1 Samuel Chapter 25**

1Sm 25:1

**“and lamented him.”** The Hebrew word generally refers to the public crying and wailing that occurred when someone died (see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:26).

**“the wilderness of Paran.”** With Samuel dead and Saul aggressively seeking his life, David fled out of Judah and went far down south into the wilderness of Paran, the wilderness area that was inhabited centuries earlier by Ishmael and his descendants (Gen. 21:21). Paran is a broad central area in the Sinai Peninsula, but its exact boundaries are only generally described. The whole of Paran is some 23,000 square miles, and there is plenty of rough country to get lost in. Exactly where in the wilderness of Paran that David went is not described; the point was not so much exactly where David was as how far from Judah he went to get away from Saul. Despite being so far from Judah, David stayed in touch with people in south Judah, which is no doubt how he heard about Nabal and the sheep shearing that he was doing, which would have meant there was a lot of food available to David if Nabal was willing to help.

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18].

1Sm 25:2

**“Carmel.”** This is the town in south Judah, close to Hebron; it is not “Mount Carmel.”

**“wealthy.”** The Hebrew is “great,” but it refers to being great in wealth.

1Sm 25:3

**“Nabal.”** The name “Nabal” has more than one meaning. It is the strongest Hebrew word for “Fool,” but it can also refer to a musical instrument such as a harp, or it can refer to a container such as would contain wine. Some scholars suggest that no parent would name their child Nabal, the strongest Hebrew word for “fool” and that therefore it is a name assigned to Nabal by the Author to make a point. While that is possible, it is also possible that the parents had one of the other meanings in mind when they named him Nabal, but his wife certainly thought his name was “Fool,” so even if that was not the intended meaning for his birth name, it was the moniker by which he came to be known (1 Sam. 25:25).

Something the reader should keep in mind as they read the records of David is that in many ways David was a type of Christ and many of the records that God chose to include in the Bible about David are shadows of the life of Christ. That is certainly the case here in 1 Samuel 25, where one of the major characters is Mr. Fool who is selfish and worldly and spurns David and holds him in contempt. In contrast to Nabal, there is “Abigail,” which likely means “my father rejoices” or less likely, “my father is joy.”[[21]](#footnote-24644) Thus, Abigail’s father—who is by extension God—rejoices in her, and we see why in the description of her and in the fact that she honored and supported David—by extension Christ—and is blessed for it, eventually becoming part of the royal family. So we see via the type of Christ that those people who spurn Christ will end up dead, obliterated from life itself, while those people who honor Christ will join the royal family and live forever.

**“of *the house of* Caleb.”** This could also be translated, “And he was a Calebite,” but that is not as clear to the English reader as “of the house of Caleb” does. It seems most likely that what is being emphasized here is that Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, one of the two faithful spies that Moses sent into the Promised Land, and who was given Hebron as his inheritance (Num. 13:6; 14:5-9, 26-30; Josh. 14:13-14). This would explain why Nabal lived in the desert area near Maon, a town in the hill country of Judah (Josh. 15:48, 55) about nine miles south of Hebron. However, the word “Caleb” can have two other meanings, which, even if they are not the primary meaning of the word, come into play as we meet Nabal because a native Hebrew speaker would see all the potential meanings. “Caleb” can also mean “like his heart,” from the word *leb*, heart, in Hebrew, indicating that Caleb was a man who acted like his heart and thus was harsh and evil, and it is interesting in that light that when Abigail told him that she had given sustenance to David and his men, Nabal’s “heart died inside him,” and then following his heart, he died too. Also, “Caleb” can be pointed differently in the Hebrew than the proper name is, and mean “dog.” Thus, *kaleb* (#03612 כָּלֵב) is the man’s name and *keleb* (#03611 כֶּלֶב) means dog, but without the vowel points that were added many hundreds of years after Samuel’s time, the two words are the same. So “Caleb” can also literally mean, “like a dog,” making his name and description “Fool...like a dog,” and dogs were generally disliked in the biblical culture.[[22]](#footnote-17006) Sadly for the house of Caleb, Nabal was not the good man that Caleb was.

1Sm 25:8

**“to your son David.”** David humbles himself as if he were a son in need.

1Sm 25:9

**“in the name of David.”** Here we have the custom of agency. To speak in the name of David is as if David spoke.

1Sm 25:10

**“Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?”** It is almost impossible that Nabal did not know about David—he would have known about him. David had been fighting the Philistines for years, was a commander in Saul’s army, and was the son-in-law of King Saul. Just from David’s killing of Goliath, David would have been known about around the kingdom. Also, Abigail, Nabal’s wife, knew all about David and that he was anointed to be the next king in Israel. So what we see in Nabal (“Mr. Fool”) is not ignorance, it is willful contempt. Nabal spurned God’s anointed ruler and would not help him in any way. Nabal thought he did not need God or His ruler.

It is also likely that what we see in Nabal is a willful blindness: he saw what he wanted to see. When he spoke about servants breaking away from their lords, he was referring to the way David was no longer with Saul—that David had “broken away” from King Saul—but Nabal turned a blind eye to why that occurred, which had nothing to do with sin or rebellion on David’s part. Also, the fact that King Saul was pursuing David deep into the wilderness to kill him showed that Saul had an intense interest in killing David, whereas he could have just dismissed him from service and let him go back to Bethlehem; so something was clearly wrong here. Furthermore, Nabal ignored not only the prophecies about David that Samuel had given that were likely well-known, but also ignored the ancient prophecy that the ruler of Israel would come out of the tribe of Judah. Nabal had no desire to submit to God or His anointed ruler, and so explained away his responsibility to do that.

This attitude of Nabal toward David is part of the scenario being set forth in the Bible of David being a type of Christ. Nabal is typical of people who are mean and selfish and who reject God and His Messiah, His anointed. They reject God because they are proud and arrogant and often think of themselves as self-sufficient, but like Nabal, their end will be death; death in this life and then everlasting death in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

1Sm 25:14

**“a greeting of blessing.”** The Hebrew is just “bless,” but a blessing was used as a greeting.

**“our lord.”** This is a grammatical plural, literally “lords,” but it refers to a single “lord,” Nabal (see commentary on 1 Kings 1:43).

**“he shrieked at them.”** The noun form of “shrieked” is the name of a hawk. Thus the men bring in the idea that Nabal screamed at the men like a hawk would shriek at something. It’s never good to shriek at the anointed king of Israel, only trouble can follow.

1Sm 25:17

**“lord.”** The Hebrew “lord” is plural; a grammatical plural of emphasis or majesty.

**“sons of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

1Sm 25:20

**“just as she rode.”** God’s invisible hand is at work to bless both Abigail and David.

**“under the cover of the mountain.”** Abigail used the mountain in her area to get the supplies to David without being seen by her husband or the people who would report to him.

1Sm 25:21

**“in vain.”** The Hebrew word indicates a lie or falsehood. The idea is that it was a lie that David could treat Nabal well and be treated well back.

1Sm 25:22

**“who pisses against a wall.”** A crass idiom and cultural way of referring to the men.

1Sm 25:23

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth, as we see in this verse. The word translated “bowed down” is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

1Sm 25:25

**“Please do not let my lord.”** Abigail addresses David in the third person out of respect.

**“man of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil, although Abigail likely did not mean it that way; she would have meant it more as “worthless man,” or something like that.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

**“Nabal.”** The word “Nabal” means “fool,” but there are several different words for “fool” in Hebrew. The word “Nabal” refers to a committed, unrepentant fool.

**“folly is with him.”** This is a Hebrew idiom. Today we would say “He is a fool,” but in the Hebrew idiom, the phrase is “folly is with him” (cf. Job 12:13, 16).

1Sm 25:28

**“a lasting house.”** Perhaps more literally, “an established house,” but the idea in mind is that David would start a dynasty as well as that his own house would be established.

1Sm 25:30

**“all the good that he has spoken concerning you.”** There had to be wonderful prophetic words spoken to or about David that were well-known in the culture, which makes Nabal’s rejection of David even more stark in contrast to what Abigail knew.

1Sm 25:34

**“who pisses against a wall.”** An idiom and cultural way of referring to the men.

1Sm 25:35

**“and have granted your request.”** The idiom is, “I have lifted up your face,” meaning “I have looked upon you favorably,” or “I have granted your request.”

1Sm 25:36

**“banquet.”** The Hebrew is *mishteh* (#04960 מִשְׁתֶּה). It is a banquet with lots of wine. Everett Fox[[23]](#footnote-30505) translates it “drinkfest.”

1Sm 25:37

**“he became like a stone.”** Nabal likely had a stroke.

1Sm 25:39

**“Yahweh has returned the evildoing of Nabal.”** Nabal returned evil for David’s good (1 Sam. 25:21), and here Yahweh returns Nabal’s evil for evil.

**“Then David sent and spoke with Abigail.”** David speaks with Abigail through mediators, the men he sent.

1Sm 25:41

**“servant...servant...servants.”** In her speech, Abigail uses three different words for “servants.” The first two refer to female servants, and Abigail refers to herself as a “servant.” The third, in the phrase “the servants of my lord,” is the common word for a male servant or slave. The first word translated “servant” in the verse is *'amah* (#0519 אָמָה), and it generally referred to a female servant or female slave, a maid or handmaid, a concubine. The second “servant” in the sentence is *shiphchah* (#08198 שִׁפְחָה), which is considered by many scholars to refer to the lowest rank of a female slave, who was also often the female slave of the mistress of the house, although *shiphchah* can in some contexts simply refer to a female servant, maid, handmaid, or slave girl. However, the reader must be sensitive to the context because there are times when *'amah* and *shiphchah* are used synonymously in the Hebrew text, especially when they are used in Hebrew poetry.

Sometimes, such as here in what Abigail said to David’s men, the difference between *'amah* and *shiphchah* is quite important, and in this case reveals the complete humility of Abigail, and her wisdom in the way she begins to become part of David’s household. She accepts David’s offer with the words, “your servant [*'amah*] is a servant [*shiphchah*] to wash the feet of the servants of my lord,” which shows great humility, wisdom, and tact seeing that as the former wife of Nabal she could well have been the wife of the wealthiest and most powerful person in that general area of Judah and could have been quite conceited and haughty about it. After all, when she went to David she took five slave girls with her and rode on a donkey, a sign of wealth and influence. Thus, in reality, although she spoke of washing the feet of David’s servants, both as an owner of slaves and as the wife of David it is extremely unlikely that Abigail would ever wash anyone’s feet except perhaps those of her husband David at home.

Abigail somehow knew about the prophecies that David would be king and spoke to him as an anointed ruler, being truly humble and using great wisdom long before she knew there was a possibility of her being David’s wife (1 Sam. 25:30). Here in 1 Samuel 25:41 however, she is faced with the reality of becoming part of the family and royal dynasty that will define Israel into its future, as she herself said of David, “Yahweh will make, yes, make my lord a lasting house” (1 Sam. 25:28). It is difficult to know exactly what was going on in the mind of Abigail, but we can make some assumptions based on regular human life and experience. Abigail had been the wife of “Mr. Fool” (“Nabal” means “fool”) who was selfish and harsh, and although she would have had money and slaves and been somewhat privileged, life with Nabal must have been very difficult and distressing in many ways. Now, very unexpectedly, she is invited to be the wife of God’s anointed ruler, the future king of Israel, and thus to be a founding member of the royal house that we now know ruled Israel for many generations and eventually produced the Messiah himself. She would no doubt have been somewhat apprehensive about what her totally new life would be like, but that would be mixed with excitement, wonder, amazement, and other things as well, such as concern over the conflict between David and Saul that had not been resolved and had no easy resolution. But Abigail was a wise, strong, and determined woman and she saw the opportunity before her and moved forward into it with resolve. She married David and gave birth to Chileab, David’s second son (2 Sam. 3:3; called “Daniel” in 1 Chron. 3:1), who, sadly, apparently died as a child because he is never mentioned in all the goings-on in the royal household of David. Then, as is typical in biblical records, as the focus in David’s house moved to his kingship and conflict between his heirs, Abigail is no longer a focus of attention and is no longer mentioned in the Bible. However, based on the woman she was, we can assume she played an important part in David’s life and household, especially early on.

Keeping in mind that David was a type of Christ and things in the Old Testament are to teach us (Rom. 15:4), we see in Abigail’s dealings with David the right attitude and action that people are to have toward the Messiah, Jesus Christ: be genuinely humble, use wisdom, and act decisively.

[For more on *'amah* and *shiphchah* see commentary on Ruth 3:9.]

1Sm 25:42

**“five young women.”** Although the Hebrew text uses the word for “young women,” in the culture they are “hers” and would have been slaves. The fact that Abigail took five slaves with her and rode on a donkey showed that she had wealth and influence. There is no mention of things she would have taken with her, this is assumed in the text because she would have taken things that would have allowed her some comfort, even in the wilderness with David.

**“a wife to him.”** Abigail was likely not David’s first wife. Michal was first, but Saul took her from David. Then David married Ahinoam from Jezreel, and Ahinoam is always mentioned before Abigail every time they are listed together and Ahinoam bore David’s first son, Amnon. Given that, staying more literal to the Hebrew and saying, “a wife to him” rather than shortening it to “his wife” seems to give the most accurate meaning.

1Sm 25:43

**“Ahinoam of Jezreel.”** This is the “Jezreel” of Judah, not the Jezreel in the Jezreel Valley. This Jezreel is in south-central Judah, not far from Maon, Ziph, and Carmel (cf. Josh. 15:56; 1 Sam. 25:43; 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam. 2:2; 3:2; see commentary on Josh. 15:56).

**“and the two of them were his wives.”** The need for a royal heir who could continue the dynasty was such that most kings had more than one wife. In this case, David’s having more than one wife was important because Abigail’s only son, Chileab, David’s second son (2 Sam. 3:3), seems to have died as a child. He is never mentioned as being part of the life of the royal family. David married more wives later.

1Sm 25:44

**“Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti.”** This is just one more indication that by this time in his life Saul had turned away from God in his heart. Saul may have considered David his enemy, but he was still legally married to Michal and so Saul had no right under the Mosaic Law to give her away. It is clear that by this time in his life Saul had, and/or was influenced by, demons, and demons and demonic people are lawbreakers and defy God. We certainly see that in Saul.

**“Gallim.”** Gallim is somewhere just south of Gibeah, north of Jerusalem, in the tribal area of Benjamin.

**1 Samuel Chapter 26**

1Sm 26:1

**“the hill of Hachilah, which is facing Jeshimon?”** David is in the same area as he was in 1 Samuel 23:19.

1Sm 26:3

**“while David was staying in the wilderness.”** David was in what is called “the wilderness of Judah.” He had been in this general location earlier (cf. 1 Sam. 23:19).

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

1Sm 26:10

**“be swept away.”** That is, Saul will die, perhaps having the overtone of a violent death (cf. Gen. 18:23).

1Sm 26:15

**“Aren’t you a man?”** That is, are you not a valiant man, a tough guy?

**“your lord, the king.”** The word “lord” is plural, but the word “king” is singular. Thus “lord” is a plural of majesty.

1Sm 26:16

**“worthy of death.”** Literally, “sons of death.”

1Sm 26:25

**“So David went his way.”** David knew Saul was too unstable to trust.

**1 Samuel Chapter 27**

1Sm 27:1

**“perish.”** The Hebrew could be translated “be swept away.”

1Sm 27:2

**“So David arose and crossed over.”** David moved from the hill country of Judah to the coastal plain controlled by the Philistines.

**“to Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath..”** David had been in Gath earlier in his flight from King Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 22:1).

[For the details of David’s journeys once he started running from Saul, see commentary on 1 Sam. 19:18.]

1Sm 27:3

**“Ahinoam the Jezreelitess.”** This is the “Jezreel” of Judah, not the Jezreel in the Jezreel Valley. This Jezreel is in south-central Judah, not far from Maon, Ziph, and Carmel (cf. Josh. 15:56; 1 Sam. 25:43; 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam. 2:2; 3:2; see commentary on Josh. 15:56).

1Sm 27:7

**“was a year and four months.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “was days and four news,” using “days” for a year and “news” for the new moons, or months.

1Sm 27:8

**“as you go to Shur.”** Elsewhere called “the wilderness of Shur.” This “Shur” is in the Sinai peninsula as you head south out of Israel into the Sinai. So David, whose home base is in Judah, was concerned about an attack from the south, and made a preemptive strike on the enemy nations there.

**“inhabitants of the land who were of old.”** The inhabitants of the land that David attacked had been there a long time. This vocabulary is used in Micah 5:2 as well.

**1 Samuel Chapter 28**

1Sm 28:1

**“Now it came about in those days.”** So this event is happening in the north-central part of Israel while David is making raids in the Negev in the south of Israel.

**“the Philistines gathered their armies together into an armed force to fight with Israel.”** This gathering occurred in Aphek (1 Sam. 29:1). From here, David was sent back to Ziklag (1 Sam. 29:10-11) and the Philistines marched north to Shunem in the Jezreel Valley (1 Sam. 29:4).

**“know, yes, know.”** The Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 28:1 uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[See commentary on Genesis 2:16.]

1Sm 28:2

**“Then you will come to know what your servant can do.”** David’s answer is purposely vague. If David went to war along with Achish and the Philistines, they would indeed learn what David could do, not because he would fight along with them, but rather because he would fight against them. This shows David’s bravery and his willingness to put his life on the line for Israel. To be among the Philistines and then begin fighting against them would almost certainly mean he and his men would be surrounded as soon as they began to fight. In those circumstances David could easily be killed, a risk he was willing to take to save Israel.

**“I will make you my bodyguard​ from now on.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “for all the days [to come].” Achish felt that if David went with him to war and fought against his own people, Israel, that he could be trusted to be the king’s bodyguard.

1Sm 28:3

**“Now Samuel was dead.”** Samuel’s death and the lamenting and morning that occurred are covered in 1 Sam. 25:1.

**“Samuel was dead…and Saul had removed from the land those who inquired of spirits or had familiar spirits.”** This sentence sets the stage for what Saul does in the following verses. When Samuel was alive, Saul could ask him what the will of God was, but now Samuel was dead and Saul was so ungodly that God would not answer his questions or respond to his inquiries. So Saul turned to the medium at En-dor to get an answer to his question. The Bible says that Saul had removed from the land mediums and people like the woman at En-dor who asked demons questions they could not otherwise get answers to, and biblically he was supposed to do that (cf. Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:9-14; Lev. 19:31; Exod. 22:18). The godly King Josiah did (2 Kings 23:24). Nevertheless, the fact that there was a woman who lived at En-dor who was a medium and who was known to Saul’s servants reveals a couple of things: one is that Saul did not do a thorough job of removing mediums from the land, which, given his ungodly character and that fact that Saul himself had an evil spirit is not surprising. Also, however, it confirms what has been throughout the ages, that many people use mediums and “fortune tellers” of all kinds to get information, and will hide them from authorities and protect them. The land of Canaan had lots of people who dealt with demons before the Israelites started conquering Canaan (Deut. 18:9, 14), and some of them and their practices remained after Israel was in power.

[For more information on people with “familiar spirits,” see commentary on Deut. 18:11.]

1Sm 28:4

**“and came and encamped at Shunem.”** Shunem was a city in the Jezreel Valley (for the chronology, see commentary on 1 Sam. 29:1).

**“and they encamped at *Mount* Gilboa.”** This battle took place in the same basic area as when Gideon fought the Midianites. The fact that the Philistines were in the Jezreel Valley was a “do or die” situation for King Saul because if the Philistines could control that area they would cut off northern Israel from Southern Israel and control the major grain-producing area in Israel.

1Sm 28:6

**“Yahweh did not answer him; not by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”** This sentence is a huge key in understanding 1 Samuel 28 and the appearance of the demon who impersonated Samuel (more about that in the commentary entries on the next verses). Many people think that the prophet Samuel actually appeared to Saul, but that is not what happened. Saul was so ungodly that, as 1 Samuel 28:6 says, God would not answer his questions. If God’s prophets who were alive would not give Saul an answer, then there is no way that Samuel the prophet would have answered him. When all true prophets prophesy, the “answer” they give is from God, and God was not talking to Saul. Yet many people think that Samuel would somehow answer Saul even though to do so was an abominable thing (Deut. 18:12), and Samuel’s working via a medium meant that she should have been put to death for acting the part of the medium (Lev. 20:27). The “Samuel” that appeared was a demon, and demons have no problem defying and disobeying God. Demons are very good at impersonating people, which is why people see “ghosts” that seem to be dead people.

[For more on dead people being dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“Urim.”** A stone in the breastplate of the High Priest by which judgment was given.

[For more on the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

1Sm 28:7

**“familiar spirit.”** The phrase “familiar spirits” is from the Hebrew word *yiddoniy* (#03049 יִדְּעֹנִי), from the root *yada* (#03045 יָדַע), “to know,” and thus refers to “a knower,” or one who has a “familiar spirit.” The idea is that mediums and spiritists usually have some particular spirits or “spirit guides” (demons!) who “know” things and are familiar with people and situations and with whom they are regularly in touch and who serve them (see commentary on Deut. 18:11).

**“inquire.”** The Hebrew is stronger than “ask” in 1 Samuel 28:6. So Saul asked more emphatically of the woman with a familiar spirit than he asked of God.

**“En-dor.”** En-dor is on the north side of the Hill of Moreh, so Saul had to do some travel, almost surely down to the east toward the Jordan Valley, then north, then back west to get around the Philistines and get to the woman at En-dor.

1Sm 28:8

**“and put on different clothing.”** That is, different from his usual royal robes.

**“and bring up for me the one that I say to you.”** Saul asked this female medium to bring up Samuel, as if she had the power to do it. Mediums will tell you that they cannot summon the dead at will, but the dead person must want to come to the meeting. In this case, the demons were more than happy to fulfill Saul’s request and be able to afflict Israel through his disobedience. Note the bad and fatalistic advice the demon gave Saul (1 Sam. 28:16-19).

People use 1 Samuel 28:8 as evidence that people do live on after they die, but the verse says no such thing. What the verse does establish is that many people believe that the “soul” or the “spirit” lives on after the body dies, and that it has some kind of “spirit form” and intellect. That belief has existed for millennia in many cultures around the world, and it existed in Israel and sadly, it exists among Christians today; many of them try to contact the dead against God’s very clear commands (Deut. 18:9-14).

[For more on why people think dead people are alive, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

1Sm 28:9

**“how he has removed from the land those who inquire of spirits or have familiar spirits.”** Mediums were supposed to be executed (Lev. 20:27), but Saul did a poor job of it.

**“familiar spirits.”** See commentary on Deuteronomy 18:11.

1Sm 28:10

**“As Yahweh lives, no punishment will happen to you for this thing.”** Technically, the only person in the kingdom who could promise that the woman would not be punished for disobeying the king was the king himself. However, the woman, who did not know she was speaking to King Saul, does not seem to have thought about that. Interestingly, as soon as the demon “Samuel” appeared, she realized she was dealing with King Saul himself (1 Sam. 28:12). This could well be a case where the demons gave the medium revelation about the situation because she suddenly knew things that she did not know before. A major reason that mediums and fortune tellers have been around for millennia is that the demons know things and communicate some of what they know to the medium. If what mediums said was all just guesswork, the profession would have died out ages ago. Demons are real and they do communicate with people.

1Sm 28:13

**“gods.”** The noun *elohim* (God, god, gods) is plural (*elohim* is always plural, it is a plural noun), but the verb “coming up” is plural also. The woman likely saw many “gods”—actually, they were demons—coming up out of the earth, but one of them had a form that was mistaken for Samuel, whom she then describes to Saul. There are occasions when the Hebrew word *elohim* refers to people who act under the authority of God (cf. Exod. 21:6; John 10:34), so the woman may have seen some powerful-looking “men” coming up from the earth and called them “gods,” but even so, what she saw was demons. Demons are very good at appearing as people or even impersonating people (they usually do this as some form of “ghost”) and thus convince the gullible and/or unlearned that dead people are actually alive somewhere. It is a major part of the deception of the Devil to convince people that dead people are not really dead.

[For more on dead people being dead in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

1Sm 28:14

**“And Saul knew that it was Samuel.”** Saul was deceived. Here in 1 Samuel 28:14, what Saul saw was not Samuel, but a demon impersonating Samuel. It is well-known that ghosts and apparitions impersonate the dead, and that is the situation here.

The text says that Saul “knew” it was Samuel, but in this case, the Bible is telling us Saul’s state of mind, what was true for him even though it was not actually true. We see the same kind of thing in Genesis 3. Just before Eve sinned and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the text says, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food….” But it was not “good for food!” What she “saw” was not real and it resulted in her and Adam’s death and the death of all humans after her. When the Bible says that Eve “saw” that the tree was good for food, it is giving us her point of view, not the truth, and that is what is happening in 1 Samuel 28:14.

There are many lines of evidence to support that Saul was deceived and that what he saw was a demon impersonating Samuel.

* The text says that God would not answer Saul’s questions by prophets (1 Sam. 28:6). Even Saul himself said, “God has turned away from me and no longer answers me” (1 Sam. 28:15). So why would God answer Saul through a dead prophet? He would not.
* Saul went to a medium to get answers (1 Sam. 28:7), which should alert us to the fact that what was happening is ungodly.
* God forbade people to communicate with the dead (Deut. 18:9-14). That was an abomination to Him. Samuel had been faithful to God throughout his life, so even if he were alive in some form, would he really disobey God now and do something “abominable” to God and appear to Saul to answer his questions? He would not.
* Getting information from mediums and people who dealt with familiar spirits was evil and defiled a person in the eyes of God (Lev. 19:31; 2 Kings 21:6). Godly kings like Josiah got rid of the mediums in Israel (2 Kings 23:24). Would Samuel participate in something that to God was evil and defiling? He would not.
* According to the Law of Moses, mediums and those people who dealt with spirits were to be put to death (Lev. 20:27). Would “Samuel” appear to Saul at the behest of this female medium and thus force her to do something which would, if the king and people followed the Law, mean she would be put to death? No, godly Samuel would not do that, but a demon certainly would.
* According to the Law of Moses, anyone who used mediums was to be “cut off” from the people. God said, “The person who turns to those who are mediums and to those who have familiar spirits to prostitute themselves after them, I will even set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people” (Lev. 20:6). The godly prophet Samuel would not participate in something that would have such horrendous consequences for those involved, but a demon would.
* The “Samuel” that appeared to Saul was exactly what Saul would have expected to see, “an old man…covered with a cloak.” But does a disembodied soul (or spirit) have the shape and age of the person when they die? Is that what old and infirm Christians have to look forward to, something like “Samuel” apparently had, an elderly spirit body? Why would the soul of Samuel be old if the soul is immortal? And would that mean that the soul of an infant who died before he or she could walk or talk would be an infant-like soul forever? No, thankfully, no. In this case, the demon manifested itself in the form that the people would have been expecting so it could fool the people, and it worked. Saul and the medium were fooled. Sadly, that demon is still fooling lots of people who think that the prophet Samuel actually appeared and gave a prophecy to Saul.
* Still another reason that points to the fact that it was a demon and not Samuel that appeared to Saul was the terrible and fatalistic message that the demon gave. While it is true that Saul was an ungodly king, there are times when God helped other ungodly kings in war. Also, although there are times when God’s prophets deliver messages of doom, there is a difference here. One is that when Saul originally asked about the war and what to do, God would not answer him (1 Sam. 28:6). So similarly, God would not answer Saul now in a forbidden and “abominable,” “evil,” and “defiling” way. That God would not answer Saul when he first asked (1 Sam. 28:6), should have told Saul that he was on his own and that he should call a war council and make a sound decision about what to do. Options could have included retreating or hiring soldiers from other countries like some other kings did (cf. 2 Chron. 25:5-6). Had Saul done that, he and wonderful people like David’s friend Prince Jonathan could have lived. As it was, the fatalistic prophecy given by “Samuel” mentally devastated Saul and gave him no option but to fight the superior Philistine army, which, predictably, resulted in the death of many, including Saul and the royal family.

It has sometimes been objected that a demon could not have predicted the future the way that “Samuel” did when he appeared to Saul. But actually, demons have a lot of power and influence over future events, which is why people have gone to mediums and diviners for many thousands of years. If the mediums were mostly wrong, their profession would have died out long ago, but mediums and diviners are thriving today. Some events are hard to foresee, but if Saul went to war against the Philistines, his death, and the death of the royal family, were pretty much inevitable. But because the Devil is the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and has considerable sway on earth (1 John 5:19), and because Saul had sinned so badly he and his troops were not being protected by God (Lev. 20:6), and because the Philistines had a larger, better-equipped army, it was not hard for the demon to predict that Saul and his sons, who would as a matter of custom be in the heat of the fight, would die in the battle the next day.

The prophecy given by the demon “Samuel” is in line with how demons communicate. They give enough truth to convince a person that they really know the situation and the future, but they mix it with lies and probability (see commentary on 1 Sam. 28:15).

Many centuries ago, the Church Father Tertullian (c. AD 155-220) realized that the “Samuel” who spoke to Saul was a demon, and he wrote: “God forbid, however, that we should suppose that the soul of any saint, much less of a prophet, can be dragged out of (its resting-place in Hades) by a demon. We know that ‘Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light’ (2 Cor. 11:14)—much more into a man of light—and that at last he will ‘show himself to be even God’ (2 Thess. 2:4), and will exhibit ‘great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, he shall deceive the very elect’ (Matt. 24:24). He hardly hesitated on the before-mentioned occasion to affirm himself to be a prophet of God, and especially to Saul, in whom he was then actually dwelling. You must not imagine that he who produced the phantom was one, and he who consulted it was another; but that it was one and the same spirit, both in the sorceress and in the apostate (king), which easily pretended an apparition of that which it has already prepared them to believe as real—(even the spirit) through whose evil influence Saul’s heart was fixed where his treasure was, and where certainly God was not. Therefore it came about, that he saw him through whose aid he believed that he was going to see, because he believed him through whose help he saw. But we are met with the objection, that in visions of the night dead persons are not infrequently seen….”[[24]](#footnote-13767)

Tertullian is correct. Saul saw a demon. The demon in the medium at En-dor did not have the power to raise the dead, but it, or other demons in the area, did have the power to impersonate the dead, which is what happened.

So in summary, we see that King Saul asked God about the future in several different ways and God would not answer him. So Saul went to a medium who dealt with familiar spirits. Saul was deceived and sinning in what he did, and God did not give in to his desperation; in fact, He could not since Samuel was dead. However, a demon gladly fulfilled Saul’s desire and appeared as Samuel the prophet and gave a prediction that Saul would die, which came to pass.

[For more information on the dead being genuinely dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the soul not living on after a person dies, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more information on the abomination of witchcraft, necromancy, using mediums, and other similar “black arts,” see Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and the commentary on those verses. For more information on this record of Saul and the medium at En-dor, see the commentary entries on the verses in the chapter.]

**“kneeled and bowed down.”** This kneeling preceded bowing down to the ground. The two actions, kneeling and then bowing to the ground blended into one act of homage or worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. Also, instead of “kneeled and bowed down,” the text could be translated “bowed down and worshiped,” with “kneeling” being understood as part of the process of bowing down, and “bowing down” was the act of worship. The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

1Sm 28:15

**“Why have you disturbed me.”** At this point, the demon begins to talk with Saul. The text does not tell us how this occurred and there are several ways that it could happen. One is that the demon could speak through the medium herself by using the woman’s body and vocal cords, but in many of those cases, the tone of voice itself is the demon’s, not the woman’s normal voice. It would also be possible, however, that the demon manifested itself more corporeally and actually spoke to Saul, demons have the ability to do that.

Typical of what demons say, what this demon said is a mixture of truth, error, and misleading information. The very first thing the demon does is put Saul on the defensive as if Saul is causing trouble. The demon asks, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Saul wants an answer from Samuel, so he does not want to cause trouble, but that is the very first thing the demon accuses Saul of, “disturbing” Samuel. But that whole communication is a lie. The demon was not “disturbed,” and it did not “come up.” The demon knew Saul was in a very delicate and tenuous mental state, and he wanted to bully Saul so he would be defeated and compliant.

Then, in 1 Samuel 28:16, the demon went on to say, “why do you ask of me,” when the demon knew exactly why Saul was asking. Again, this is misleading and meant to make Saul think of himself as a troublemaker. By the way, if this was really Samuel the prophet, he would have known why Saul was asking. Then the demon went on and said, “Yahweh has turned away from you and has become your foe.” This is a perfect blend of truth and error. It was true that because Saul was so ungodly that God had turned away from him, but it is not true that God had actively become Saul’s foe. Given that Saul was on the eve of war with the Philistines, that was a deflating and fatalistic statement that presented only a future of doom.

In 1 Samuel 28:17, the demon again speaks the truth. It was historical truth and widely known, but it reinforced Saul’s fear. However, in 1 Samuel 28:18, we again see a blend of truth and misinformation. Saul did not obey God when it came to the Amalek situation, but the demon then says, “therefore Yahweh has done this thing to you this day.” The demon does not clarify what “this thing” is, which leaves Saul to imagine the worst thing possible. Ostensibly, “this thing” could refer to the distress Saul is in and the predicament about the Philistines, but even so, God is a merciful God and if Saul would repent even a little bit, God might be able to help him, after all, He helped wicked Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 21:20-29). The point is that the demon was not suggesting any way out to Saul, only defeat.

In 1 Samuel 28:19, the demon gives Saul the final fatalistic prophecy, that he and his family and the army of Israel would be killed. Of course, this is predictable if Saul actually went to war, which he did. So here again we see the ultimate desire of the Devil, which was to see Israel defeated and devastated. If Saul had been thinking logically, he would have told his army to retreat and saved them and his sons and himself from death and at least lived to see another day. At that point, he could have gone to God and/or his advisors and asked what to do to save his family, army, and country. Also, if this apparition really was Samuel the prophet, he would have fought to have Saul do something that would save Israel, not just tell Saul that he and the army of Israel would be killed. But this apparition was not Samuel the prophet, it was a demon.

In summary, Saul disobeyed God and got himself into a very difficult situation, and then tried to figure out how to get out of the situation by disobeying God even more and consulting a medium. The demon who spoke via the medium offered no help at all, and in fact worked to kill off Saul and the army of Israel, which is what happened.

[For more information on communication from the Devil and his demons being a blend of truth, error, and misinformation, see commentary on Gen. 3:5.]

**“by bringing me up?”** The record here in 1 Samuel 28 is consistent in saying that Samuel is being brought “up.” Samuel was not in heaven, he was dead, sleeping in the earth, and a demon impersonated him. But the fact is that Saul, the medium who conjured the demon, and the demon itself all agreed that Samuel came “up.” Since the people of the time thought the dead were somewhere in the earth, not in heaven, that the demon came “up” from the earth was part of the impersonation of Samuel that made the experience realistic to the medium, Saul, and others who were there. At the resurrection, when God raises the dead, at that time the people will indeed come up out of the earth (cf. Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29).

The Bible says that when a person dies they are dead in every way and not alive in any form or place, and they are awaiting the resurrection when God will again bring them to life.

[For more information on what happens when a person dies, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the soul not living on after a person dies, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

1Sm 28:16

**“foe.”** A rare Hebrew word, only occurring here and in Psalm 139:20.

1Sm 28:17

**“Yahweh has done to you as he spoke by my hand. Yahweh has torn the kingdom out of your hand.”** This was first spoken by Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:26-28.

1Sm 28:18

**“you did not obey the voice of Yahweh and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek.”** This is recorded in 1 Samuel 15:9-19.

**“this thing.”** The demon does not clarify what “this thing” is in the text. Ostensibly it refers to the whole situation that Saul was in; all the fear, the impending battle, and the fact that God did not answer him. However, given the fact that the demon did not define what “this thing” was, that left it to Saul to imagine what it was, and given his mental state, he no doubt imagined the worst. Note that the demon is not giving Saul any hope at all, but was just leading him to defeat and death.

1Sm 28:19

**“And Yahweh will give Israel.”** For more on this prophecy, see commentary on 1 Samuel 28:14.

1Sm 28:20

**“fell full length on the ground.”** In the culture, there were various ways that one person would show reverence for another or reverence for God. The most common way was to fall to one’s knees and place one’s chest to the ground. However, it also occurred that a person would fall full length—fall prostrate—on the ground in front of the person or God. This was an act of utmost respect or reverence, and that is what Saul did when he thought he was in the presence of Samuel.

1Sm 28:23

**“sat on the bed.”** The reader must remember that in the ancient near-eastern world, a “bed” was like a thick blanket on the ground. It was usually rolled up during the day and stored against the wall of the house, and like that it was a comfortable place to sit. Saul would sit on the rolled-up bed and lean back on the wall.

1Sm 28:24

**“in the house.”** It was customary for people who just had a few animals like a donkey, cow, goat, or sheep, to keep them in the house at night. There was no police force in those days to keep valuable things from being stolen, so bringing valuable animals into the house was common. Also, especially on chilly nights, the presence of animals in the house helped keep the house warmer. It was common to have a manger in the house so the animals could eat and be calm, and the manger that Jesus was laid in was in the house (Luke 2:7).

**1 Samuel Chapter 29**

1Sm 29:1

**“to Aphek.”** According to 1 Samuel 28:4, the Philistines were already at Shunem in the Valley of Jezreel, which was more than 40 miles to the northeast of Aphek. The city of Aphek was in the coastal plain just north of the Plain of Philistia and much closer to the main Philistine cities than Shunem was, so why does 1 Samuel 29 have the Philistines back at Aphek when 1 Samuel 28 has them already in Shunem? Scholars have suggested different ways of resolving this apparent discrepancy and why the Bible places the gathering at Aphek after the gathering in the north at Shunem. One proposed solution is that there is another city named Aphek that was close to Shunem, but no such Aphek is mentioned elsewhere or has ever been found. A second solution that has been proposed is that this gathering at Aphek was a later contingent of the Philistine army that gathered at Aphek and then would head north to join the other Philistines who had gone north to Shunem earlier. However, that seems to be unlikely given the fact that in 1 Samuel 29 the ruling lords of the Philistines are mentioned (1 Sam. 29:2) and the commanders of the Philistines are mentioned (1 Sam. 29:4), and David and Achish are there with them (1 Sam. 29:2). It seems the only reasonable way that all the lords and the commanders and King Achish and David could have been together would have been before they marched off as a group to the north to fight against Israel. So the third, and most likely solution as to why 1 Samuel 29 has the Philistines southwest of where they were in 1 Samuel 28 is that the records are out of chronological order, and that the events recorded in 1 Samuel 29 occurred earlier than the troop movements recorded in 1 Samuel 28. But why reverse the chronological order of the chapters? To understand that, we must remember that in the original text there were no chapters or verses, and the focus of this part of Samuel is not on the Philistines, but on David. By moving the events in 1 Samuel 29 next to 1 Samuel 30, the Bible gives us a continuous narrative of events in the life of David. Thus, we see David not being allowed to fight alongside of the Philistines and being sent home to Ziklag in 1 Samuel 29, and then finding Ziklag burned down and the people there taken captive, pursuing and destroying the Amalekites, and then returning to Ziklag in 1 Samuel 30, at which point he was well-positioned to approach the elders of the tribe of Judah and be crowned king once it was known that King Saul had been killed in battle (1 Sam. 31:1-6; 2 Sam. 2:4).

**“the spring that is in Jezreel.”** There is a spring about 500 yards northeast of Tel Jezreel.

1Sm 29:3

**“who has been with me now.”** This phrase refers to David, not Saul, even though “Saul” is the person referred to closest to the phrase. So this is one example showing that the reader must pay attention to the context and that strict rules of grammar do not always apply (cf. 1 John 5:20).

1Sm 29:4

**“adversary.”** The Hebrew is *satan*, the “adversary.”

1Sm 29:5

**“sang *to each other*.”** The Hebrew is literally, “answering,” so some versions add “to one another,” because the singing was meant to memorialize something but also to remind and encourage one another about the event or person.

1Sm 29:6

**“As Yahweh lives.”** Achish uses the name of Yahweh, likely in recognition that the Hebrew God Yahweh had given David great success.

**“*Philistine* lords.”** The word translated “lords” here refers to the Philistine lords.

1Sm 29:8

**“of my lord the king.”** David is being ambiguous. His lord the king is still actually Saul.

1Sm 29:9

**“like an angel of God.”** What could David have done to make Achish feel that David was so good for him? One possibility is that David could have kept the Amalekites from attacking Philistine villages by his constant and successful raids against them.

1Sm 29:10

**“the servants of your lord.”** Achish refers to himself as David’s lord.

**1 Samuel Chapter 30**

1Sm 30:2

**“both young and old.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “little and big.”

1Sm 30:5

**“And David’s two wives.”** Although David will take more wives later, the text makes it clear that at this time he only had two wives.

**“Ahinoam the Jezreelitess.”** This is the “Jezreel” of Judah, not the Jezreel in the Jezreel Valley. This Jezreel is in south-central Judah, not far from Maon, Ziph, and Carmel (cf. Josh. 15:56; 1 Sam. 25:43; 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam. 2:2; 3:2; see commentary on Josh. 15:56).

1Sm 30:6

**“but David found strength in Yahweh his God.”** This seems to be a turning point in the life of David. He had lost energy and resolve when he was being chased by Saul month after month, and finally became so discouraged that he went to the Philistine king Achish, king of Gath, and sought refuge in the Philistine country on the coast of Israel. In the year and four months he was there he had to hide how he felt and lie about his activities, which were bloody and merciless; killing every man, woman, and child in village after village, as he made raids from his base in Ziklag. Now Ziklag has been burned and the women and children have been captured by the Amalekites, and his own men—who were no doubt weary of the duplicitous and even shameful lifestyle they were living—spoke of stoning him. But David showed his true self and found strength in Yahweh, and things turned around for him. He and his men fought the Amalekites and got back all their stuff as well as all the plunder that the Amalekites had gotten from raiding. Then due to the timing of the death of Saul, went to Hebron and was crowned king over the Judeans. Then, after a two-year civil war, was crowned king over all Israel.

1Sm 30:8

**“overtake, yes, overtake, and will rescue, yes, rescue.”** The Hebrew doubles the verbs “overtake” and “rescue,” using the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis. God’s answer to David’s question is emphatic, punchy, and to the point.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

1Sm 30:9

**“came to the brook Besor.”** The brook Besor in the southern Negev is not a deep ravine or a deep stream, and it is easy to cross. However, it is a distinct boundary as one travels south, and the men who were exhausted felt they could go no further.

1Sm 30:10

**“so faint.”** The travel had no doubt been tiring, but in this context “faint” could also refer to physical exhaustion combined with mental discouragement. The men were already tired and mentally fatigued, and they had no idea how far the Amalekites had gone with their families or even if they were still alive, so they just could not muster the strength to go on.

1Sm 30:12

**“a slice of *pressed* figs and two clusters of raisins.”** David’s men were traveling light and fast through the arid regions of the Negev, and light fare such as raisins and pressed figs would have been the kind of food they had with them (cf. 1 Sam. 25:18; 2 Kings 20:7).

**“for three days and three nights.”** Without water in the Negev for three days and nights must have meant that this Egyptian was on the point of death. So it was a blessing from God for him to be found and saved, and a blessing from God for David and his men to find him and get help from him.

1Sm 30:13

**“I am a young servant.”** The young man was likely a slave.

1Sm 30:14

**“Cherethites.”** In this case, the “Cherethites” are people from Crete, in this case, the Philistines. The Philistines and Amalekites were enemies.

**“the Negev of Caleb.”** Caleb was given the city of Hebron, so the Negev of Caleb would be the Negev to the south of Hebron.

1Sm 30:17

**“the *evening* breeze.”** The Hebrew reads *nesheph*, the word for “breathe.” Here it refers to the late afternoon or evening “breath,” that is, breeze. The sun heats up the land during the day and the air begins to rise. By evening, there is a very regular breeze off the Mediterranean Sea, a breath of cool air, if you will. Here, David killed the Amalekites from the “breath” (the evening breeze) until the next evening. That must have been quite a feat and required dependence on God, because David and his men were already tired, and to fight for 24 solid hours takes a huge amount of willpower and endurance.

**“400 young servants.”** It is possible that these servants—likely slaves—got away on camels because they were made to watch over the camels while their Amalekite lords ate and drank. Also, David may well have let them go rather than pursuing them because he knew that they were servants or slaves and were not willingly a part of the Amalekite fighting force. Perhaps with the camels for collateral, these slaves could begin a new life for themselves out from under their Amalekite lords.

1Sm 30:18

**“and David rescued his two wives *as well*.”** The fact that the text says that David rescued all that the Amalekites had taken should have included his wives, so why are they specifically mentioned? Part of the reason would be that David has already been anointed king over Israel, and even though he has been a king in exile, he is still the anointed king. The wives of the king had to be carefully watched over because if they had children, those children could claim to be descendants of the king and try to usurp the throne, just as David’s son Absalom did. So specifically mentioning that David recovered his wives removes any doubt that any child of theirs would legitimately be David’s.

1Sm 30:20

**“they drove *them*.”** That is, David’s men drove them.

**“the other livestock.”** The “other livestock” seems to be the livestock that David and his men had originally.

**“and they said, ‘This is David’s spoil.’”** It is David’s men who recognize his leadership and what he has done for them and want him to take the flocks and herds that were the Amalekites as his own spoil, and they got their own flocks and herds back.

1Sm 30:21

**“who were made to stay at the brook Besor.”** The text is unclear if the people were made to stay behind at Besor by their exhaustion or by David. It is quite possible that David saw that they could not really effectively travel or fight and that they would be more of a liability than an asset and had them stay behind for their own good and the good of the army that was fit to fight.

1Sm 30:22

**“*men* of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

**“me.”** The text is singular, “me.” The men of Belial speak as if everyone were in agreement with them that those left behind would get nothing. This is a tactic of the Devil and his followers, to make it seem like “everybody” is doing something even if in reality it is only a small number. Inflating numbers and trying to include people to make the numbers seem bigger is a trick of the Devil to get people to feel bad if they are not “part of the crowd.” The Devil knows that people do not generally want to be alone or different, so he often falsely inflates numbers to get people to join his evil cause who would not join if they thought that others were not joining. No doubt there were many among the 400 men who went with David who thought that the spoil should be evenly shared, but the men of Belial ignored that fact and included them in the “me” without their permission. The desire to be part of a group rather than be alone, even if being alone is the right thing to do, is why God has in the Law of Moses, “You must not follow a crowd to do evil” (Exod. 23:2).

**“so that he may lead them away and depart.”** The men of Belial were happy to divide the group and send away those who were too exhausted to fight. The Devil is always trying to cause division and weaken the group. In this record, we see the heart of God exemplified in David, and the heart of the Devil exemplified in his children, the men of Belial. David fought to include the ones who had been left behind and keep the group together and respecting one another, while the men of Belial attempted to sow division, promote hard feelings and bitterness, and divide the group.

1Sm 30:26

**“to his friends, to the elders of Judah.”** David had made the elders of Judah his friends. The word translated “friends” can be very generic, and not refer to “friends” the way we do in English. It can simply refer to people around, “neighbors” or “fellows.”

1Sm 30:27

**“Jattir.”** A city of priests in southern Judah (Josh. 21:14).

1Sm 30:28

**“Eshtemoa.”** A city of priests in southern Judah (Josh. 21:14).

**1 Samuel Chapter 31**

1Sm 31:4

**“torture.”** Saul was apparently afraid of being tortured, not of dying, because he asked his armor-bearer to kill him, and when the armor-bearer refused, Saul killed himself. How the Philistines would have tortured Saul since he was already badly wounded is not expressed but was clearly in the mind of Saul.

**“Therefore Saul took the sword and fell on it.”** This is how Saul died: he took his own life. The story told by the Amalekite was a lie (see commentary on 2 Sam. 1:6). The text reads “the sword,” not “his sword.” It is possible that Saul used the sword of the armor-bearer; perhaps he had dropped his in the battle. If so, then the armor-bearer used the same sword (1 Sam. 31:5).

1Sm 31:6

**“and all his men that same day together.”** One lesson we learn from this record of the death of Saul and his army is the importance of having godly and wise leaders. The Bible shows us in many places, this being one of them, that when leaders make mistakes many other people get hurt as well. Saul was an ungodly leader, and his poor leadership and hatred of David, one of his best leaders and fighters, led to his death as well as the death of his sons and his army. The death of his army put Israel in a very vulnerable position militarily, and it was only David’s godliness and leadership skills that allowed him to rather quickly build an army that could defeat the armies of the nations around him and build and solidify his kingdom. The subjects of a nation should do whatever they can to assure they have godly leaders.

1Sm 31:7

**“of the valley.”** Likely the Harod Valley, a narrower section off of the main Jezreel Valley.

1Sm 31:8

**“that they found Saul.”** It seems that the archers did not know that they had severely wounded the king, so they did not know Saul was dead.

1Sm 31:9

**“the house of their idols.”** That is, the temple of their idols.

1Sm 31:10

**“house of the Ashtaroth.”** The temple of the Ashtaroth, which is likely in Beth-shean.

1Sm 31:11

**“Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard.”** Years earlier, when Saul had just become king, he rounded up an army and rescued the people of Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:1-11). The people of Jabesh-gilead never forgot that kindness, and so went at the risk of their lives to keep Saul’s body from being desecrated. This is one of the great records of thankfulness and heroism in the Bible.

1. Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, [ConcC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-30224)
2. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus [NICOT], 78-79n12. [↑](#footnote-ref-32304)
3. E. W. Bullinger has a number of biblical examples of the figure antanaclasis in his classic work, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-18207)
4. Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, 9:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-10142)
5. Willem VanGemeren, *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 662. [↑](#footnote-ref-31531)
6. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2:131-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-25600)
7. Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, see note on 1 Sam. 2:25. [↑](#footnote-ref-24404)
8. Cf. Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31990)
9. Cf. Wikipedia, “Dagon,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagon. [↑](#footnote-ref-18328)
10. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 871, “anthropopatheia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23020)
11. David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* [NICOT], 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-20867)
12. Horatio B. Hackett, *Illustrations of Scripture*, chap. 1, para. “Skin and Leather Bottles,” Kindle. [↑](#footnote-ref-20815)
13. J. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, “Skin Bottles,” 354, para. 651. [↑](#footnote-ref-21209)
14. David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* [NICOT], 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-18093)
15. Robert Bergen, *1st and 2nd Samuel* [NAC], 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-24279)
16. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-16595)
17. Cf. D. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* [NICOT], 382, n108. [↑](#footnote-ref-20560)
18. Cf. E. Fox, *The Schocken Bible*; David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* [NICOT], 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-29136)
19. John Walton, Victor Matthews, Mark Cavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-29146)
20. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28665)
21. Cf. A. Steinmann, *1 Samuel* [ConcC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24644)
22. Cf. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* [OTL], 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-17006)
23. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30505)
24. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, “A Treatise on the Soul” (Tertullian), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, chap. 57, 3:234. [↑](#footnote-ref-13767)