

# **Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus**

## **5. The United Monarchy – Part 1 Samuel and Saul**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the Old Testament**

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# 1 Introduction

The book of Judges closes with a lament: "In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). That described the situation very well. God had miraculously given birth to this nation so that they might be his ambassadors to the rest of the world. He chose the nation of Israel, but he chose them for a task – to be instrumental in reconciling the rest of the world to him. Now his ambassadors were living in their Promised Land but they were engulfed in idol worship, civil war, and every other sort of sin imaginable. Part of the problem is that there was no one person in charge. It was God's desire that they turn to him for leadership. If the people individually were in regular communication with God and submitted to his leadership, then there would have been no need for a king. But the people were not submitted to God's leadership and thus anarchy prevailed (thus the reference in Judges 21:25, "everyone did as he saw fit").

During the period of the judges, men (and women) did arise as leaders for a time, and the nation tended to be more submitted to God when under the leadership of a righteous judge. This arrangement did not provide for any form of ongoing, successive leadership, however. When the judge died, anarchy returned because there was no mechanism in place to automatically select the next leader. The people looked around and noticed that the surrounding nations had kings and they felt that this would be good for them as well.

The last judge was a righteous man named Samuel. The people went to Samuel and demanded a king. God responded positively to their request and put a monarchy in place over the nation of Israel. He anointed the first king, Saul. Because Saul was not fully submitted to God, when he died the monarchy was taken from his family and David became the next king. David was a righteous man and God promised him that the throne would not depart from his family. When David died, his son, Solomon, became his successor. Solomon was the last king of the united nation.

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam followed him as king, but there was tribal conflict in the nation. As a result of some political bickering, the nation of Israel split in two and became the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah. The descendants of David did retain the throne of the Southern Kingdom and remained in power there until the end of that kingdom. But the united monarchy only covers the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. These are three very colorful and very different characters.

1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings together represent a history of the nation from the time of Samuel, through the united monarchy, through the divided monarchy, and until both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms had been conquered and subdued by other nations (and had really ceased to exist). (Note that the Southern Kingdom was later restored as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). 1 Samuel starts with the birth of Samuel and ends with the death of Saul. 2 Samuel focuses on the kingship of David. 1 Kings opens with the transition of power from David to Solomon. Solomon dies in 1 Kings 11. 1 and 2 Samuel were originally a single book and were divided into two parts by the translators of the Septuagint – several hundred years before the birth of Christ. The same is true of 1 and 2 Kings and also 1 and 2 Chronicles.

1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles together give an overview of everything from Adam through the fall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (thus covering much of the same history as 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings). 1 Chronicles opens with a very hasty history of the world pre-David, and then the rest of the book focuses on the life of David. 2 Chronicles opens with the transition of power from David to Solomon. Solomon dies in 2 Chronicles 9.

1 and 2 Chronicles have a different focus than 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The books of Samuel and Kings were written during the exile and are historical in focus. The books of Chronicles were written during the post-exilic period. They were written by the same author as Ezra and Nehemiah. Chronicles attempts to give the nation a sense of hope in that the promises given to the nation are still valid, even though they no longer had a Davidic king and were living under foreign rule. The Chronicles focus on the kingships of David and Solomon, presenting them as ideal leaders and leaving out most information about their failures. Chronicles attempts to give the post-exilic people a sense of continuity with their past. It focuses on such topics as the building of the temple (the rebuilding of the temple was a major activity for the post-exilic people). It emphasizes obedience to the law and the prophets (reteaching the people the law and the prophets was also a major post-exilic activity). It also puts major emphasis on the Messianic promises, which are a link back to the line of David.

David and Solomon were writers as well as rulers. David did not write all of the Psalms, but he wrote many of them. Solomon did not write all of the Proverbs, but he wrote many of them. He is also credited with having written Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

The united monarchy only lasted around 120 years, but during that short time a great deal of God's wisdom was imparted to the world. This is reflected in the amount of Scripture devoted to this one time period.

Let's see what we can learn.

## 2 Samuel

### 2.1 *The Birth and Dedication of Samuel*

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

There was a man from the tribe of Ephraim named Elkanah. He had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was barren. Elkanah truly loved Hannah and tried to make her feel better about the fact that she had no children. Peninnah, on the other hand, taunted her and tried to make her feel unworthy. This made Hannah miserable.

One day Elkanah was at the tabernacle making a fellowship offering. Once again Peninnah made some rude remark to Hannah and Hannah became upset. She went off to weep and pray. She prayed that God would give her a son, promising to dedicate him to the Lord. She was praying earnestly and deeply, such that her lips were moving but no sound was coming out. A priest by the name of Eli was nearby. He saw her and supposed by her behavior that she was drunk. After being chastised for her "condition," she told him that she had not been drinking but that she had been pouring out her heart to God. Eli told her to go in peace and asked God to grant her the desire of her heart. She left and felt better immediately. Soon she conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel.

Hannah was determined to honor her vow to God. She kept her son at home until such time that he was weaned. We assume that this means until an age where he could begin to do a few things for himself. Today it is normal to wean children during their first year, but in the context of this chapter Samuel was probably walking and talking before he was weaned. Still, it must have been a gut-wrenching act of faith on the part of Hannah to turn him over to Eli.

Before Samuel was born, Hannah had promised that he would be dedicated to God. When he reached an age where he could survive in the home of Eli and be of service at the tabernacle, she and Elkanah took Samuel to Eli and turned him over. She reminded Eli that she was the woman that he had found in such distress and that he had prayed that God would give her the desire of her heart. She now revealed what that desire was and told him of her vow. They made an offering to dedicate Samuel and then returned home.

### 2.2 *The House of Eli*

1 Samuel 2:12-4:1

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were evil. Levitical law provides that a portion of meats that were brought for offerings would go to the priests for food. The law also prescribes how the meats are to be prepared, how the fat is to be burned, etc. Hophni and Phinehas were forcing the people who brought offerings to let them pick over the meat first so that they would get the best pieces before allowing the offerings to proceed. They were contradicting the law and putting themselves before God. In addition, they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Eli knew all of this but let them get away with it.

Samuel lived in this environment but remained righteous. Each year, his mother would visit him when she came to make offerings. She would bring him a new coat every year. Eli would always bless her and pray for her, and God gave her three sons and two daughters to take the

place of Samuel. In spite of the negative influences of the house of Eli, Samuel grew to love and obey and serve God. 1 Samuel 2:26 says:

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

The Bible only says that about one other person (check Luke 2:52).

A prophet came to Eli and confronted him about the state of his family. He told Eli that because of the evil that he allowed to go on in his household, his family would be cut off. As a sign that this word was true, Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day. In their place, another would be raised up to be the spiritual leader of the nation.

Sometime after that the Lord spoke to Samuel. We do not know how old he was at this point. He was probably getting to be a young man, but he had never had God speak directly to him before. As he was trying to go to sleep one night, he heard a voice call his name. He assumed that it was Eli, and he went to Eli and asked what he wanted. Eli told him that he had not called and sent him back to bed. This happened three times. Finally Eli figured out what was going on, and told Samuel that if the voice came again he should say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Sure enough, Samuel went back to bed and the voice came again, calling his name. He replied as Eli had instructed him. God then told him that he was about to come in judgment against the house of Eli.

The next day Eli wanted to know what God had told Samuel. Samuel was afraid to tell him but Eli insisted. Eli was submissive and accepted the Lord's judgment.

Following this, we assume from the text (3:19-20) that God spoke frequently to Samuel and that Samuel was faithful in handling the word of the Lord. He became known as a prophet throughout the land.

### **2.3 *The Ark is Captured***

1 Samuel 4

The Israelites and the Philistines were at war with one another. There was a particular battle ensuing near Aphek, which the Israelites were losing. They decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the camp. If God were in their midst, they thought surely they would win. Thus they sent for the Ark.

When the Ark was brought into the camp, a great cheer went up from the Israelites. It was loud enough that the Philistines heard it and figured out what was going on. There was great fear among the Philistines. They knew all that the God of the Israelites had done to bring them out of Egypt and into Canaan, and they did not really want to fight that God. Still, battle followed and the Philistines soundly defeated the Israelites. Many were killed, including Hophni and Phinehas (who died on the same day). When it was over, the Israelites were scattered and the Philistines had captured the Ark.

A messenger from the battle ran back to Shiloh, where Eli was (and where the tabernacle was located). He told the people there about the battle and the heavy losses. He told Eli that Hophni and Phinehas had been killed. Then he told the people that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured. When Eli heard that the Ark had been taken, he fell backwards out of his chair, broke his neck, and died. The wife of Phinehas was pregnant at the time and late in her term. When she heard all of the news, she went into childbirth and died while giving birth to a son.

All in all it was not a good day in the camp.

So what happened here? Why did God allow his chosen people to be defeated? Why did he allow his Ark to be taken captive by the enemy? Here is a clue.

In Joshua, the Israelites experienced some great military victories. When they did, they were operating under God's game plan. It was a time in their history when they were faithful to him, doing the things that he asked. When they failed to follow him, they were defeated (remember Achan at Ai?).

Now fast-forward to the time of Eli. Eli was the spiritual leader of the nation. He was also a permissive and undisciplined father who let his own sons do whatever they wanted, even though it made a mockery of God's ordinances. God had already told him that his sons would pay with their lives and that the leadership role would be torn away from the house of Eli.

This battle with the Philistines would have been something that the Israelites concocted for themselves rather than something that God told them to do. He did not lead them into this battle and was not going to give them victory. So what did they do? They decided to force God into their own situation. They went and got the Ark. God did not lead them into battle; they led God into battle. The trouble is that this leading and following business does not work unless God is doing the leading and we are doing the following.

Furthermore, when God gave the instructions for the building of the Ark, he said it was to be placed into the tabernacle and left there unless the people were in transit. The Ark was not some sort of a charm. It was not a "rabbit's foot" that could be brought into a battle for good luck. The people felt like they had God in a box and could make him do whatever they wanted. God took advantage of the occasion to show them that they were wrong.

There is a huge lesson in all of this for us. Most of us go about fighting our own battles according to our own agendas. We wait until we get into trouble before turning to God and letting him out of his box long enough to rescue us. Then we put him back and take charge once again. At least that is the way we would like to work it if we were completely honest with ourselves. But it does not work that way. We should be fighting the battles that are on God's agenda. We need to realize that God does not live in a box and does not come out at our beckoning. When we behave this way we are setting ourselves up in his place. He is Savior, but he is also Lord.

## **2.4 The Return of the Ark**

1 Samuel 5:1-7:1

God did not honor the fact that the Israelites took the Ark into battle. Neither was he pleased with the Philistines for taking it from the Israelites.

After the Philistines captured the Ark, they took it to Ashdod and set it up in the temple of their god, Dagon. The next day they went into the temple and found the statue of Dagon face down before the Ark. They set the statue back up. The next morning they found that the statue had fallen again and this time its head and hands had been broken off. The trouble did not stop there. The people of Ashdod were afflicted with problems that included breaking out with tumors. They knew that the source of the problems was the presence of the Ark in their city, where it did not belong.

They shipped the Ark to Gath, another Philistine city. Once it arrived, the people there began experiencing similar problems. They were also breaking out in tumors. They decided to ship it to Ekron. The people of Ekron saw it coming and knew of the problems it had caused in Ashdod and Gath. They did not want it in the city.

The Philistine leaders got together to try to decide what to do about what was happening to them. They reached the conclusion that the Ark needed to be returned to the Israelites. They built a cart for it and hitched some cows to the cart to carry it back. They also fashioned five gold tumors and five gold rats to send back with it. History gives us some insight into the meaning behind these strange golden statues.

In the ruins of Rome and Greece, archaeologists have found buildings that were pagan "faith healing" centers. This is where people who were affected with some sort of body ailment would come and try to get their favorite god to give them healing. In the ruins of such buildings, they always find little statues of body parts. When a person sought one of these gods for healing to a particular part of the body, he would typically bring a statue of that body part as an offering. Perhaps it was to remind the god which body part needed healing, or perhaps it was given as some sort of symbolic exchange – "if you'll fix my foot I'll give you a statue of it." The same sort of thing seems to be happening here with the Philistines. They knew that the God of the Israelites was inflicting these problems on them. They were making little statues of the things that needed healing and sending them back to God in hopes that he would give them relief. The golden statues of tumors we understand. The fact that they also sent back golden statues of rats might indicate that God had overrun their cities with rats as part of the punishment that he was inflicting on them.

They set the Ark and the golden statues on the cart, hitched up the cows, and set the whole thing in motion in the general direction of the Israelites. They figured that if the cows headed towards Beth Shemesh (an Israelite city), then all of this really was from God; if however, the cows strayed off in some other direction, then all of this had happened to them by chance. Sure enough, the cows headed straight towards Beth Shemesh.

The people of Beth Shemesh were exhilarated to see the Ark coming. They took the cart, cut it up into pieces, and started a fire. Then they took the cows pulling the cart and sacrificed them as a burnt offering. Some of the men of Beth Shemesh got curious and decided to look into the Ark. God zapped them dead. It may not have been quite as dramatic as the scene in "Raiders of the Lost Ark," but they were dead just the same. When this happened, the people realized that God was very serious about having his Ark respected and a fear came over them.

The Ark was taken to Kiriath Jearim and stored in the home of a man named Abinadab.

## **2.5 The Philistines Are Defeated**

1 Samuel 7:2-17

The Ark remained in the home of Abinadab for twenty years. During this time, the people remained under the oppression of the Philistines. They finally got tired of the situation and asked Samuel to help them. Samuel told them to get rid of all of their idols, which they did. He told them to come to the city of Mizpah for a time of prayer and fasting.

The Philistines heard that the Israelites were gathering at Mizpah and decided to attack them there. When the Israelites heard that the Philistines were coming, they asked Samuel to intercede. As he did, God set loud thunder down on the Philistines that threw them into a panic. They began to run and the Israelites pursued them and defeated them. Samuel led the nation in overthrowing the Philistine oppression. They took back cities that had been captured by the

Philistines, such as Ekron and Gath. Samuel became the last judge and from his home base in Ramah he traveled around the country settling disputes among the people.

## 3 The Reign of Saul

### 3.1 *The Nation Asks for a King*

1 Samuel 8

When Samuel got older, he tried to prepare his sons to take his place. His sons were not good men, however. The people recognized that these sons would not provide the sort of righteous leadership that they had received from Samuel.

They came to Samuel and asked him to appoint a king, like the neighboring nations had. Samuel was grieved at their request. The people already had a king – God. In asking for a human king, he felt that they were rejecting God's leadership. While in prayer over the matter, God reminded him that the people had been rejecting his leadership for years now and that this was nothing new. He told Samuel not to take this personally and to do what the people asked.

Samuel went back to the people and gave them one more chance. He reminded them that a king would force them to pay taxes, would force them to participate in the army, and would force them into other forms of service to the nation and to the king. The people said that they could live with all of that and they still wanted a king. He sent the people home and awaited further instructions from God about who should be the king.

### 3.2 *Saul Anointed as King*

1 Samuel 9-10

There was a man by the name of Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. His father, Kish, had lost some donkeys and Saul went off with a servant to look for them. After several days of searching, they decided to head back towards home and came to a town where Samuel happened to be ministering. It occurred to them that they might go ask this prophet if he could discern where the donkeys were.

They approached the town and asked someone whether or not Samuel was there. They got a curious response in 1 Samuel 9:12-13:

"He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place. As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward, those who are invited will eat. Go up now; you should find him about this time."

"High place" is a term used typically to describe a pagan altar. The Canaanites had built altars on mountaintops and there they made sacrifices to their gods. When the Israelites conquered the land, God had told them to destroy the high places. In fact, Deuteronomy 12 is specific in saying that the high places were to be destroyed and that the Israelites were to make their offerings only at the tabernacle – the place of God's choosing and not wherever man felt like making the offering. Remember also that in Joshua 22, civil war almost broke out among the Israelites because the Transjordan tribes built an altar near the Jordan and the other tribes thought that they intended to make sacrifices there. That being the case, why in 1 Samuel 9 are

the people making an offering at a high place – not at the tabernacle – and why is Samuel participating in it?

It is possible that this is not one of the "official" offerings as described in Leviticus. Perhaps the people were simply having some sort of "church social" supper and they wanted Samuel to preside. It is more likely, however, that this was a simple case of disobedience. It took time for the Israelites to become the people that God wanted them to be. They did not start out in 100% conformance to the law. It seems that they continued to make offerings at odd locations for a time. Eventually (especially after the temple was built) they did make all sacrifices at the single place of God's choosing, but apparently at this stage of their history they were not completely obedient in this matter.

Whatever the explanation, there was a sacrifice going on in the town and Samuel was officiating.

Saul went into the town and found Samuel. The previous day, God had revealed to Samuel that he would show him this day who the king would be. When Samuel saw Saul coming, God affirmed to him that this was the chosen leader. Saul came and spoke to Samuel and Samuel told him to stay the night so they could talk. He told him the donkeys that had been lost three days before had been found and that everything was OK at home. Saul was Samuel's guest that day.

The next morning they arose early because Saul wanted to go home. Samuel sent the servant ahead so that he could talk privately to Saul. He told him that God had chosen him to lead the nation. As a sign he told him several specific people he would meet on his journey home and things that they would say to him. At last he would meet a group of prophets. The Spirit of God would come upon Saul and he would prophesy as well, and the Spirit would change his heart.

This part was significant. These are the days prior to Acts Chapter 2. The Holy Spirit had not been poured out on the masses. The Holy Spirit was active in the world, however. After his anointing as king, the Holy Spirit came on Saul, ministered to him, and gave him guidance until the time God ultimately rejected him as king (at which time the Spirit came on David and remained with him). The Holy Spirit ministered to special people chosen of God and Saul was one of those people.

On the way home, all of Samuel's words came true. He met the people Samuel said he would meet. They said the things that Samuel said they would say. He did run into a group of prophets and the Spirit of God came upon Saul and he prophesied. God changed his heart and made him a new man.

Samuel had told Saul that after these things happened, it would be seven days before his kingship was announced publicly. At the appropriate time, Samuel summoned the people of the nation to Mizpah. He revealed to them that Saul would be their king. He explained to them what it meant to have a king and how they would be ruled. After this, Saul returned to his home in Gibeah (which is where his capital was). Some men despised him as leader but most accepted him.

### **3.3 Saul's First Great Victory**

1 Samuel 11

The Ammonites threatened the people of Jabesh Gilead. The men of Jabesh Gilead asked for a peace treaty with them. The Ammonites said that they would give them peace, but first they would gouge out the right eye of all the men of Jabesh Gilead as a way of humiliating them. The people of Jabesh Gilead were upset and they appealed to the other tribes of Israel for help.

Saul

Word of this came to Saul. Saul was enraged by what was going on. He took two oxen, cut them up into pieces, and sent them via messengers to the other tribes of Israel saying, "This is what will happen to you if you do not lend military support to Saul." The people took the hint and a large army turned out.<sup>1</sup>

Saul led his troops against the Ammonites and invaded their camp at night. They fought the Ammonites until the heat of the day and defeated them soundly.

After this, there was a great rallying of the people behind Saul as their king. When Samuel initially announced to the people that Saul was the chosen king, he received lukewarm reception. Now the people were ready to put to death anyone who did not wholeheartedly support Saul. He was solidly the popular choice of the people.

### **3.4 Samuel's Farewell Speech**

1 Samuel 12

Samuel is getting old. He has led the nation for many years. Now, however, the nation has a new leader. Samuel was the last of the judges. The period of the judges is over and a king rules over the land. Samuel is not quite ready to die, but he feels that a farewell address is in order.

As Samuel addresses the people, he reminds them of their history of being inconsistent in their obedience to God. He reminds them of the periods when they have been oppressed by their neighbors due to their disobedience, and the fact that God sent judges to rescue them and to lead them back into obedience.

He also reminds them that they have done a dishonorable thing in rejecting God as their leader and asking for a human king. He tells them, however, now that they do have a king they owe that king their allegiance. He tells them that they should obey their king and that they and their king should be faithful to God and put away idols. If they fail in this, God promises to sweep them all away.

### **3.5 Samuel Rebukes Saul**

1 Samuel 13:1-15

Saul and his army were engaged in a battle against the Philistines. Saul had an army of men under his control and another was under the leadership of his son, Jonathan. The battle was not going well for Israel. Saul gathered the troops at Gilgal and was waiting for Samuel to come and make an offering for them. He had been instructed to wait for seven days.

The seventh day came and Samuel did not appear quite as promptly as Saul expected. Saul decided to take matters into his own hands. He prepared the sacrifices himself and made the offerings. Right after he did this, Samuel showed up and discerned that Saul had already made the offerings. He confronts Saul in 1 Samuel 13:11-14:

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<sup>1</sup>There is a curious wording in verse 8 which indicates that this book was probably written later in the history of the nation rather than during the lifetime of Samuel. It says "When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand." The fact that Israel and Judah are treated as separate entities is a later-time concept, i.e. post-Solomon. It is generally believed that 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings were written during the exile in Babylon. It is clues like this that scholars use to date books.

"What have you done?" asked Samuel.

Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

So what happened? Didn't God command the people to make sacrifices? Wasn't Saul doing a good thing? Why was Samuel mad, and why would God tear the kingdom away from Saul for this act?

The problem is not that Saul wanted to make a sacrifice. The problem is that he usurped the power of priest. It was not up to Saul to make offerings. This is the role that God had given to the priests. God wants obedience more than sacrifice. We do not do his things our way. Saul was not willing to wait on God (to bring Samuel at the right time). He was not willing to do things God's way. Thus God rejected his lineage as the future kings of the nation. He found a man after his own heart (whom we later learn to be David) and gave him the kingdom instead.

Saul remained in power for the time being, but as of now his days as king were numbered.

### **3.6 Battle With the Philistines**

1 Samuel 13:16-14:48

In the first part of this section, the text points out that there were no blacksmiths in Israel. The art of blacksmithing was known to the Philistines and they did everything in their power to prevent their neighbors from becoming adept at this trade. The reason is simple. Blacksmiths not only made horseshoes; they made swords and spears and other weapons. If the Philistines controlled the blacksmiths, then they controlled who got the weapons.

Thus the Israelites found themselves engaged in war with the Philistines with almost no weapons. Only Saul and Jonathan had a sword or a spear.

This does raise an interesting question. In the section that follows (in chapter 14), the Israelites have a battle with the Philistines and the Israelites win. What did they use for weapons? The text does not address this issue. Several possibilities could be offered.

They could have used their hands as weapons. If God was for them, then it is not impossible that they could have overpowered armed soldiers with their bare hands.

Another possibility is that they had other types of weapons. Remember that David killed Goliath with a slingshot and not a sword.

The third and (in my mind) the most likely possibility is that they took weapons from the Philistines. Saul and Jonathan did have weapons. As we shall see in a minute, the first person to actually enter into battle was Jonathan. If he were able to kill a few Philistines initially, then there would have been a few unused swords on the ground. His Israelite brothers could have picked up those swords and joined in the battle. The more Philistines that died, the more swords

there would have been. Before long, the entire Israelite army could have been armed. Note also that we shall soon see that the Philistine army contained Hebrews, who changed sides (back to the side of Israel) once the fighting began. They would have brought weapons with them.

As this story opens, the Philistines and the Israelites were at a standoff. The Philistines were gathered for battle and were armed. The Israelites were gathered but were unarmed (except for Saul and Jonathan). In fact, they were basically hiding out while they tried to figure out what to do.

Jonathan decided to go "test the waters." He left the place where the Israelites were hiding accompanied by his armor bearer. Nobody knew that they had left the camp. He went over to where the Philistines were camped. He had a plan and he told it to his companion. They would show themselves to the Philistines. If the Philistines said, "Wait there while we come and get you," then this was a sign that this was not the time for battle. If they said, "Come up here to us," this was a sign that God was giving the Philistines into their hands.

So they showed themselves. The Philistines said, "Come up here so we can teach you a lesson." Jonathan told his armor bearer that this was the sign, and they climbed up and started fighting. Jonathan began killing Philistines. The Philistine army began to panic. Saul and his army noticed a great stir in the Philistine camp and decided that it might be time to go to battle. By the time they arrived the Philistines were fighting and killing each other. They joined in the fighting, and the Philistines were defeated and driven away that day.

Earlier in the day, Saul had pronounced a curse on anyone who ate food before evening and before he had avenged himself on his enemies. The men were faint with hunger but afraid to eat because of the curse. Jonathan had been away when Saul said this and was unaware of the curse. After the battle, they were walking through the woods and came across a beehive with honey dripping from it. Most of the men were afraid to eat from it because of the curse, but Jonathan ate some of it. After he had eaten, somebody told him about the curse. He responded that the curse was a foolish thing. He felt better after eating and was confident that every one of them would have more strength if allowed to eat.

That night everyone ate. Saul was feeling good about the day's victory. The Philistines were on the run. Saul decided to consult a priest among them to see if they should continue to pursue the Philistines by night. The priest inquired of God but got no answer. They figured out that some sin had been committed, and as a result they could not communicate with God. Saul wanted to find out who had sinned and was prepared to kill the offender. They went through a selection process and God revealed that the offender was Jonathan. Saul then learned that Jonathan had eaten the honey. However, the people would not let Saul kill Jonathan for this offense since he had done it innocently.

Saul did not continue to pursue the Philistines that day. The section does close by saying that Saul provided effective military leadership to the nation during his reign and inflicted punishment on all of their enemies.

A few curious things arise from this passage. First of all, 1 Samuel 14:21 says, "Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan." Apparently there were "turncoats" among the ancients. Some Israelites had joined forces with the Philistines and were fighting with them against their brothers. When their brother Israelites began to prevail, however, they changed sides and fought with Saul and Jonathan. How quickly allegiance can be bought. They may have been a source of swords and spears for the Israelite army.

Another curious thing is this whole issue of Jonathan coming under Saul's curse. Jonathan had no idea that Saul had pronounced these words. He was completely unaware that he was going against Saul's word when he ate the honey. Yet when they went through the selection process to see who had sinned, God pointed out Jonathan. Is it consistent with the nature of God to hold us accountable for keeping oaths that we are not even aware that someone else pronounced?

Jonathan was innocent at the point when he ate the honey. His behavior after he found out about his father's oath is questionable, however. Whether or not he thought the oath was a good idea, he had violated it and should have simply confessed that to his father. Instead, he concealed the act and publicly questioned his father's leadership. This seems to have been Jonathan's sin that day, more than eating the honey. And it is consistent with the nature of God to hold us accountable for this sort of behavior.

### **3.7 Saul's Family**

1 Samuel 14:49-52

Chapter 14 closes by giving some of the members of Saul's family. Of note are his son Jonathan, his daughter Michal (who became a wife of David), and his cousin Abner, who was the commander of his army.

It also says that war with the Philistines continued throughout his life. Whenever he saw a strong, brave man among the Israelites, he took him into his army.

### **3.8 Saul is Rejected as King**

1 Samuel 15

In Exodus 17, as the children of Israel were in the desert, they were attacked by the Amalekites. This was the battle where the Israelites won as long as Moses had his hands up in the air.

In 1 Samuel 15, God intends to avenge this attack upon Israel by the Amalekites. He gives Saul instructions to attack and destroy all of the people and all of their possessions, including their animals. The nation is to be obliterated.

Saul gathered his troops and made his attack. They won the battle easily. They destroyed almost everything. They chose the best of the sheep and cattle and let them live. They also took the king of the Amalekites, Agag, alive.

God appeared to Samuel and told him that he was grieved that he had made Saul king. He was going to tear the throne away from Saul because Saul would not do as God instructed him. Samuel wept over this news. It was obvious that Samuel loved Saul and it hurt him to see this happen. More than that, however, Samuel loved God and would be obedient to him.

Samuel set out to find Saul and tell him the news. He was told that Saul had gone to Carmel, had built a monument to himself, and then had headed to Gilgal. Samuel went to Gilgal to find Saul. He confronted Saul with his disobedience. Saul insisted that he had done everything God wanted him to do, and that he let the animals live only because he wanted to offer them as a sacrifice to God at Gilgal. Samuel replied in 1 Samuel 15:22-23,

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?  
To obey is better than sacrifice,

and to heed is better than the fat of rams.  
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry  
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has rejected you as king.

Saul then confessed that he had sinned, saying that he only did it because the people pressured him to do it and that he was afraid of what might happen if he went against them. He pleaded for another chance.

But as Samuel turned to walk away, Saul grabbed and tore Samuel's robe. Samuel told him that just as the piece of robe had torn off in his hands, thus would the kingdom be torn from his hands.

Saul pleaded with Samuel to return with him, honor him publicly, and worship with him before he left. Samuel did so. Then Samuel brought out and killed king Agag. Samuel left Saul and never saw him again.

The chapter closes by saying that Samuel mourned for Saul and that God grieved that he had made him king of Israel.

This was Saul's second time to twist the instructions of God and execute them his own way. We do not do God's things our own way. God does desire sacrifice from us, but only after he has our obedience. An offering made out of disobedience is a bribe. God cannot be bribed. An offering made out of obedience is an expression of love. God can be loved.

### **3.9 Samuel Anoints David**

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Samuel loved Saul and spent time mourning over his fate. God came to Samuel and told him that he should grieve no longer because he was ready to send him to anoint the one whom God had chosen as the next king. He sent him to the home of a man named Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem (Jesse was the grandson of Ruth and Boaz). God instructed Samuel that one of Jesse's sons was the chosen one.

Samuel went to Jesse and had him present his sons. He started with the oldest and tallest. Samuel thought that this must surely be the one. God told him not to judge based on external appearance because God looks at what is in the heart. Samuel said that this was not the one, and they went to the next older son, continuing down the line until seven sons had passed. God had chosen none of them. Samuel asked Jesse if this was all of the sons that he had. Jesse said that there was one more young brother who was off tending sheep. They sent for him. God told Samuel that this was the one.

This son was David. Samuel anointed him that day as the next king. When he did so, the Spirit of God came on him in a mighty way and remained with him the rest of his life.

### **3.10 David Plays the Harp for Saul**

1 Samuel 16:14-23

When the Spirit came on David, it left Saul. (If you recall, after Saul was anointed, the Spirit came on him and he prophesied – see 1 Samuel 9:10.) An evil spirit began to harass him.

When the evil spirit would come on him, he would be in a very foul mood. His servants felt that it would be good for Saul if someone could play the harp for him when he was in this sort of mood.

David had a reputation for being a skilled harp player. Someone in Saul's service knew about it. The next time Saul was being tormented, they sent for David. David played the harp for Saul and calmed his soul. David began performing this service for Saul regularly.

As best we can tell, David probably did this for Saul for some period of time when he was young and then ceased to perform the service. There seems to have been a lengthy period of time when they had no contact. We assume this because in the story that follows (David and Goliath), Saul seems to be unaware of who David is. He summons David after Goliath is killed and wants to know who he is, who his father is, etc.

### **3.11 David and Goliath**

1 Samuel 17

Saul and his troops were engaged in a standoff with the Philistines at the Valley of Elah. They were not actually fighting. Saul's troops were camped on one hill and the Philistines on another, and the valley ran between them. Among the Philistines was a very large man named Goliath. He would prance in front of the Israelites daily, challenging them to send forth a single individual who would fight him. If Goliath won, the Israelites would serve the Philistines. If the Israelite won, the Philistines would serve the Israelites.

This one man was able to hold both armies at bay. The Philistines were hiding behind Goliath. Without him, more than likely they would have been afraid to take on Saul's troops. If they had not been afraid, they would have simply attacked rather than let Goliath do everything for them. On the other side, the Israelites were intimidated by this man. Not one of them was willing to face him alone.

Saul was looking for a champion to take on Goliath. He had offered to the man who killed Goliath wealth, his daughter's hand in marriage, and freedom from taxes for his father's family. Despite all this, nobody was willing to try.

David's three eldest brothers were with Saul. Jesse wanted to send them some food, so he asked David to find them and take them a "care package." David found his three brothers just about the time that Goliath threw forth his next challenge.

David could not figure out why nobody would challenge Goliath. He perceived the thing that everyone else overlooked – God was on their side. As David began asking questions about Goliath and about the reward that Saul was offering, Eliab, David's oldest brother got irritated at him. He considered David to be a pesky kid with a big mouth who was in the way. Brushing aside his criticism, David went to Saul, offering to fight Goliath.

Saul expressed concern that David was too young for Goliath, a seasoned fighter. He felt that David would not stand a chance. David explained to Saul that he had killed lions and bears while tending his sheep. The reason he was able to do this is because God was on his side. He said that Goliath would die just like the lions and bears.

Saul was willing to let David fight. It seems likely that Saul did not take Goliath's proposition literally. More than likely, Saul fully expected David to be killed. He had no intention of having his troops lay down their weapons to become servants to the Philistines once David was dead.

However, he was willing to let David try to eliminate Goliath, the "irritant," so they could continue fighting the Philistines.

He offered David his armor but David was not used to it and found it to be cumbersome. When he was in the desert guarding his sheep, he did not use armor or sword or spear. He used a slingshot. He saw no reason to operate any differently now.

He picked up some stones and went forward to confront Goliath. Goliath, in his arrogance, was amused that this child would come forth to challenge him. He told David that he would cut him up and feed him to the birds. David put a stone in his sling, let it fly, and hit Goliath squarely in the forehead, killing him. He ran forward, took Goliath's sword, and cut off his head.

There were two basic reactions to this turn of events: the Philistines were terrified and the Israelites were excited. Just as it is doubtful that Saul would have submitted to servitude to the Philistines if David had died, the Philistines had no intentions of becoming servants of the Israelites. They turned and ran. Saul's army pursued them. The Philistines were totally scattered and many of them were killed.

After things settled down a bit, Saul called the commander of his army, Abner (who was also his cousin according to 1 Samuel 14:50), and asked him if he knew this young man who had defeated Goliath. Abner did not know who he was. They called David forth and asked him who his father was. He told them that he was the son of Jesse of Bethlehem.

That brings us to the question that was raised at the end of the discussion of chapter 16. In chapter 16, David had become Saul's harp player and verse 21 says that Saul was very fond of David. Why did he fail to know who David was in chapter 17? More than likely, David's service for Saul as a harp player lasted a limited period of time while David was younger (i.e. pre or early teen). Now David was probably in his late teens. People can change a great deal in that amount of time. His physical appearance might have been quite different. It seems that Saul simply did not know that this was the same young man who used to play the harp for him. Now David would become a permanent fixture in Saul's life and he would never again forget who David was.

In the story in Judges 4 when Deborah and Barak confronted Sisera and his Canaanite army, Sisera's troops had mighty chariots that intimidated the Israelites. God was able to position the battle in such a way that it took place on Mount Tabor and thus the chariots were rendered useless. In fact, they became a hindrance. Their own military might was turned against them and became a "ball and chain." The story of David and Goliath is similar. By the world's standards, Goliath should have won this fight. He was bigger and he had more "state of the art" weapons. But David had God on his side. God positioned this battle such that armor and swords became a hindrance and a "ball and chain." With the simplest of weapons, God was able to lead David in defeating the biggest of enemies.

When we face battles in life (as we do daily), how much more successful we would be if we would learn to rely on the simplicity of God rather than tackle everything with our own might (which more often than not is really a "ball and chain.") We need to learn to confront the enemies of God just as David did in 1 Samuel 17:45-47:

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know

that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands.

### **3.12 Saul's Jealousy of David**

1 Samuel 18-20

The battle with the Philistines continued for an unspecified time. The first five verses of 1 Samuel 18 describe a series of continuing battles that must have taken place after the killing of Goliath but before the Israelites returned home. David showed much military prowess during this time and everyone was impressed with his leadership. Also during this time, David and Jonathan (Saul's son) became friends who were closer than brothers. They had a genuine self-sacrificing love for one another. Saul also recognized David's gifts and his leadership abilities but was feeling a bit threatened by his popularity. Remember that Saul knew that God was going to tear the kingdom from him, so he was probably a bit paranoid anyway.

The day came when the troops returned home. There was great celebration among the people. They came out into the streets singing and dancing. They were singing a chorus that stated, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). This infuriated Saul, who perceived that David was a definite threat to his kingdom.

At this point, Saul began an irrational and unsteady campaign to kill David. His attacks against David included the following:

- On several occasions, while David was playing his harp, an evil spirit came upon Saul and he hurled his spear at David.
- Saul had earlier promised his daughter's hand in marriage to the one who would kill Goliath. Saul was willing to honor that promise and offered his daughter Merab to David. His intention was to gain more control over David's life and to put him in dangerous situations (i.e. at the front of battle lines with the Philistines) in hopes that he would be killed. David viewed himself as poor and unworthy to be the king's son-in-law. Part of this is that David did not think he could come up with the bride price necessary to marry a king's daughter. Thus Merab married someone else. Saul had another daughter, Michal, who loved David. Saul would try to get to David by using her instead. He told David that he wanted him to marry Michal, and that all he had to pay as the bride price was the foreskins of one hundred Philistines. He figured that David would surely be killed trying to get the foreskins of one hundred Philistines. Not so! David killed two hundred Philistines and brought their foreskins back to Saul. He then married Michal. It was obvious to Saul that David had much favor with God and with the members of his own family. This made him even more angry and paranoid.
- Saul told his attendants, including Jonathan, to seek David out and kill him. Jonathan took his father aside and told him that David had done no wrong and that they had no business trying to kill him. He was able to get Saul to vow not to kill David. An evil spirit came on him again later, causing him to change his mind. He sent men to the house of David and Michal intending to take David, but David had found out that they were coming and escaped. Michal made the bed to look like David was asleep, stalling the men long enough to let David get away. When Saul found out that Michal had tricked him, she said that she had only done it because David had threatened her.
- David escaped, went to Samuel, and told him what was going on. Word reached Saul that David was with Samuel and he sent men to get him. When the men got to the place where Samuel was, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. They began to prophesy and were unable to

carry out Saul's orders. He sent more men and the same thing happened. Finally he went himself and the same thing happened to him. They left without David.

- Sometime later, David made his way back in secret and found Jonathan. He asked if Jonathan knew why his father wanted to kill David. They devised a scheme to find out Saul's frame of mind. There was a New Moon festival approaching. This was a multi-day affair. There would be a dinner at Saul's house and many people, including David, were expected to be in attendance. David would be absent but Jonathan would be present at the dinner. If Saul asked where David was, Jonathan would reply that David had asked him for permission to go participate in an offering in Bethlehem. Jonathan would then say that he had given him permission to go. If Saul did not seem to mind, then it would be an indication that Saul was not mad at David. If Saul got angry about this, then it would be an indication that Saul intended to do David harm. The first day of the festival David was absent, but nothing was said. The second day Saul asked where David was. Jonathan told him what they had agreed that he would say. When Saul heard that Jonathan had given David permission to go to Bethlehem, he was furious and hurled his spear at Jonathan. Jonathan left and told David that it was not safe for him to remain. They both wept because they loved each other dearly and knew that they might never see each other again.

### **3.13 David the Fugitive**

1 Samuel 21-26

David began a life of running from Saul. Saul began a life where his energies were divided between fighting the Philistines and insanely pursuing David. The following sequence of events took place.

- David went to the city of Nob to visit the high priest, Ahimelech. Ahimelech was accustomed to seeing David leading an army and was surprised to find him running alone. David told Ahimelech that he was on a secret mission and that nobody should know that he had come. He was trying to protect himself by keeping his whereabouts secret. David probably trusted Ahimelech but did not trust the other people who were there about (his mistrust later proved to be well-founded).

He asked Ahimelech for food. David was on the run and was hungry. Ahimelech had nothing to offer him but the previous day's bread from the Table of Shewbread. The Table of Shewbread was a fixture in the tabernacle on which twelve loaves of bread were placed daily – one for each of the tribes of Israel. When new bread was placed there daily, the old bread was available to be eaten by the priests. According to the strict letter of the law, David should not eat the bread since he was not a priest. Ahimelech must have inquired of God to see whether or not it would be permissible to let David have some of the bread and God must have said that it was OK. If Ahimelech had simply taken the matter into his own hands and given David the bread without getting God's permission, then he would have been violating God's law in the same way that Saul had done.

As a side note, Jesus referred to this incident in Matthew 12:1-4. That Scripture says:

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread – which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests."

The point that Jesus was trying to make is that the spirit of the law is more important than the letter. At the same time, one should not violate the letter of the law without first checking with the author of the law, God. It is easy for us to rationalize our behavior as being in tune with the spirit even when we are clearly violating the letter. It is best to check it out with the Boss first.

David also asked Ahimelech if he had some sort of weapon. Ahimelech had in his possession the sword that had belonged to Goliath. He gave it to David and David went on his way.

While all of this was taking place, there was an Edomite named Doeg present. He was Saul's head shepherd.

- David went to the Philistine city of Gath. People there recognized him and there was talk of taking him captive and handing him over to the king of the city. In order to avoid this harassment, David began to act as if he were mad. He went about scratching on doorways and letting saliva drool down his beard. The king had no interest in having this madman in his midst and left David alone. Note that Psalm 34 was written to commemorate this event.
- David returned to the home of his father. There he gathered a band of supporters. 1 Samuel 22:1-2 says, "When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him." While he was there, he went to the king of Moab and asked him to allow his father's family to live in Moab under their protection. The king of Moab agreed.
- Doeg the Edomite informed Saul that Ahimelech and the priests at Nob had assisted David. Saul had them killed along with the residents of Nob. One from among them escaped and joined David's supporters, telling them what had happened. David felt great remorse for having brought this distress upon the people of Nob.
- The Philistines attacked the city of Keilah. Under God's direction, David defended the city and drove away the Philistines. Saul heard that David was there and sent troops to capture him. David and his followers (who now numbered around six hundred) escaped.
- Saul continued to pursue David into the Desert of Ziph. He came very close to capturing him, when word came that the Philistines were attacking on another front. Saul temporarily gave up his pursuit of David so that he could go fight the Philistines. David went to live at En Gedi.
- When Saul finished with the Philistines, he returned to En Gedi to find David. En Gedi is an incredibly barren place. It is the lowest point on the face of the earth and is on the shore of the Dead Sea. It is near Qumran, the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, and like Qumran has many caves in the vicinity. David and his men were hiding in caves to escape Saul. Saul wandered into one of the caves to use the bathroom. It happened to be the cave where David was hiding. David crept up and cut off the corner of his robe but would not harm Saul. After Saul left the cave, David came out and spoke to him. We read in 1 Samuel 24:9-22:

He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, look at this piece of your

robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds, so my hand will not touch you.'

"Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

There are several interesting observations in this story. First of all, in spite of all that Saul is doing to him, David's respect for Saul runs deep. He gives him the homage that is due him as king. He also appeals to him on a personal level, calling him "father." Remember that Saul is David's father-in-law. Secondly, when David confronts him, Saul seems to have had a lapse from being under the influence of the evil spirit. When in his right mind, his affection for David seems genuine and deep. He recognized that David truly is righteous and he acknowledged that David was God's chosen king to succeed him. Saul knows that David has every earthly right to seek revenge on Saul and his family, and gets David to make an oath that he will not harm them. Last, even though David and Saul seem to have had a bit of a reconciliation here, David does not trust Saul and returns to his stronghold rather than going home with Saul.

- At the beginning of Chapter 25, Samuel died and all Israel mourned for him.
- There was a man named Nabal who had a wife named Abigail. On some previous occasion, David's men had aided the sheep shearers of Nabal, providing them with supplies and protection. David heard that Nabal's men were shearing sheep near Carmel. He sent some of his servants to ask Nabal to repay the favor by giving them some supplies. Nabal was a wealthy man and could have easily obliged but he told David to "bug off." David was incensed. He rounded up some of his followers and they headed off to deal with Nabal. David vowed that no male in his household would be allowed to live.

Abigail heard what was going on. It is apparent from the way that she talked that she did not have very high regard for her husband. As best we can tell, he was a crude, rude, and often drunken man. She quickly assembled food and drink and went out to meet David to supply him what he needed. She made no excuses for Nabal but asked David to forgive her for the oversight. She gave him the food and drink. David was very positively impressed with her and told her that she had just turned back death for every male in her household.

The next day after Nabal had regained sobriety, Abigail told him what she had done. He was overcome with some sort of sickness and died about ten days later. David was pleased that

God had carried out David's vow against Nabal without David having to shed blood. He also wanted to provide for Abigail. He sent word to her and offered to make her his wife. She accepted and became one of David's wives.

This section says that David had also married a woman named Ahinoam from Jezreel. Saul had given Michal, David's first wife, to another man.

- Once again, Saul pursued David in the desert. David hid from Saul and his army. One night Saul and the men with him fell into a deep sleep, courtesy of God. David and a couple of his men crept into the middle of the camp where Saul was sleeping. They took Saul's spear and his water jug. David's men urged him to kill Saul but David would not raise his hand against God's anointed. After they had crept back out of the camp David called out to Saul and his men and woke them. David identified himself and showed them the spear and water jug, pointing out that if he had wanted to harm Saul he could have done so but did not. Saul felt remorse and promised to leave David alone. He urged David to return home with him, but David had enough sense to know that Saul's sincerity changed every time the wind shifted directions. Saul went back home. This would be the last time he ever saw David.

### **3.14 David Among the Philistines**

1 Samuel 27

David reached the conclusion that he would never be safe from Saul's pursuit as long as he remained in Saul's territory. He felt that he would be better off taking his chances among the Philistines. David and his band of followers traveled to the city of Gath and made contact with the king of that city, Achish. He told him that he had fallen out of favor with Saul, was not welcome in Israel, and that he wanted to live among the Philistines. Achish recognized that David was a mighty warrior and found it desirable to have David as an ally. He invited David to live close to him, but David had other ideas. He told Achish that he was not worthy to live so near the palace and asked that he and his friends be allowed to settle in one of the nearby towns. Achish agreed and they settled in the city of Ziklag.

David and his men spent their days invading the neighboring towns that belonged to the Geshurites, Girzites, and the Amalekites – enemies of Israel. Essentially he was continuing the campaign started by Joshua and extending the borders of Israel to where they originally were supposed to be. When he would attack a city, he would leave no survivors so that nobody would live to tell that it was David that had destroyed them. However, whenever Achish asked him how he spent his time, he would say that he was raiding the towns of Israel or its allies. In this way, he hoped to convince Achish that he was a loyal friend and that he was an enemy of Israel.

Yes, David was being dishonest. This was not a high point in his life.

### **3.15 Saul and the Witch of Endor**

1 Samuel 28

Now that David was living among the Philistines, Saul no longer contended with him, but he still had to contend with the Philistines.

The text tells us that Saul was a man who had known what it was to have direction from the Lord and sorely missed that direction. Saul was facing another battle with the Philistines. He longed for the time when he had the counsel of Samuel. The Spirit of God had left him and he wanted divine direction. Earlier in his reign, Saul had actually done something right in expelling all the

mediums and spiritists from the country<sup>1</sup>. Now, however, he himself would resort to just such a method to get some sort of spiritual guidance. He asked his advisors if anyone knew whether or not there were still any mediums in the land. Somebody said that they knew of one in the city of Endor.

Saul disguised himself and went to see this woman. He asked her to consult a spirit for him, but she said that she could not do such a thing because of the severe penalties that Saul had placed on anyone who would do this. Still not revealing himself, Saul promised her that she would not be punished. She asked him whom he wanted to see and he replied Samuel. Samuel appeared to the woman, and somehow she became aware that the man before her was Saul (we presume that the spirit of Samuel revealed it to her). She screamed in terror, but he assured her again that she would not be punished.

Samuel wanted to know why Saul had disturbed him. Saul told him of the great distress in which he found himself. He was having so many battles and no spiritual guidance. Samuel reminded him that God had rejected him and had torn the kingdom out of his hand, giving it to David. He reminded him that it was all due to his own disobedience. He went on to reveal to Saul that the next day the Philistines would conquer Saul's armies and that Saul and his sons would be with Samuel.

Saul was devastated by this news. He fell down and could do nothing but lie on the ground. Eventually those around him convinced him to get up and eat something. That night they left.

This is a very strange story. At the center of the strange event is the question, "Who or what appeared to Saul?" Does the Bible support the concept of being able to communicate with the dead?

Several possibilities exist. Least likely is the possibility that the medium was visited by a demonic force. If this woman regularly conjured up the spirits of the dead, then she was regularly visited by demonic forces. If this was a demon, then it did deliver a message that was true and prophetic, which is possible, even though it may not be the normal mode of operation for a demon.

It is also possible that God gave the woman a vision of Samuel. Note that the text says that the woman saw Samuel and relayed what he had to say to Saul. Saul did not see him directly as best we can tell. Thus the woman may have had a vision planted in her mind by God.

Third, even though it is not the normal mode of operation and God said that people should not practice the consulting of "departed" spirits, if it served God's purpose, it is possible that the Spirit of Samuel appeared to the woman. If one takes the text very literally, that is what happened. At the transfiguration, we have the spirits of Elijah and Moses appearing to Jesus. It is possible.

Whoever or whatever it was, it gave a message to Saul that was true and terrifying. Saul's time was numbered and was now being measured in hours and minutes rather than days or years.

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<sup>1</sup>See Deuteronomy 18:9-13 if you are unclear as to how God feels about these things.

### **3.16 The Battle Between the Philistines and Israel**

1 Samuel 29-30

Meanwhile Achish was ready to take on the Israelites in battle. He viewed David as his ally and counted on David to go and fight with him against Israel. David acted like he agreed. Who knows what he would have done if he had actually ended up in this battle? He never got the chance, however. The Philistine leaders who were with Achish did not trust David, and they insisted that Achish send him back to Ziklag and not allow him to be involved in the battle. Achish is reluctant because he really trusted David, but he gave in to the pressure from his people and sent David back.

When David and his men returned to Ziklag they found that it had been raided and burned by the Amalekites. All of the women and children had been carried off into captivity, including David's two wives. David and his men were in grief over what had happened. David consulted God and God told him to go after the Amalekites. They overpowered them, killing many of them, recovering their wives, children, and belongings. He took the plunder from the Amalekites and sent some of it to the elders of Judah and to those in Bethel, Ramoth, Negev, Jattir, and other cities. It seems that David was doing a bit of politicking. He knew that the time was near for him to take over and he wanted to win the favor of these people who would soon be his subjects.

### **3.17 The Death of Saul**

1 Samuel 31, 1 Chronicles 10

Meanwhile the battle raged between Israel and the Philistines, and was concentrated in the area of Mount Gilboa. Mount Gilboa is just below the Carmel mountain range, south of Meggido, and just south of Mount Tabor (where Deborah and Barak fought Sisera). The battle grew very fierce and the three sons of Saul were killed, including Jonathan. Saul was critically injured.

He called his armor bearer and pleaded with him to take his sword and to kill him so that the Philistines would not be able to capture him and abuse him. The armor bearer could not bring himself to kill Saul. Saul took his own sword and fell on it, killing himself. When his armor bearer saw that Saul had killed himself, he also took his own life.

The Israelite army scattered in defeat. The Philistines came upon Saul's body and cut off his head. His head was hung in the temple of their god, Dagon. They hung his body and those of his sons on a wall in the nearby town of Beth Shan. The people of Jabesh Gilead heard how the bodies had been dishonored, so some of their valiant men sneaked into Beth Shan at night. They took the bodies and burned and buried them. (Remember that Saul's first real military victory was defending the people of Jabesh Gilead when their enemies were threatening to gouge out one eye of every man of that town. These people never forgot their debt to Saul.) The nation's first king was dead.

### **3.18 Saul's Epitaph**

Saul started off well. When he was first declared as king, some men openly rejected him. He was not intimidated by it. It seemed that he was willing to let God give him the loyalty of the people in God's time and according to God's way. He built up the military power of the nation and used it to honorably defend the nation from harassment by neighbors. He was a man who had the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was God's chosen servant.

At some point, Saul began to see himself as the man in charge rather than the man who waits on the Lord. He sat down in God's throne. The trouble is that the only time any of us gets to sit in God's throne is when we are sitting in his lap and enjoying his presence. We do not get to push him out and take his place. Saul began to ignore what God wanted him to do and how God wanted him to do it. He started doing things his own way.

God first rejected Saul in 1 Samuel 13, when Saul took matters into his own hands and made a sacrifice in a way that violated God's instructions. We may look at this episode and wonder whether or not what Saul did was really so bad. Was God being a bit picky? Was he a bit rash in rejecting Saul over this incident? The fact is, at this point in his life, Saul was a man who was visited by the Holy Spirit regularly. He was tuned into God and did not have to guess at God's instructions. Furthermore, Saul was given a high level of privilege and a correspondingly high level of responsibility by God. He was the leader of the people and he was an example to the people. If he would not take his position, responsibility, and privilege seriously and if he would not trust God to be God, then God would find someone who would do all of these things.

After this first incident of disobedience, God told Saul that he intended to take the throne from him at some point in the future. As best we can tell, however, the Spirit did not abandon Saul at this point. This happened after the second incidence of disobedience, when Saul violated God's explicit instructions, failing to kill the animals and the king of the Amalekites. After this incident, God prompted Samuel to go ahead and anoint David. At this time, the Holy Spirit came upon David and left Saul.

Now without the Holy Spirit, Saul spent the rest of his life as a target for harassment by evil spirits. No longer could he tolerate anything that he perceived to be a threat to his leadership (as opposed to when he first started). He continued to use the military to defend the nation, but he now he also used it to harass David, who loved him. He hurled spears at David and at his own son, Jonathan. He harassed his own daughter in an attempt to get at her husband. He spent the rest of his life in a tragic and an insane pursuit of David. What he really wanted, however, was what God had taken away from him and given David. He knew that David had been given the kingship and he wanted it. He knew that David had been given the Holy Spirit and he wanted it. He knew that David had God's favor as he had once had and he wanted it.

In the end, he destroyed everything that was dear to him.

It is fairly obvious to us to see how Saul could have avoided getting in the mess that he did. (Obvious because most of us have experience ignoring God's instructions and doing things our own way!) Once it all happened, however, could Saul have handled things better than he did?

God did not reject Saul the man. God rejected Saul, the leader of the nation. He had to. God cannot have unfaithful people shepherding his flock. Even after he had been rejected, Saul had the option to be submissive to God. Knowing that he had been rejected, he could have humbled himself before God and men and stepped aside and let David have the throne. He had the option to repent. This does not mean that God would have restored him to the throne. He probably would never have been empowered by the Holy Spirit in the same way as he was before. But he did not have to live the remainder of his life in hopeless and consuming destructive behaviors.

When we fail God, he has the option to discipline us as he will. We can stubbornly act like nothing happened or we can humbly submit ourselves to God and to men and accept our consequences. When leaders fail (such as spiritual leaders who fall into immorality), God will remove them from their places of leadership and may very well choose never to restore them to their former level of leadership. We have seen this happen too often in recent times and repeatedly we have seen Sauls, who stubbornly act like they have done nothing wrong and

struggle desperately to hang onto what they once had. Just as was true with Saul, this ends in destruction.

God is really more interested in reconciliation.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 contains a very to-the-point summary of Saul's downfall:

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

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