

FIRST SAMUEL

Introduction

The book of Samuel, divided in two by Christians but still a single work for Jews, is at its basic level, the story of a man named Samuel and his role in bringing about a successful monarchy to unite the Israelite tribes. In the larger narrative of Israel's history as presented by the bible, the story told in Samuel is one of transitions. Samuel we are told is a Judge, harkening back to the story of Israel's first centuries in the "promised land," but he is also a prophet, beginning a long line of prominent critics of Israelite society and government. He is also the shepherd who brings about a successful monarchy and a successful dynasty that will unite all the tribes after a period of mutual hostility and occasional warfare.

First Samuel begins more or less where Judges left off, telling of the birth of Samuel, his mother's decision to give him to God, and his apprenticeship to the priest at Israel's then pre-eminent shrine at Shiloh. Eventually becoming a leader recognized and respected by all Israelites, it is Samuel that answers God's call to anoint a king who can unite the Israelites against the threat posed by the rival Philistines.

Samuel, in the form we know it now was probably completed in the period of the Babylonian exile or shortly thereafter. Scholars regard it as being part of the Deuteronomistic History which also includes Deuteronomy, Judges, Kings, and Jeremiah. In seeking to understand how the exile came about, leading Israelite thinkers developed the theory that the primary issue was Israelite's unfaithfulness to the covenant which invited divine punishment. In many ways, the Deuteronomistic school of thought was hostile to the monarchy, which they felt had largely been responsible for the apostasy of the people, and we can see the seeds of that idea right from the beginning of the monarchy as told in the book of Samuel.

Though compiled in the sixth century BC or thereabouts, much of Samuel is made up of much older material from more than a single author (there are numerous contradictions in the narrative) as well as material not directly related to the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David but which were obviously felt added to the understanding of Israelite history.

1Samuel

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 begins before Samuel was born, and tells the story of his mother, Hannah, and her longing to be a mother.

v1 Ramathaim is also known as Arimathea was a town in the hill country northwest of Jerusalem.

This genealogy is also given in 1Chronicles as part of the Levitical priesthood, who later had responsibility for the Ark of the Covenant and other worship matters in the Jerusalem Temple

...Zophai his son, Nahath his son, Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son.

1Chr 6:26-27

These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD, after the ark came to rest there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem; and they performed their service in due order.

1Chr 6:31-32

v2 Hannah means “graced” or “favored” while Penninah seems to derive from the word for “coral” and later came to be the generic word for a second wife.

Extra-Biblical Israelite tradition held that Hannah was Elkanah’s first wife and that he reluctantly took on a second wife in order to produce heirs.

v3 Shiloh was located near the center of Israelite territory, in what in Jesus’ time was called Samaria and today is in the West Bank. It is the location where the Tabernacle that accompanied the Israelites during the Exodus was set up after their arrival in the Jordan Valley and hill country, it is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and it was the preeminent worship site in Israel prior to the conquest of Jerusalem by David.

v4-5 Sacrifices were times of feasting, as most of the meat “sacrificed” was consumed by the one sacrificing (minus a portion to the priests).

So, Elkanah fulfilled his obligations to his wives and children but he clearly felt for Hannah and her unfulfilled wish

v6-7 Elkanah favored Hannah, Penninah was frustrated about it and took it out not on Elkanah but on Hannah, which made Hannah feel even worse.

v8 I've always thought this a poignant expression of love and devotion; and it's hard to feel anything but sadness for everyone in this family.

v9 Hannah is described as going to the "temple of the Lord" which may be a little surprising since elsewhere we are led to understand that there had never been a temple prior to the building of the one in Jerusalem by Solomon.

Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 2Sam 7:5-6

Of course, we also get the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan about the proper location of worship

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." John 4:20

The other interesting point here is that Hannah appears to be within the temple/tabernacle in prayer. Women would not have been allowed into the inner precincts of the Jerusalem Temple.

v10-11 In her prayer, Hannah vows that if she would bear a son, she would dedicate him as a Nazirite

Nazirites were a kind of monastic order and the expectations of Nazirites is described in Numbers chapter 6 and are pretty much as Hannah states. The other most well-known Nazirite was the judge, Sampson.

v12-14 Eli, not the most pastoral or non-judgmental priest ever, assumes that Hannah is drunk apparently because she does not pray out loud as presumably most people did.

One cannot but think of Jesus excoriating of those who pray for public consumption more than genuine interaction with God.

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. Matthew 6:5

v15-16 Hanna pours her heart out to the old priest, and begs that he see her as a person, a child of God worthy of righteousness.

v17 Eli, his heart moved by Hannah's plight also asks that God might give her the peace she seeks.

v18-20 Having received the support of Eli, her hope is renewed, and she goes back to her family feeling more positive about her future.

Upon their return home (Ramah is a shorter version of Ramathaim – like calling Syracuse ‘Cuse), Hasannah and her husband “have relations” and she becomes pregnant.

Samuel (*Shemu-el in Hebrew*) means “Him of the Lord.”

v21-23 At most, Samuel would have been only 3 months old at the time of the annual trip to Shiloh, assuming it was always at the same time of year. So, though the narrative seems to suggest it was only a short while, it seems more likely that it would have been a year or more before Hannah returned to the sanctuary as no child would be weaned at 3 months and it is unlikely Hannah would have made such a journey alone.

v24-28 Hannah makes good on her promise and brings a significant offering (a bushel of flour, a bull and 5-7 gallons of wine).

One can only imagine the reaction of Eli upon being given a young child to care for!

verse 28, in Hebrew, “He is Given to the Lord” is play on Samuel’s name.

1Samuel

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 tells of Hannah's ongoing care of Samuel, even while he is living and serving in the priest Eli's house.

v1-10 The Song of Hannah is an ancient verse, in a similar form to many Psalms of thanksgiving. Some scholars believe it was written for some other occasion, possibly to celebrate a royal birth ("king" in v10 is anachronistic to Samuel's time) and was added to the story by a later editor because it fit the story so well.

The song of Hannah speaks of the primacy of God's power, wisdom, and authority over all of creation. As well, it speaks of God's abiding interest in justice and concern for the welfare of the lowly. And it speaks to God's redemption of the faithful and God's ultimate overcoming of every evil.

v12-17 Though Eli is presented as righteous and obedient to God's will, his sons are shown to be the opposite; expressing avarice and contempt for God's will. This is the recurring theme of God's salvation story in scripture – that those who should be most concerned for guiding the community to do God's will come to seek instead their own desires by taking advantage of the piety of the common people. It is a problem that festers in every generation.

v18-21 These verses show that Samuel wasn't abandoned by his parents but that they continued to support him.

In the second Temple period (~515BC to 70AD), the priestly ephod evolved into a very ornate garment, but here it is described as a much simpler tunic-like garment (similar to how a cloak evolved into the chasuble worn by some priests during communion).

v22-26 Eli tries to exhort his sons to stop taking advantage of people, but the passage suggests it is already too late and that Eli's failure to rein in his sons and their excesses are about to come to a divinely sanctioned end.

v27-36 The "man of God" here is otherwise unidentified; but he lays out a pretty damning case against Eli and his family and their abdication of their priestly responsibilities.

This particular bit of prophecy will largely come to pass later in this book. The underlying theme here is about the primacy of the priesthood that will be raised up in Jerusalem. Priesthood in ancient Judaism was invested only in certain clans and was a patrilineal inheritance. Basically, what the man of God is pointing to is the eventual rise of the Zadok clan of priests over all the others.

1Samuel

Chapter 3

One of the most well-known stories of the Old Testament, the Lord's coming to Samuel.

v1 We find Samuel serving a kind of priestly apprenticeship, but under Eli and not Eli's sons when God "speaks" to Samuel; an uncommon event in those days we are told.

v2-4 Eli, along with Samuel, appear to actually live in the temple/tabernacle.

According to Exodus 27:20-21, the lamp of God was meant to remain lit all night, from evening to morning.

You shall further command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the light, so that a lamp may be set up to burn regularly. In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is before the covenant, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a perpetual ordinance to be observed throughout their generations by the Israelites. Exodus 27:20-21

v4-8 Samuel hears God call 3 times, each time believing it is Eli calling because, as we have already been told, the word of God was practically unknown at Shiloh by this point.

v9-14 Eli finally figures out what is happening and tells Samuel how to respond. God confirms the oracle given at the end of chapter 2 and God tells Samuel, that the blasphemy of Eli's sons is effectively unforgivable.

v15-18 Samuel is clearly shaken by this vision, and he also clearly feels for Eli and so does not want to share this dreadful news to the old man. Eli, though unable or unwilling to restrain his sons understands the power of God's will and accepts the divine judgment.

v19-21 and 4:1a Samuel continues to receive visions and he becomes noteworthy and widely respected because of it.

1 Samuel

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 (along with chapters 5 and 6) turn away from Samuel for a bit to tell about the conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines. Though it may seem like a detour, it's important because the fate of the Ark of the Covenant reinforces the narrative of God's increasing dismay with the priesthood at Shiloh.

v1 The first half of this verse is really the ending of the previous chapter, signaling the rising prominence of Samuel.

The second half sets the stage for the battle between Israel and Philistia.

The Philistines lived along the coast, primarily in five cities (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron) and seem to have emerged at about the same time as Israel did in the highlands east of the coastal plain. Their origins are murky, but there seems to be some agreement that they were part of large-scale migrations that occurred at the transition from the bronze to iron age known as the Late Bronze Age collapse.

Like Israel, Philistia, was conquered by Babylon and its nobility taken into exile to Mesopotamia. The Greek word for Philistine is the root of the modern name for the region of Palestine.

As to the locations, Aphek was a crossroads at an important trade route into the Judean hill country from the coastal plain, near modern day Tel Aviv. Ebenezer is unknown, but clearly somewhere near Aphek. Ebenezer is used elsewhere to denote a stone marker of some sort, so perhaps it was a place of a previous victory for the Israelites?

v2 In an initial battle, the Philistines meet the Israelites and are victorious. The number of participants can probably be taken with a grain of salt, but the general sense that Israel suffered a grievous blow comes across (archaeology suggests battle mortality of 15-20% for the losing side)



v3-4 The “elders” believe the problem is that Israel’s army had gone into battle without the power of god present, so they decide to send for the Ark from Shiloh. Eli’s sons (who are fated to die on the same day according to 2:34) bring the Ark.

v5-8 The Israelites are heartened by the Ark’s arrival and their response instills fear in the Philistines who have heard of what happened when god sought to free the Israelites from Egypt, which was the most powerful empire around in that time.

v9 An unidentified leader of the Philistines seeks to rally them.

v10-11 The Philistines achieve a stunning victory, defeating the Israelites, overrunning their camp, and capturing the Ark.

v12 A survivor from the battle heads to Shiloh to report on what has happened.

v13-18 Eli hears of what has happened and realizes that the prophecy from the “man of God” in chapter two has come to pass and that this is God’s action. In his dismay; he faints and breaks his neck, killing him.

v19-22 Phineas’ wife hearing the grave news, goes into labor. Though the child survives, she does not. In her grief she gives her son an unfortunate name, “the glory has departed from Israel.”

1 Samuel

Chapter 5

In this chapter the Philistines discover that what they think is a great triumph is actually the work of God and that God does not favor them.

v1 As noted before, Ashdod is one of the five cities of the Philistines, near the center of their territory on the southeast coast of Canaan.

v2 The “House of Dagon” means a temple to the god Dagon. Dagon (or Dagan) was worshipped throughout the Levant and was originally a god of the harvest (his name comes from the Semitic word for “grain”) and is presented by the Bible as the chief god of the Philistines.

At this point in their history, according to archaeology, Israel wasn’t fully monotheistic, but tended to see their God (EL) as the greatest of the gods.

v3-5 God shows his supremacy to the Philistines by repeatedly humiliating their god in his own temple.

v6-10 The Ark get shuffled between the cities of Philistia but causes sickness and distress wherever it goes.

v11-12 Realizing that instead of capturing the power of El, they have become unwitting pawns of God’s plans. the Philistines decide to give back the Ark to the Israelites to rid themselves of the suffering it has caused them.

1 Samuel

Chapter 6

v1-2 After deciding to send the Ark back, attention turns to figuring how they can lift God's punishment from themselves for offending God by their impertinence.

v3-6 The Philistine priests reason that an offering representing all five cities and the "plagues" they had suffered should satisfy their dishonoring of God. One can assume it would also return much of what like had been taken as booty when the Philistines overran the Israelite camp at Ebenezer, capping off their thoughts by using the example of the Egyptians before them.

v7-9 The cart and cows are effectively sacrifices which is why they should be "un-used." This is really a pretty clever device to decide whether or not the Israelite God was behind their travails or not.

Beth Shemesh was located at the southern end of the valley of Sorek (which we may remember is where Delilah lived) that marked a kind of border region between the two peoples and held the most direct road between them.

v10-12 The cows actions confirm the work of God for the Philistines.

v13-16 The Israelites are overjoyed at the Ark's return and celebrate in style. Seeing the ark returned and the offerings accepted, the priests of Philistia return home.

v17-18 These passages affirm that the Philistines offerings symbolized atonement according to their presence in the land and also serves to explain a stone monument found in this location.

v19-21 This passage is a little obscure, we have no idea of who Jeconiah is, nor why his descendants wouldn't want to celebrate. Ancient Jewish commentary suggests they were punished for looking inside the Ark. Nevertheless, it was clear that this important sacred object needed to be tended by those who knew what they were doing (i.e.; priests) due its power. As we will learn, there are priests resident in Kiriath-jearim.

Kiriath-jearim itself was about fifteen miles north east of Beth-Shemesh, in the country of the Benjaminites, about 8 miles northwest of the Ark's final home, Jerusalem.

1Samuel

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 returns us to the story of Samuel, where he begins to take on the role of judge in addition to those of priest and prophet.

v1 The ark arrives at its new home and is placed under the care of Eleazar and his father Abinadab. This is the only mention of these two, but those names appear (more than once) in genealogies of priestly families.

v2 So even though the ark has returned to Israel, for some reason people are still lamenting as though it were lost?

Some commentary suggested that during this period, Israel was under Philistine domination, though that is not evident in the text itself anywhere.

Others suggest that it was a period when Israelite worship was in disarray: the temple at Shiloh's reputation was in tatters, the ark had been captured and though returned, was kept in a private home, and as we shall see, Samuel is laboring to restore confidence in the ways of God.

v3-4 Samuel reenters the narrative, by insisting upon return to the ways of the covenant and abandoning the worship of other Gods.

2 things stand out here, first it suggests that Israel's conflict with the Philistines continued and was largely not going in Israel's favor, and second that the age old problem of fidelity to God (and monotheism more generally) was an ongoing cultural struggle.

v5-6 After twenty years, Samuel, in his role as Judge, determines that the people are ready to militarily confront the Philistines again and that their Faithfulness to the Covenant has grown sufficiently to believe that God might once again act on their behalf.

v7 Mizpah was a small hilltop town/fortress in the Judean hill country a few miles north of Jerusalem. Its location was nowhere near the earlier described border with Philistia, suggesting that Philistine control of the borderlands was pretty secure.

v8-9 Samuel here demonstrates both his role as Judge (to lead Israel, even in its fear) and as priest (in the performance of the sacrifice)

v10-11 Once again, as we saw at Jericho and with Gideon in Judges, it is God who delivers Israel the victory – not Israel itself.

v12-14 Samuel raises a monument to both mark the victory and to define the border between Israel and Philistia. We'll remember that in the earlier war, Israel's army was encamped at Ebenezer before the Philistine victory – here Samuel demarks a *new* Ebenezer, now redeemed as a place of victory, thus undoing the last 20 years (symbolically, at least).

Come Thou fount of Every Blessing (verse 2)
Here I raise my Ebenezer
Here there by Thy great help I've come
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure
Safely to arrive at home
Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God
He, to rescue me from danger
Interposed His precious blood

v15-17 Just like in Judges, having (temporarily, at least) defeated the oppressive foe, Israel settles again under the leadership of its deliverer.

1 Samuel

Chapter 8

Fearful of the Philistine threat, the Israelites, who seem more united than they were in Judges, finds that the old way of trusting God to raise up leaders in moments of need doesn't leave them feeling as secure as if there was a permanent king to protect the nation.

v1-3 Just like Eli before him, Samuel's sons turn away from the ways of Samuel and God and seek instead to take advantage of their situation to enrich themselves.

As an aside, this just generally seems to be an issue with inherited privilege.

v4-5 The Elders are the leaders of the various tribes, who gather to tell Samuel that his sons' leadership isn't up to the standard he has set.

v6 Samuel doesn't seem to take nearly as well as old Eli did when Samuel told him what God had said in his vision.

v7-10 God's reply here is interesting because on one hand, he tells Samuel to listen and to hear sincerely what they are saying. And yet, God suggests that Israel's consistent problem has been not trusting God and that this episode is no different.

v10-18 Samuel gives a pretty good preview of what the history of monarchy generally (and of David's dynasty particularly) has shown to be true.

v19-22 Samuel, at the Lord's urging, relents and says that he will find a king. One wonders if Samuel's sons had proven more honorable if Samuel himself would have been asked to be a king. At any rate, everyone agrees that Samuel himself can be trusted to do the job and has the authority to accomplish it.

1Samuel

Chapter 9

Chapter nine tells the first of two versions of the story of how Saul became king. This one seems almost like a folk tale about the boy who searches for a donkey but finds a kingdom.

v1-2 We get a little of the genealogy of Saul, and rare for the bible, a physical description of Saul – tall and handsome.

Saul comes from the tribe of Benjamin. We may remember that Benjamin was the youngest of the 12 sons of Jacob and had the same mother (Leah as Joseph). We may also remember from Judges that the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out in an Israelite civil war kicked off when a gang of men from Benjamin raped the concubine of the Levite (chapters 19-21) at Gibeah. So, the choice of Saul, of Benjamin, doesn't bode well.

v3-4 Saul's journey begins when some donkeys go missing. Having owned horses, I will offer that wandering equines rarely go far – they are ruled by their bellies, afraid of everything, and none too clever. But these must have been very special donkeys to warrant multiday search across hundreds of square miles.

v5 This may be the most sensible thing Saul ever says.

v6 The boy (a wise boy) suggests they seek out the aid of Samuel who lives nearby (in Ramah).

Zuph means "honeycomb" in Hebrew and is also the name of an ancestor of Samuel (see 1:1) – Samuel is a "Zuphite."

v7-8 Saul is concerned that they have nothing to offer, but conveniently the boy has a bit of a broken-up shekel. Apparently, prophets don't find donkeys out of the kindness of their hearts.

v9-10 We get an explanation of the use of seer before the establishment of the role of prophet during the monarchy.

v11-14 Samuel is clearly approachable and does not live set apart. Saul and the boy find him just as the young women had said.

v15-16 Now we learn that the missing donkeys were God's device to get Saul to Samuel. We also get the formula, familiar from Judges, of God hearing the cry of his people at their

oppression – except that didn't we learn in chapter 7, that the Philistines had been subdued by Samuel and remained that way while he lived?

v17 God tells Samuel that Saul is the one.

v18-21 Saul and Samuel have their first conversation, and Samuel honors Saul by inviting him to eat with him. Samuel also seems to know all about the donkeys (though Saul hasn't had a chance to meet him) and then Samuel cryptically alludes to Saul's fate, which immediately makes Saul suspicious.

v22-26 Saul get the "royal" treatment, the best position, the best portions, and comfortable bed. One can only imagine how disorienting and confusing this whole thing would be to everyone involved (except Samuel, of course, who seems to enjoy the drama).

v27 At last, Samuel seems to be ready to explain to Saul what is going on.

1 Samuel Chapter 10

Chapter 10 tells the story of Saul's selection by Samuel to be Israel's king, but also of Saul's reluctance to take on the role

v1 In what must be the shortest anointing ritual ever, Samuel names Saul as king

v1-8 Samuel tells Saul what is going to happen to him next and makes plans to meet again to make the announcement public. Perhaps Saul doesn't quite believe Samuel, so Samuel is giving him some signs to reassure him.

Rachel's tomb was near Ephrathah which is where she was going when she died while delivering Benjamin. (Gen 35:16-20)

There is also a tradition that Ephrathah is the same place as Bethlehem, though 1 Samuel refers to them as separate places

This is the only place in the bible that mentions the "Oak of Tabor, but Bethel was a place where God had spoken to Jacob and where he had raised a pillar (Gen 35:13-15)

The giving of the gifts for sacrifice to Saul implies a kind of priestly role.

Gibeath-Elohim means "Hill of God" and which is sometimes called Gibeah. It is Saul's hometown and was the place where the Benjaminites raped and murdered the Levite's concubine in Judges

Gilgal was a major town of Benjamin (Saul's tribe) and a place with an important altar to God where sacrifices were made.

v9 This seems to say that God brought Samuel to accept his anointing



v10-13 Everything Samuel said would happen does.

v14 Back home, Saul is met by his uncle who isn't named here, though an uncle Ner is mentioned in Ch. 14

v15-16 Saul holds back on telling of the anointing, though it isn't clear why – perhaps Samuel's instructions to meet in Gilgal in a week implied that he should keep it to himself until then?

v17-19 Samuel calls for the people of each tribe (surely just representatives) to gather at Mizpah once again and reminds them that their desire for a king is not in accord with God's will, but that Samuel will abet their desire anyway (Because doing so is what god said to do)

v20-21 Even though Samuel has already anointed Saul, a lottery is held to choose the king (drawing lots has a long history of being used to discern God's will in scripture and history). Some scholars suggest that this is actually a separate "how Saul became king" story and that the text blends them together to suggest that the lottery merely confirms (again) Saul's selection.

v22-24 Saul still doesn't seem to eager to take up his new role.

v25 Even though God apparently was against the idea of a king and the story suggests that it is only in the face of the Philistine threat that the people desire a king, Deuteronomy (supposedly written long before Samuels birth by Moses) has a whole section on the duties of the king – which includes that he should have a copy of the Law written for him that he is supposed to study every day.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the LORD has said to you, "You must never return that way again." And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. **When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him** in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, diligently observing all the

words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.

v26-27 Public opinion is divided

v27 The chapter ends by setting up a situation where Saul can begin to show his leadership.

1 Samuel

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 tells of us Saul's success as a military leader in overcoming the threat of the Ammonites. Some scholars see it as a separate tradition of how Saul became king that has been woven into the narrative.

v1 Some translations lack the opening "about a month later."

The Ammonites were a kingdom that lay to the east of the Jordan valley. In the exodus account, the Ammonites refuse to let the Israelites pass through their land, and in the book of Judges, they were the antagonists in the story of Jephthah (of the unfortunate vow). All of which is to say that the Ammonites were long term rivals of Israel.

Gilead is the home of Gad and Reuben, Israelite tribes who lived on the eastern shore of the Jordan valley – right next to Ammon.

v2 This seems a pretty steep price for peace.

v3 Hey, we'll surrender next week if first you'll permit us to send for help!

v5 Saul does his own plowing!

v6 This same formula was one we saw in Judges. When the Spirit of God comes upon someone, is it as though they command great strength and are undefeatable.

v7 This cutting of oxen was a common means of sealing a pact – Abraham does the same when he and God formulate his covenant – and it suggests that whoever breaks the oath will suffer the same fate as the oxen.

v8 That the Israelites are divided between northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) groups is a pretty solid clue that this book was at least edited during the time when there were two kingdoms, it would be an anachronistic description for Saul's time. Bezek is nowhere else mentioned and its exact location is unknown, but it is clearly a place within a couple of miles of Jabesh, so on the eastern shore somewhere.

v9-11 The people of Jabesh rejoice to hear that Saul is rallying the troops and pledge their loyalty to him. The Israelites are wildly successful, routing the Ammonites and delivering Jabesh.

v12-13 This should be read that the people want to put to death who despised Saul (see 10:27) but Saul is merciful and chooses to focus on celebrating instead.

v14-15 These two verses suggest that Saul wasn't already king when the battle at Jabesh took place, which is part of the evidence that 1Samuel is weaving together two different stories about Saul's ascent. We'll see the same when it comes to David's rise.

1 Samuel

Chapter 12

Samuel formally hands over leadership of Israel to Saul but warns that all may still not turn out well.

v1-5 In his introductory words, Samuel establishes that he has been a faithful leader, serving with honor and integrity, essentially calling on the people to swear by God that it is true.

v6-15 Samuel recounts the high points of Israel's history, stressing those points where God has acted to preserve the people in spite of their unfaithfulness to God. He further states plainly that their desire for a king is a repudiation of God's protection but that God will continue to honor the Mosaic covenant, asking only that the king and people maintain their end of the covenant (while also reminding them that they never have before).

Sisera and Jabin

Judges 4

Sisera was the commander of the Canaanite army under King Jabin who was defeated by Deborah and Barak the leader of Israelites army. Sisera was killed by Jael, who tricked him into hiding in her tent and then drove a tent peg through his skull.

Philistines

Judges 3

God leaves the Philistines in the land promised to Israel to test the faithfulness of Israel

Judges 15-16

Samson fought against the Philistines until betrayed by Delilah

1Samuel

The book opens with the ongoing conflict between Israel and Philistia

Moab

Judges 3

Ehud murders king Eglon of Moab, who had invaded Israel while he was going to the bathroom

As an alternative though, we have Ruth the Moabite who adopts Israel and marries Boaz (and who is David's great grandmother)

v16-18 To remind people of God's ultimate authority and to firmly establish that he speaks on God's behalf, Samuel calls on God to bring on a thunderstorm to hamper the harvest of wheat.

v19-22 The people, in answer to this display of God's power accept their sinfulness and beg Samuel to intercede on their behalf. Samuel assure them of God's continued investment in their being and urges them to live into the covenant.

v23-25 Even though he is handing over leadership to Saul and his priestly duties to his sons, Samuel assures the people that he will continue in his prophetic role and continue to intercede with God on their behalf and to call out Israel (and her king) when they stray.

1 Samuel

Chapter 13

After some years as kings, Saul moves against the Philistines but causes trouble for himself when he usurps the role of the priest.

v1 So, here we encounter a major translation problem, no currently known manuscript has the complete sentence here, so it isn't clear how old Saul was at the beginning of his reign nor how many years he reigned (could be 22 or 52). Some translations have filled in those numbers based on other conjectures (or guesses).

v2-4 Saul and Jonathan (whose relationship to Saul is not explained here) split the Israelite forces. Apparently, Saul's force is defensive or a feint while Jonathan's smaller force defeats a contingent of Philistines at Geba.

Michmash was a town between Jerusalem and Bethel

Gibeah is Saul's home base

Geba was a hillfort between Michmash and Gibeah

We should probably understand this to mean that Saul's messengers "blew the trumpet" throughout the whole of Israel. This also suggests that Saul's "rule" isn't 100% supported by all the Israelite tribes.

v5-6 The Philistines prepare to battle the Israelites with a far superior military force that also holds a technological edge (there are significant parallels here with the story of Deborah and Sisera)

Beth-Aven means "house of wickedness" and it may be an insult directed at Bethel (house of God)

v7 Israelites flee across the Jordan to "relative" safety while others hide in the hills out of fear, but Saul remains at Gilgal, Samuel's home, and site of an important altar to God.

v8 Though not previously mentioned, clearly Samuel and Saul had arranged to meet at Gilgal to bless Israel's effort against the Philistines. Samuel's absence increases fear and soldiers start sipping away.

v9-12 Seeing his support vanishing, faced by a larger and better armed foe, Saul knows he will need God's support, so he decides to make that intercession himself instead of waiting for Samuel.

v13-15 Saul's presumption is the source of his undoing. Samuel once again prophesizes, this time to tell Saul that his actions have lost him God's favor.

Saul leaves with the remnants of his forces to confront the Philistine threat.

v16-18 With the Israelites essentially trapped in the hillfort at Geba, the Philistines send out three significant raiding parties to ravage the countryside.

v19-22 This passage explains that the Israelites were not capable of working iron themselves but were dependent on the technological superiority of the Philistines (who profited handsomely by it) so that the Israelite army was woefully inferior to their foes.

v23 This is really the beginning of the next chapter, but it sets up the coming encounter between the Israelites and Philistines.

1 Samuel

Chapter 14

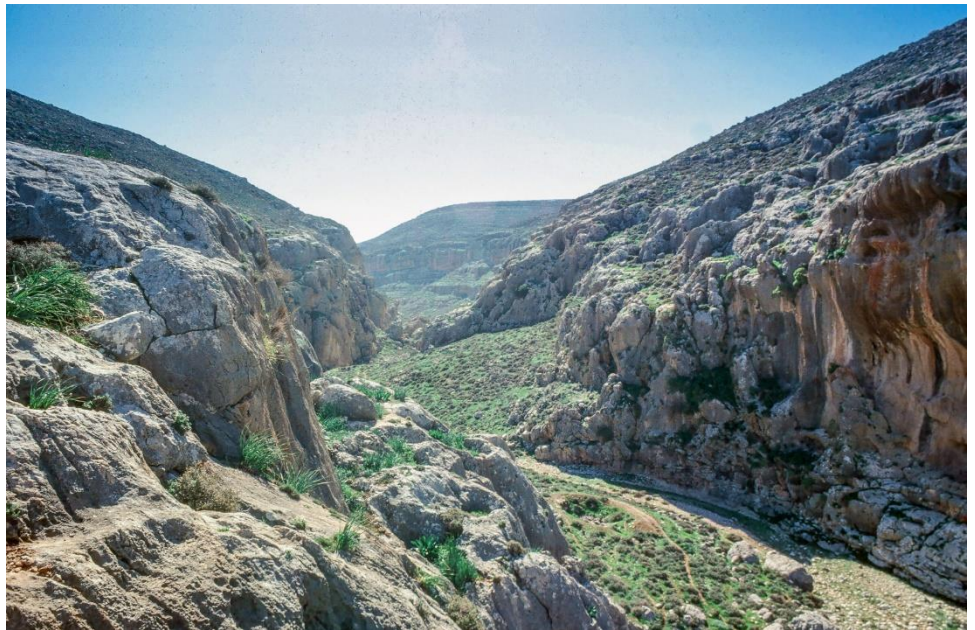
With a little help from God, the Israelite forces begin to push back the Philistines

v1-2 Jonathan (now identified as Saul's son) decides to confront the Philistines personally and secretly

v3 Reminder, Ahijah, Eli's great-grandson is among those condemned back in chapter 2 (27-36) for their unfaithfulness. The ephod is a vestment worn by the priests but is also a sacred object by its own right.

v4-6 Jonathan goes up a narrow pass in the Judean hill country to reach the Philistines with only his young page to assist him.

v7-16 Though it is not explicitly stated, Jonathan seems to have had some kind of vision concerning his fate against the Philistines here (or he's just really recklessly confident) and his willingness to trust that delivers him a victory.



Bozez and Seneh

The unexpected nature of his victory instills surprise and panic among the Philistines, who likely are expecting more Israelites to pop out all around. If we remember from Judges, panic is one of God's most potent weapons. We also get an earthquake which undoubtedly amplifies the panic.

v16 The lookouts – more likely to be at Geba then at Gibeah – see the panic unfolding amongst the Philistines but don't understand it.

v17 Suspecting some elements of his force may be involved, Saul tries to find out who's missing and discovers it is his son and his page.

v18 In ancient Greek versions (which are actually older than any extant Hebrew manuscripts) it is the ephod Saul calls for and not the ark.

v19 This makes more sense if Ahijah has brought the ephod and not the ark. A pocket of the ephod held the sacred Urim(*cursed*) and Thummim (*accounted for*), by which lots were cast to discern God's will. So, basically, Saul is asking the priest to cast lots to see if Israel should attack or not.

v20-23 The Israelites take advantage of the confusion to attack the Philistines *and* apparently there were Israelite confederates of the Philistines who decide this is a good time to turn on their supposed allies. The disarray is so great that regular people decide to join in (probably to take advantage of the looting mostly) and Israel experiences a great and surprising victory.

v24 OATHS ARE BAD! This opening line both sums up and introduces the story told in the following 22 verses.

v24-30 Saul tells binds his soldiers to his oath to not eat anything until evening and victory have arrived. But Jonathan, who was off with his page killing Philistines didn't hear that so when he found some honey, he decided to refresh himself and it worked wonderfully well. When the others tell him of the oath, Jonathan dismisses it and says that Saul's oath has hindered their victory thus far.

v31 Aijalon is pretty much due west of Gibeah, so the flow of battle suggests the Philistines were being pushed almost completely out of Israelite territory.

v32 So, as evening comes and victory is at hand, the troops are no longer bound by the oath and set to slaughtering captured animals wherever they can find them. The problem here is that since they are slaughtered "on the ground" the blood can't be drained out which is contrary to the Mosaic law.

Lev 19:26 You shall not eat anything with its blood.

v33-34 It isn't explicitly clear to whom Saul is talking here, but it likely his military lieutenants, at any rate he directs that a stone be set up to slaughter the animals on so that they can be drained properly.

v35 It's not clear whether or not the stone set up for the slaughter is the same as the altar or not and the fact that it is the first altar set up by Saul in at least twenty two years of rule seems a little damning.

v36-37 Saul wants to press the attack and his leaders seem to agree, but the priest suggests that they consult with God (who after all has delivered the victory) but God refuses to answer. It isn't clear here "how" exactly God is being consulted or is expected to answer.

v38 The lack of response to whether or not the Israelites should continue their attack prompts Saul to believe that there is a sin issue that God is angry about.

v39 Why does Saul name Jonathan here?

v40-42 Saul believes it is either the fault of the royal household or the people, by casting lots, it is determined that Jonathan has sinned, which is preventing God from assisting.

v43-44 When queried, Jonathan admits eating the honey, thereby breaking the oath his father swore, even though Jonathan was not present to hear it and was ignorant of it until told about it after eating the honey. Saul, like Jephthah and his daughter, accepts that Jonathan should die.

v45-46 In a new twist, the people decide that Jonathan's death isn't right and so agree to "ransom" him. It's not clear what this "ransom" entails, but it is certainly a rebuke of Saul by the people who do not believe his oath to be efficacious or worthy to be followed.

v47-52 This sounds like an epilogue to Saul's career and feels a little out-of-place in the narrative, but there is still more to Saul's story.

1 Samuel

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 marks the apex of Saul's rule and lays the foundation for the rise of his successor, David. Fundamentally, the chapter is an interrogation of the limits of obedience as well as a power struggle between Samuel and Saul.

Instead of going through this chapter verse by verse; I want to step back a little and examine the different views and possible interpretations of this pretty horrific story.

Despite his apparent retirement as announced in the previous chapter, Samuel seems to have no intentions of actually departing the scene and relinquishing his power and influence. Despite Saul being named king, Samuel appears to be calling the shots and it is clear that Saul realizes his "rule" is dependent upon Samuel's indulgence and public blessing.

When Samuel declares to Saul that God wishes him to utterly destroy the Amalekites, Saul does not question him and set out to make war on them.

So who are the Amalekites?

We first hear of them in Exodus, when people under king Amalek attack the Israelites in the wilderness at Rephidim. Moses seeks divine aid and the forces of Israel are victorious, but it also says that God vowed to make war on Amalek until they are eliminated.

*Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some men for us and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the sun set. And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword. **Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."** And Moses built an altar and called it, The LORD is my banner. He said, "A hand upon the banner of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."*

Exodus 17:8-16

This special instruction towards the Amalekites also shows up in Deuteronomy

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God. Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand,

in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

So who is Amalek that he should hate Israel? And, why should God wish to blot out these people particularly?

Amalek is the grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12), Jacob's older twin brother and thus Isaac's great grandson. If you recall the story of Jacob and Esau, Esau was the beloved son of Isaac, but their mother favored Jacob. When Isaac was old, he decided to pass on his birthright (God's blessing!) to his oldest and favorite son Esau. Rebekah, their mother, though convinced Jacob to pretend to be Esau (because Isaac's eyesight had declined) and so stole the birthright from his brother.

In ancient Jewish tradition, Esau's descendants (especially Amalek's mother Timna) resented the descendants of Jacob (i.e; the Israelites) because they received the blessing stolen from them and thus engendered a deep-seated hatred of Israel. So, in the context of the Biblical story, the Amalekites are not just rivals for control of the land. They are committed to destroying Israel and thus they represent an existential threat to God's salvation plan for humanity. In essence, they represent the manifestation of Evil in the world – intentional opposition to God.

So why destroy the animals too? Also, in ancient Jewish writings there is a belief that the Amalekites, being allied with Evil, have magical powers that allow them to shape-shift. So, all the animals must be killed because some of them might be Amalekites in disguise.

It should also be noted, that according to the story of Esther, at least some of the Amalekites survive, because we hear that Haman, the antagonist of the story, is a descendent of Agag.

We should also look to the context of the authors. This book was compiled and completed by those we call the Deuteronomic historians; it's important to remember who these people were – they were religious authorities. In other words, they are possibly (likely) biased in favor of adherence to religious authorities (represented by Samuel) and against secular authority (represented by Saul). In general, they are suspicious of the monarchy because from their perspective (post-exile) it was the kings who had led Israel to destruction because they played fast and loose with the law.

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All that said, the story also represents a continuing conflict throughout Jewish and Christian history over the role of *obedience* in following God.

Saul and Samuel have differing approaches in their thinking; Samuel expects absolute obedience whereas Saul's approach is a little more flexible. In the case of the Amalekites, Saul intends to kill everyone as demanded, it's just that he believes that killing some of them as a sacrifice meets the intent of what he believes to be a divine command, whereas Saul expected him to follow the "letter" of the law here and kill them as they were conquered. Either way, they'll all be dead, but in this case, Samuel believes the means matter more than the ends. And btw, that's essentially Jesus' point of view, the how and why of our actions matters most; though of course Jesus seems pretty clearly to be opposed to genocide; even of evildoers – perhaps *especially* of evildoers.

Despite Samuel's claims to the contrary, he does appear to be unwilling to let go of being Judge over Israel. As we've already seen, Saul's leadership isn't universally accepted by the Israelites; and even he generally does what Samuel commands.

Saul, however, believes he has some discretion over the *how* of doing what Samuel directs whereas Samuel expects absolute obedience. What is a king if he is only the enforcer of Samuel's desires? Who really rules here? From my perspective, Saul seems to genuinely be trying to operate faithfully within the limitations imposed on him and it is Samuel's rigidity that is Saul's biggest obstacle.

A further question for us here is whether or not Samuel's command to destroy the Amalekites is a genuine reflection of the divine will or if it is birthed from Samuel's distorted understanding. It is difficult to square with Jesus' teachings, which remember, are a kind of corrective to the religious rigidity of his own day and a repudiation of the perspective represented by the Deuteronomic historians.

Jesus teaches that blind obedience is as often a stumbling block as it is a sign of faithfulness. Jesus, on multiple occasions says that if there is a conflict between a loving response and the law, then choose the loving response.

Here it strikes me that the loving response would be to seek reconciliation with the Amalekites to redress the genuine injustice done to them by Jacob's deceitfulness and welcome a reunion of the strained descendants of Isaac.

1 Samuel

Chapter 16

In this chapter, the story shifts from Saul and his conflicts with Samuel to center on Saul's successor David. This chapter gives us the first of two different versions of David's rise to prominence in Saul's court. From this chapter through 2 Samuel:5 is believed by most scholars to be a much older work that has been repurposed by the Deuteronomic historians and inserted into their larger story.

v1 The last chapter ended with the ambiguous suggestion that God had already chosen a successor, this chapter begins with Samuel upset over Saul's impending departure but as yet unaware of who that might be.

The horn of oil is for the anointing

With Saul, Samuel's choice was validated by the three round drawing of lots, but no such process will be used for David. With Saul, the king was chosen from perhaps the most reviled tribe, Benjamin. David will come from Judah, which back in Judges had been the tribe ordained to go first into the promised land.

v2 Samuel expresses fear of Saul, which represents a shift in how their relationship has been portrayed so far

v3-5 At God's command, Samuel takes a young cow and goes to Bethlehem to sacrifice. When he arrives though, he is not welcomed as we would expect but the town elders are actually quite wary of his visit.

Clearly something has shifted between Saul and Samuel that has been left out, which would account for the expressions of fear.

v6-10 We get a clue here that it is known that Samuel is on the hunt for a new king (which would explain the fearfulness of Samuel and the town elders) because it is otherwise difficult to explain why Jesse would agree to parade his sons before Samuel for no apparent reason.

In all, seven sons are presented and all are rejected.

v12 Exasperated, Samuel asks Jesse if there might be another son somewhere? Young David, the *eighth* brother is out tending the flock and then he is sent for because no one can eat the feast until he arrives. (in 1Chronicles 2:13-15, it says David was the *seventh* son).

Like Saul, he is tall and handsome, and also tanned.

v13 Samuel then confirms the choice of David by anointing him and using the familiar formula, the “spirit of the Lord” “came upon him.”

v14-23 The final section of the chapter has Saul hearing of David’s musical skills and calling him to come serve him, thus closing out the first story of Saul’s introduction to David.

v14 Just as the spirit of the Lord had descended upon David, it departs Saul and he is instead tormented by an evil spirit. I think this is one of those passages that really highlights the difference in cosmology from the OT to the NT. In the OT, there is no oppositional power to God; no evil forces aligned against God’s will.

v15-17 So a version of music tames the wild beast

v18 Here lies the origin of the idea of David as a masterful musician which will lead to the later tradition of him composing the psalms.

A little incongruity here as David is described as a warrior and a man of valor. So far, he is only the youngest son who watches the sheep and in the second story of his introduction to Saul in the next chapter, he is certainly no warrior.

v19-20 Jesse agrees and sends an offering along with David to Saul’s court

v21-23 Whatever may come later, we see that the relationship of David and Saul begins in amity and admiration.

1 Samuel

Chapter 17

In this chapter, we get the famous story of David and Goliath. This chapter also introduces a completely different story about how David and Saul met.

v1-2 The Philistines again threaten Israel.

Socoh was a town about 14 miles west of Bethlehem, along the disputed border with the Philistines

Azekah was a hill fort that overlooked an important trade route through the Elah valley



Elah Valley from Azekah

v3 The armies are arrayed against each other across the narrow valley (in the photo above, the Israelites would have been on the hills in the distance)

v4 Goliath of Gath. Gath was one of the five main Philistine cities, and the only one not on the coast. Archeologists have found evidence that Gath was settled by the Philistines shortly after their arrival in the Levant (around 1200BC – this story occurs around 1000BC). There is another Goliath of Gath who is also described as a giant in 2Samuel who is killed by someone else)

Goliath itself is a name with roots in Anatolia (part of today's Turkey) which would have been either part of the ancient Hittite or Mycenaean empires, and is one of the places the Philistines are believed to have originated.

He is described as six cubits tall, which would be about 10 feet (a cubit ~ 18"). More ancient manuscripts describe him as being just over 4 cubits (a cubit and a span) so 6' 9" or so – still big but not fantastically so.

v5-7 Goliath's armor covers his torso, legs, groin, arms, and head – only his face is exposed.

The word translated *javelin* here is the Hebrew word *kidon* which can also mean a sword

his armor coat would have weighed ~ 90lbs (the use of *shekel* here reveals its origins as a unit of mass. By comparison, medieval mail coats weigh 13-20lbs

His spear head is made of iron and weighs about 11lbs (for comparison, Roman spears weighed 2-5lbs), which we learned in ch. 13 is a material that Philistines can work, but that Israelites can't – it is a far superior metal to bronze.

And the phrase "like a weaver's beam" suggests something with a thong and ring that was used in conjunction with some kind of launching device.

So, overall, Goliath is big, well-armed, and well protected

v8-11 Goliath taunts the Israelites and challenges them to settle this battle with a champion who could defeat him

v12-15 We are introduced to David and his family again, as though this is the first instance where they enter the story

v16 Goliath taunts the Israelites daily for nearly a month and a half.

v17-18 Jesse sends David to his brothers who are in the army to bring them supplies, and to bring back word of how they are doing

v19-24 David goes as his father directed and happens to arrive just in time to see Goliath perform his daily ritual

v25 It's not clear whether what the men say is something official or just camp rumor

"free in Israel" likely means freedom from taxes and mandatory labor

v26 You can almost hear the gears turning in David's head

v27 The men reassure the boy that what they've said about a potential reward is true.

v28-29 The reaction of David's eldest brother suggests that he doesn't think too highly of David

v30 David keeps talking to different groups of men about the potential reward of facing and defeating Goliath

v31 Hearing of David's words that the living God would be with whomever faced Goliath, Saul sends for David.

v32-37 David volunteers to face Goliath, but Saul is incredulous because David is just "a boy." (Compare to how David was described in the last chapter before he was called to play the lyre for Saul – "a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence" 16:18)

David boasts of his fearlessness in facing down lions and bears and of his faith in God.

v38-40 Saul gives David armor and a sword, but he refuses it because it is too heavy and awkward. Instead he chooses only the weapons of a shepherd as he prepares to face Goliath.

v41-44 Goliath is a little insulted that Israel sent a shepherd boy instead of a warrior to face him (though he is "ruddy and handsome in appearance")

It has been suggested by some that Goliath may have vision problems from a condition called acromegaly, which causes people to grow very tall but leaves them with double vision and nearsightedness, which is why he is led around by his shield carrier and why he tells David to come closer – this is, of course, highly speculative.

v45-47 David's reply very clearly says that if there is to be victory it will be God's victory alone.

v48-51 Before Goliath can even make a move in all his armor, David quickly gets off a shot with his sling and strikes him down (he doesn't kill him, just knocks him out). David then takes Goliath's sword, kills him and then cuts off his head.

v51-53 David's unexpected victory causes panic (God's preferred tactic) amongst the Philistines and the armies of Israel are able to take advantage, pursuing the Philistines several miles to the gates of their own cities.

v54 When did David get a tent? likely evidence of a point where different older stories have been woven together.

v55-58 This makes clear that Saul does not know who David is, contradicting the last chapter and even verses 31-39 of this chapter.

Abner is Saul's cousin (see v50 of this chapter)

1Samuel

Chapter 18

David now fully enters into the king's household, but Saul begins to be wary of David

- v1 There has been a lot of debate over the meaning of this verse; it says pretty clearly that Jonathan and David are, in our vernacular, "soul-mates" but what exactly that might mean is unclear.
- v2 Saul takes David into his service (This verse continues to operate as though chapter 16 never happened)
- v3-4 Jonathan shows his devotion to David and pledges himself to David (I would note that this isn't explicitly reciprocated by David) to the point of dressing him as the prince.
- v5 David seems to be engaging in raids against the Philistines
- v6-9 David's celebrity grows and Saul becomes envious of the young man's fame.
- v10-11 Saul's jealousy grows white hot until he tries, unsuccessfully, to murder David. These same two verses, more or less, are repeated in chapter 19 (v9-10) and do not exist in very old manuscripts.
- v12-14 Saul's jealousy is rooted primarily in David's military success, which is the way that God's favor is believed to manifest in David.
Note: There is a contradiction here with v5 above: Here David is given command of a thousand (ie; a legion) where in v5 it was said he was made commander of all the Israelite forces.
- v15 This uses the original meaning of the word "awe" which meant *terror* or *dread*.
- v16 David's ongoing victories over Israel's enemies increases the devotion of the Israelite people.
- v17 David is offered Saul's eldest daughter (guess the reward of the king's daughter for killing Goliath was just a rumor after all) but Saul has ulterior motives because he intends to keep putting David in difficult situations until the Philistines rid him of this troublesome young man. (David will do something similar to Uriah the Hittite)
- v18 David isn't too sure about being tied too closely to Saul.

v19 Talk about crossed wires, Merab gets married to someone else!

v20-21 No worries about Merab, Saul's other daughter, Michal, loves David it seems and Saul thinks that will work just fine with his plan to eliminate David

v22-25 David is still wary, of Saul and also of having to come up with the bride price. It's probably a bit disingenuous though to say he was a poor man from a poor family. The family of Jesse, it is implied elsewhere were people of considerate position. Perhaps Eliab was right that David is manipulative and aspiring.

v26 Saul has an answer to David though that appeals to him and also one that is kind of... icky?

v27-30 Saul's machinations don't pan out though because God still favors David, and he and his men easily "collect" the 100 foreskins. To be clear it doesn't explicitly say the Philistines are killed, but I would offer it would be surprising to see them give up the items voluntarily.

1Samuel

Chapter 19

v1-7 Saul is determined to get rid of David, even speaking openly about it, but Jonathan is able to talk him out of it and Saul makes an oath to that affect and David is welcomed back (he left?)

v8-10 Here we get a repeat of the earlier spear throwing “incident.” Saul seems to still be struggling with his oaths.

v11 Saul sends people to keep a watch on David and Michal’s home to ensure David doesn’t go anywhere.

v12 David escapes into the night. It isn’t clear here why Saul’s people didn’t see him escape but it is possible that their house is adjacent to or part of a town wall and that the window allows him to escape out of the city directly (similar to the story of Rahab and the spies in Joshua)

v13 The word *idol* here is the Hebrew *teraphim* which were small household idols such as those stolen by Rachel from her father Laban. It is the same word that forms the root of idolatry. Israelites weren’t strict monotheists at this point in their history.

v14-16 Michal makes a dummy David to fool her father, but Saul has not openly decided to kill David (despite his oath)

v17 When asked why Michal tried to deceive her father she answers (falsely) that David threatened her life.

v18-24 This story appears to be a later addition as it contradicts with 15:35 when it was written that Samuel would never see Saul alive again.

v18 David flees to Samuel’s protection

Naioth isn’t a particular place, it is the word for an encampment, perhaps like a 19th century Methodist camp meeting

v19-21 Saul sends three groups of messengers to capture David, but each in turn is overcome by the power of God

v22 Finally Saul himself goes to try to capture David.

It is unclear where “Secu” is, but it may be a cut-off sentence as early Greek manuscripts say he went “to the well of the threshing floor”

v23-24 Saul too falls under the power of God and is powerless against David.

1Samuel

Chapter 20

The rest of this book tells of the growing estrangement between Saul and David; but the focus of the chapter is Jonathan's desire and hope that David will return to the palace, but David is (understandably) wary.

v1 David, concerned and likely confused over Saul's enmity, goes to Jonathan to try to gain some understanding

v2 Jonathan believes that he remains in his father's confidence and tries to assure David that his life is not in danger

v3 But David suggests that Jonathan is mistaken in this

v4-7 David comes up with a plan to gauge Saul's intentions (and maybe to also open Jonathan's eyes) and Jonathan is clear that his loyalty is to David.

v8-9 Jonathan remains convinced that Saul means David no harm

v10-17 Jonathan and David, in a private conversation away from any potential prying ears, work out how they will communicate secretly in the future about whether or not it is safe for David to return, swearing upon the covenant they have made between themselves to be loyal each to the other.

v18-23 Jonathan hatches an elaborate plan involving arrows to communicate what he has learned about Saul's intentions to David.

v26-29 On the first night of the 3-day new moon feast, Saul assumes David is ritually unclean, but grows suspicious after the second night of David's absence. When he inquires of Jonathan if he knows where David is, Jonathan tells the lie he had agreed to with David.

v30-31 Saul is not fooled by David and Jonathan's ruse and he berates his son, saying he has dishonored his mother (and/or that his mother was "too soft" on him) and that his devotion to David is foolhardy and stands in the way of Jonathan's own success. And Saul makes clear his desire to see David dead,

v32-34 Jonathan defends David, only to incur Saul's wrath upon himself leading Jonathan to storm out in his anger and grief.

v35-40 Jonathan shoots the arrows as pre-arranged passing along the message to David that Saul does intend to kill him.

v41-42 David and Jonathan seem to understand that their paths are tearing them apart and are grieved for it.

1Samuel

Chapter 21

David is now an outlaw and alone

v1 After fleeing from Saul's palace, David goes to Nob to try to "acquire" some provisions from the local priest.

Nob was near Gibeah in the lands belong to the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's clan)

Ahimelech is the great-grandson of Eli

v2-3 David lies to the priest saying he is on an errand from Saul and is seeking provisions for a small band of men (probably intimating a raiding party)

v4 Ahimelech only has "holy bread" used for religious ritual that should not be profaned.

v5 David offers reassurance for the priest's skepticism and reticence. "Vessels" here is a euphemism for genitals; David is suggesting that the men are regularly chaste (that's probably a lie too).

v6 Reassured by David's lies, the priest give David the bread.

This is the incident Jesus refers to when the Pharisees challenge him about his disciples plucking grain on the sabbath.

v7 Doeg, the Edomite is more likely to be the chief of Saul's guard than of his shepherds as we will see. It isn't clear what it means to be "detained before the Lord" but probably some kind of ritual requirement

v8-9 David also asks if perhaps maybe might Ahimelech have any weapons handy he could spare, pretty please? alas, only one, the mighty sword of Goliath whom David killed. (Wait – didn't David put all of Goliath's stuff in his one tent??)

v10 Gath is one of the five chief cities of the Philistines; the one located in the Judean foothills instead of on the coast. Considering how David was apparently killing lots of Philistines not so long ago this is either a sign of his desperation or his chutzpah.

v11-12 David is recognized (of course), though it isn't clear why the Philistines should call him "king."

v12-15 Fearing what the Philistines might do, David feigns madness as a kind of protection, but the king still isn't so sure it's a good idea to let him hang around

1Samuel Chapter 22

David begins to collect a band of merry man, but Saul's anger grows

v1 "cave" may be a mistranslation of lair or stronghold as the words are very similar in Hebrew

Adullam was a hillfort and village in the territory of Judah, on a hill about sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem (which was not yet an Israelite city at this time) not far from where Goliath was slain. Archeologists have discovered a number of cisterns and grottoes there.



Ruins at Adullam

v2 Saul seems to have upset a number of people and many of them join David's band

v3-4 David goes to Moab (the homeland of his grandmother, Ruth and a people who are kin to the Israelites to seek shelter for his parents

v5 A prophet (either named Gad or from Gad) warns David to flee. It is unclear where the forest of Hereth was, but the consensus seems to be "somewhere in the hills between Hebron and Bethlehem."

v6-10 Saul hears where David is hiding (with his fellow outlaws) and asks rhetorically why his followers and even his own son seem to betray him; sneering at them and asking if they think David will be as generous to them as Saul has been.

Doeg (from the last chapter) speaks up that he saw David at Nob and that the priest had given him provisions and weapons.

v11-15 Ahimelech plus his family and fellow priests are brought to Saul's compound and asked why they have conspired against Saul. Ahimelech replies that, as far as he knew, David was a trusted and faithful servant of Saul and that he thought he was only serving Saul by giving David the things he had asked for.

v16-17 Saul doesn't believe Ahimelech and orders his men to kill the priests but they refuse.

v18-19 Apparently non-plussed, Saul tells Doeg to kill Ahimilech and all the priests and he willingly obeys, single-handedly slaughtering them all (will almost all)

v20-23 One of Ahimelech's sons escapes and goes to David to tell him what has happened. David takes responsibility for what has happened and offers protection to Abiathar.

1Samuel

Chapter 23

David and his band elude capture by Saul while also defending Israel from the Philistines

v1 Keilah was part of the territory of Judah, in the lowlands nearer the coast (and closer to the Philistines) not far from Adullam, where David had been in the last chapter

v2 This likely was done through Abiathar, the priest who escaped the massacre at Nob

v3-5 David's band are reluctant to face the Philistines, but the word of God reassures them and they have great success

v6 As we've already seen, the ephod is a priestly garment that also contains some means for divining the divine will, perhaps the Urim and Thummim used to cast lots

v7 Saul summons troops from all the tribes, because he does not have a sufficient force on hand to fight David's hundreds, this is why David has some time to act even though Keilah is only a few miles south of Gibeah, where Saul has his stronghold. Saul still labors under the impression that God favors him.

v8-13 Drawing on some solid intelligence work, David learns that Saul is coming with forces drawn from all across Israel, and through divination he learns that, despite his saving them, the people of Keilah will likely sell him out to Saul.

We also learn that David's band has grown considerably to nearly 600 men by now.

v14 The wilderness of Ziph is a forested region in the Judean mountains southeast of Hebron, maybe 20 miles or so east of Keilah

v15-18 Horesh is the Hebrew word for "forest" but it may also refer to specific place.

Jonathan's support will be critical to David's success. We also see here where different versions of the story have been woven together, since back in ch 20 we saw that these two would be separated forever, and it was back in ch 18 that David and Jonathan made a covenant, but the clear suggestion here is that it is at this moment that their covenant is made.

v19-24 The people of Ziph, like those at Keilah, also rat David out to Saul.

It may be helpful to think about why. Perhaps having to provision 600 fighting men was too taxing on their local resources, perhaps not all of them behaved well to the local populace, perhaps they just didn't like large bands of lawless, potentially violent men hanging about. Whatever the reason, we should not be too quick to judge.

v24 They are clearly wandering about in a small region of the mountain country south of Hebron. Maon was a place just a couple miles south of Ziph.



Tel Maon

v25-28 Saul is so close to capturing David here when David is delivered by the sudden arrival of a messenger telling Saul of a Philistine attack.

v29 En-gedi (or Ein Gedi) is an oasis near the western shore of the Dead Sea, just a little bit north of the fortress at Masada



Ein Gedi

1Samuel

Chapter 24

Saul catches up to David, but things don't go as he might have hoped.

v1-2 wild goats (ibexes) remain plentiful in the region of Ein Gedi

v3 It's not clear exactly what Saul was doing in the cave, the actual Hebrew reads "he entered the cave to cover his feet." But generally, it is thought to refer to going #2

Surely, not all of David's men, that would need to be a very big cave

v4 This is the first we've heard of a divine promise to David to "deliver his enemies into his hand." We've seen, so far, nothing more than David's anointing by Samuel.

I'm assuming that Saul had taken off his cloak and cast it aside while tending to his business

v5-7 David remembers and reminds his men that Saul remains God's anointed king and that to attack his person invites God's wrath.

v8-15 Showing the same boldness as when he confronted Goliath, David confronts Saul with the evidence of his continuing loyalty (the piece of the cloak) and seeks to reassure Saul that he means no harm.

v16-19 Saul appears to be having a change of heart towards David, dispelling his own fears (at least for now)

v20-21 Saul asks that David's loyalty continue and that he not murder his rivals (ie; Saul's family) when he (eventually) becomes king.

v22 David accedes to Saul's requests, but he clearly doesn't trust that Saul's magnanimity will last, as he and his men don't return to Gibeah but retreat to their stronghold.

1Samuel Chapter 25

Chapter 25 is a kind of folk tale that shows how God's favor impacts David's life

v1 Samuel, the last judge and first prophet, kingmaker and chief priest dies (but this isn't the last we'll see of him)

"Paran" is possibly a scribal error as that region is way down in Sinai; many ancient manuscripts have the wilderness of "Maon" which is part of where the story has largely been set so far.

v2 Carmel is a town about seven miles south of Hebron and very near to Maon

v3 Nabal, in Hebrew, means someone who disdains common courtesy and openly flouts social convention. In older English translations it is sometimes rendered as fool, but knave or boor may be closer to the mark.

Calebites are a clan within the tribe of Judah. Caleb was a prominent figure (Joshua's right-hand man) in stories of the Israelite "conquest" of Canaan.

v5-9 David's men have been protecting Nabal's shepherd's (and sheep!) as they wandered in the wilderness and now David is asking if Nabal might share some of his bounty with David's band.

v10-11 Nabal here is calling out David for being disloyal to Saul; basically saying "who do you think you are?"

v12-13 Not willing to overlook the insult to his honor, David goes off in fury to wreak his vengeance

v14-17 One of Nabal's farmhands tells Abigail, Nabal's wife (for now anyway) what has happened hoping she might be able to intercede and stave off David's attack

v18-19 Abigail takes quick action to stave off the coming disaster and doesn't bother telling her husband. David's story seems ripe with strong-willed, smart woman with quick wits and courage. (Ruth, Hannah, Michal for example)

v20-22 Abigail encounters David just as he is working himself up into a real fury of indignation and self-righteousness

v23-25 Abigail offers herself as a kind of sacrifice for her husband's boorishness

v26-31 This is one of those places where Abigail seems like a manifestation of the divine favor for David; for she not only offers herself in order to save those who work for her husband but also to save David from a rash act that would harm his reputation and future position.

v30 She also seems to have some prescience concerning David's future as the story hasn't mentioned any public proclamation of Samuel's anointing of David.

v32-35 David lauds Abigail's actions and sees God's work in them

v36-38 Nabal parties on, unaware of how close he came to death, but when he is told; it seems to have a profound effect on him and he dies shortly afterwards.

v39 The lesson here is the judgement is God's and God's justice will be done, so don't take it upon yourself

v40-42 Recognizing a good woman when he sees one and not being limited to just one wife, David seeks to marry Abigail who seems only too happy to accept

v43 Here we learn that since David is an outlaw, Saul had annulled his marriage to Michal and married her off to Palti. We also learn that he took a wife named Ahinoam from Jezreel – there are two Jezreel's one of which is very near to Maon and Carmel so perhaps another local girl. However, Ahinoam was also the name of one of Saul's wives so there is speculation that David married one of Saul's wives (2Sam 12:8 also suggests this is so)

1Samuel

Chapter 26

In many ways, this chapter is a repeat of chapter 24 with just a few details changed. Some scholars suggest that both chapters represent diverging folk accounts of the same instance.

v1 This verse is a verbatim repeat of 23:19

v2 Again this verse repeats an earlier one, in this case, 24:2

The wilderness of Ziph is a forested region in the Judean mountains southwest of Hebron

v3-5 The key takeaway here is that Saul feels he is in a position of safety

v6 Not Ahimelech the priest, who was murdered by Saul. This is our first introduction to Abishai (and Joab) who will be part of David's story in the future.

v7-8 The two men stealthily enter the camp, which is completely unguarded

v9-11 Again, one of David's followers urges David to kill Saul (or at least allow *them* to kill Saul) but David warns that to kill Saul would dishonor God and invite divine punishment; saying, in effect, God will take care of Saul in due time.

v12 But David still plans to take advantage of this situation and, we learn, his ability to do so is divinely sanctioned.

v13-16 By calling to Abner (Saul's cousin, by the way) David seeks to sow discord and distrust within Saul's inner circle.

v17-20 Very similar to 24:12-15; David says three key things to appeal to Saul; he seeks to reassure him, he appeals to their shared faith in God, and he makes a practical argument against Saul's effort to kill David, namely;

- Saul's concern for David's ambition is misplaced and David is innocent
- God will be ultimate judge of each of them
- David is not a significant threat and so not worth the time and effort that Saul is giving to him

v21-25 Again similar to 24:17-22, where Saul appears to relent from his conflict with David, to acknowledge his destiny to be king, and to decide to repair the breach between them. But again, as in chapter 24, Saul returns home while David stays (safely) in the wilderness.

1Samuel

Chapter 27

Seeking to break the cycle of his continuing conflict with Saul, David decides to seek safety (again?) with the Philistines in Gath.

v1-5 David, his men, and their families decide to seek safety from Saul among the Philistines by appealing to the protection of the king of Gath.

Remember in ch 21 when David went to Gath alone, the king was happier to see him go than to stay.

v5-7 Rather than cause trouble in Gath itself, David seeks a place away from prying eyes and is allowed to settle in Ziklag.

Ziklag was a place that according to the book of Joshua belonged to the tribe of Simeon. It is in the Judean foothills, west and south of Jerusalem.

v8-10 While ostensibly serving the king of Gath, David's raids are against the traditional enemies and rivals of Israel while telling Achish that he was attacking and looting Gath's enemies.

v11 In this gruesome and horrific footnote, we learn that David is covering his deceit to Achish by murdering everyone who might betray his secret.

v12 Believing David's lies, the king of Gath thinks he has David under his control.

1Samuel

Chapter 28

Proving you can't keep a good man down. Samuel returns from beyond the grave to give some advice

(just in time for Halloween, a witch and a ghost!)

v1-2 Believing David to be firmly under his control, the king of Gath and the other Philistines decide to make war against Israel.

v3 No explanation is given to link these two facts, Samuel had died and Saul expelled practitioners of dark magic.

Also, mediums and wizards are specifically contrary to the Law of Moses:

Lev 19:31 Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

Lev 20:6 If any turn to mediums and wizards, prostituting themselves to them, I will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people.

Lev 20:27 A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them.

v4-5 As usual the Philistines outnumber the Israelites and Saul lacks confidence

v6-7 Since he has lost the Lord's favor, he is unable to discern God's will and so he opts to defy the Mosaic Law as well as his own decree and seeks a medium.

Curiously everyone seems to know where one can be found.

Endor's exact location is uncertain, though according to Joshua it is in the Jezreel valley (site of one of Gideon's victories) which is in northern Israel (the Samaria of Jesus' day). It is also known as the Valley of Meggido, from which the name Armageddon is derived.

v8 Saul wears a disguise either to make sure no one knows it is he going to the medium, because it is actually behind enemy lines, or maybe some of both.

v9-10 The medium is fearful of practicing her dark arts, but Saul reassure her that no one will learn of it and she will be safe.

v11-14 The medium does as Saul asks, but in doing so his true identity is also revealed.

Notice that Samuel comes “up” from “below.” Ancient Israelites believed the dead resided in Sheol, somewhere deep underground, not dissimilar to the Greek idea of Hades. ALL the dead descended to Sheol.

v15-19 Samuel’s dark words confirm that God is not on Saul’s side

v20 This final warning from Samuel has left Saul an empty shell of a man

v22-25 Despite his breakdown, Saul is convinced to have eat in order to restore his spirit and strength.

I’ve never killed and butchered a calf, but I’m thinking it’s actually a fairly time consuming task and not what one does just before dinner time.

First Samuel

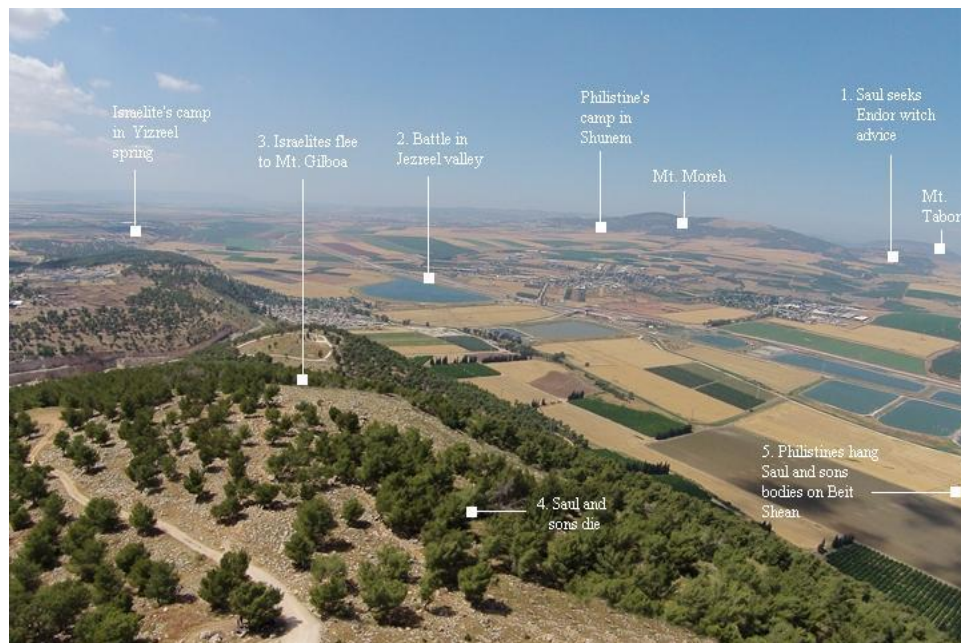
Chapter 29

In the last chapter we saw how David had entered into an uneasy relationship with one of the Philistine kings (Achish of Gath). In this chapter we discover that not all the Philistines trust David (or his men).

v1 we pick up from the last chapter where the armies of the Philistines and Israelites are gathering to confront one another.

As to the locations, Aphek was a crossroads at an important trade route into the Judean hill country from the coastal plain, near modern day Tel Aviv. This is the same location the Philistines occupied back in chapter 4 when they routed the Israelite army (and killed Eli's sons).

Jezreel is nearby to Aphek on the slopes of Mt Gilboa.



2nd Battle of Aphek

v2-5 The Philistine army is huge and David and his men are marching with them but the army commanders (not the same as the Lords, BTW) do not trust that David won't turn on them and seek to reconcile with Saul by killing the Philistines from behind. They insist that he be sent back to Ziklag despite Achish's assurances.

v6-7 Achish tells David that even though he considers him an honorable ally, he must defer to the wishes of the other kings and their commanders. Notice though that Achish in verse six swears by the God of Israel ("As the Lord lives")

v8 So when David says he desires to fight the enemies of his Lord and king; does he mean the enemies of Saul or the enemies of Achish?

v9 Achish again makes reference to God as he affirms that David must leave the scene of the battle

Again, I think we are seeing the ways that God's favor works for David. Saul is about to face the greatest crisis of his reign and instead of David being drawn into a compromising position, he is being sent far away from the battle so that he cannot have any responsibility for what is about to occur.

v10-11 David and his men turn away from the place of battle and return towards Ziklag.

First Samuel Chapter 30

David is sent away from the battle brewing in the Jezreel valley, but he finds that his enemies in Ziklag have been causing trouble.

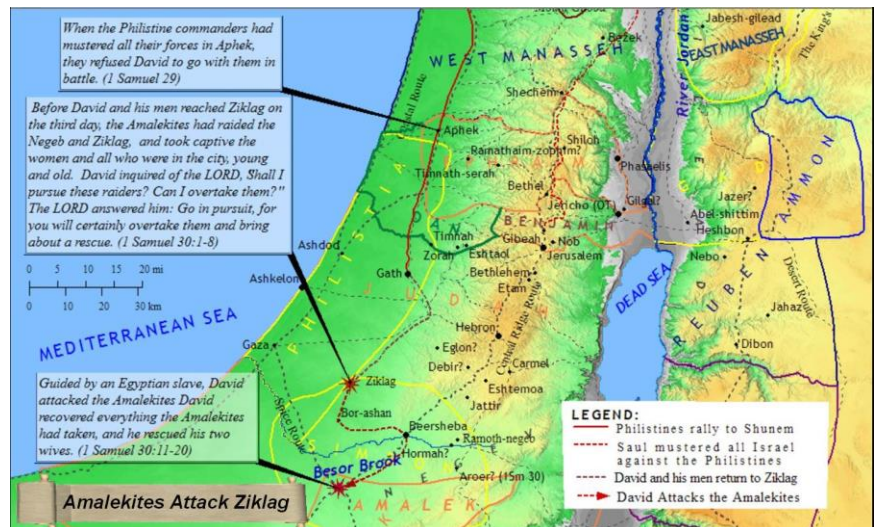
v1-2 David returns to Ziklag only to find it burned by the Amalekites and most of the population taken as slaves.

Wait, weren't all the Amalekites killed back in chapter 15??!

v3-5 When David and his men arrive they are joined by the survivors in their grief.

v6 Everyone is made at David (it's not easy being king) because of the disaster that has befallen them, but David draws strength from God and confidence in God's favor that things can be set straight.

v7-9 David seeks God's favor for pursuing the raiders and he interprets the result as an endorsement so they set off.



Wadi Besor is part of a river system in the Negev far south of Israel; as in Psalm 26: "the watercourses of the Negeb"



Wadi Besor

v10 We can assume here that David and his men are travelling fast, pushing themselves to catch up to the fleeing Amalekites. By the time they reach the oasis at Besor, a number of the men are too exhausted to continue.

v11-12 A patrol finds the Egyptian and they likely assume that he is associated with the Amalekites since he would be unlikely to be in the region for any usual reason.

Note that he is treated honorably

v13-14 David wants to know how he got to where he was found and he tells them that he is a slave to one of the Amalekites and recounts he was with the party that raided Ziklag.

Cherethites are likely mercenaries from Crete who were associated with the Philistines

“Negeb of Caleb” means territory controlled by the Calebites, a clan within the tribe of Judah. We may recall that Nabal, Abigail’s first husband was a Calebite.

v15 David then wants the captured Egyptian to lead his men to the Amalekites and he agrees so long as David promises to not kill him or return him to slavery.

v16 David and his men come upon the Amalekites who are celebrating in style unaware of the threat they face.

v17 David and his men attack at night and pursue the fleeing Amalekites for a whole day.

Camels were introduced to the southern Levant around 900BC and David’s reign is thought to have been sometime between 1000BC, so this may be an anachronism introduced by later editors or a very early incidence of camels being used in the southern Levant.

v18-20 David’s victory is absolute and complete, recapturing everything (and everyone) who had been taken.

That this is “David’s spoil” also means that it now literally belongs to David (including the people)

v21-22 As David returns to the Wadi Besor, some among his company want to deny those who had been left behind any share in the victory.

v23-25 David though shows “kingly” wisdom and authority by saying, basically, “we’re all in this together”

v26-31 David sends a portion of what he has taken from the Amalekites to leaders in all the places where his men had been roaming since he fled from Saul as a kind of compensation for their support and forbearance.

First Samuel

Chapter 31

The final chapter of First Samuel completes the story of Saul and sets up David's kingship to be explored in 2nd Samuel.

Also, just a reminder that 1st and 2nd Samuel was originally a single work (and still is to our Jewish brothers and sisters). It was split in early Greek translations because of scroll length.

v1-3 We return to the Philistine battle with the Israelites at Aphek, where we find that the Israelites are suffering a terrible defeat.

Many in the army, including Saul's sons have been killed and Saul is making a last stand (Custer style)

v4 Realizing his imminent death and not wanting to be killed by the Philistines which would be a dishonorable death, Saul orders his armor bearer to kill him instead. When he refuses, out of fear, Saul kills himself.

There is not an explicit commandment against suicide in the Mosaic law, though later Talmudic tradition came to consider that Genesis 9:5 should be interpreted as such;

For you own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.
Gen 9:5

though we should keep in mind that the Saul likely only knew an oral tradition and that the written scripture probably didn't exist in his day.

Also, we may remember that Abimelech (Gideon's son) and Samson in the Book of Judges also took their own lives.

v5-6 Seeing Saul dead, his armor bearer then took his own life and so all of Saul's inner circle were killed in the battle.

v7 Seeing Israelite army's defeat, the people in the nearby villages flee and the Philistines take them over.

v8-13 The Philistines seek to dishonor the dead bodies of Saul and his sons, but a band of brave men redeem his body (minus the head maybe?) and bury them with dignity. Thus closing out Saul's sad tale.

