



The Book of Samuel, now divided in two, marks the third stage of sacred history after Genesis and Exodus. Here we discover the work of God in human hearts, and how people cooperate with God's rule.

Here are manifested, in a very calm manner, the example and failures of David; his life, similar to that of any of us, seems to hold no mystery. At the end, though, we find that God was present in everything that happened to him and that he established with him something that would not perish.

The importance of this book does not come from historical events of great magnitude. Indeed, there are those also, but the Bible is more concerned with the personal history of David than with his victories. This first king of Israel was the model of a believer since, being a man of great personality and of no ordinary intelligence, he also let himself be guided and inspired by God, and it was his main concern to serve him in everything.

In a way, here God hides Himself. Nothing is said about revelations or grandiose manifestations of God. Only a word to the prophet Nathan which will be decisive for the future: the kingdom of David, in Jerusalem and over Palestine, will develop into the universal kingdom of God. Christ Jesus will be the Son of David.

Two personages precede David:

- Samuel, the last of the Judges, who is also a prophet. This is a time during which the disunited Israelites feel the need to have permanent authority: "We want a king, like the rest of the nations have," instead of depending solely on the charismatic ones, the "judges" who are not always at hand when the people need them.

- Saul, the first king chosen by God, but later rejected.

When the book opens, Israel is not yet master of the land of Canaan, but already the tribes have become used to a sedentary country life after having been nomadic herders. Settled in the hills, they have often submitted to the incursions of the Philistines established in the fertile plain of the coast, in their cities of Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron.

The story of Hannah

1 • ¹There was a man from Ramathaim, in the hills of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah. He was son of Tohu, son of Jeroham, of the clan of Zuph. ²He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

9.1
Jdg
13:2

³Every year Elkanah went to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh of hosts at Shiloh. The priests there were the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas.

Dt
12:18

⁴Whenever Elkanah offered sacrifice, he gave portions to his wife, Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵To Hannah, however, he gave the more delightful portion because he loved her more, although she had no child. ⁶Yet Hannah's rival used to tease her for being barren.

⁷So it happened every year when they went to Yahweh's house. Peninnah irritated Hannah and she would weep and refuse to eat. ⁸Once Elkanah, her husband, asked her, "Hannah, why do you weep instead of eating? Why are you sad? Are you not better off with me than with many sons?"

Ru
4:15

⁹After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah stood up not far from Eli, the priest: his seat was beside the doorpost of Yahweh's house. ¹⁰Deeply distressed she wept and prayed to Yahweh ¹¹and made this vow, "O Yahweh of hosts, if only you will have compassion on your maidservant and give me a son, I will put him in your service for as long as he lives and no razor shall touch his head."

¹²As she prayed before Yahweh, Eli

observed the movement of her lips. ¹³Hannah was praying silently; she moved her lips but uttered no sound and Eli thought Hannah was drunk. ¹⁴He, therefore, said to her: "For how long will you be drunk? Let your drunkenness pass." ¹⁵But Hannah answered: "No, my lord, I am a woman in great distress, not drunk. I have not drunk wine or strong drink, but I am pouring out my soul before Yahweh. ¹⁶Do not take me for a bad woman. I was so afflicted that my prayer flowed continuously." ¹⁷Then Eli said, "Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you asked for." ¹⁸Hannah answered, "Let your maidservant deserve your kindness." Then she left the temple and when she was at table, she seemed a different woman.

¹⁹Elkanah rose early in the morning and worshiped before Yahweh with his wives. Then they went back home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with his wife, Hannah, Yahweh took compassion on her, ²⁰and she became pregnant. She gave birth to a son and called him Samuel because she said: "I have asked Yahweh to give him to me."

²¹Once more Elkanah went to the temple with his family to offer his yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow to Yahweh. ²²Hannah would not go along but she said to her husband, "I will bring the child there as soon as he is weaned. He shall be presented to Yahweh and stay there forever." ²³Her husband answered, "Do what seems best to you. Stay here until you have weaned the child and may Yahweh confirm your

• **1.1** It all starts with an ordinary couple living a familiar drama in a hill town.

The woman, in an inferior situation, as it will always be in Israel, is only worth the children she bears. A man has as many wives as he is able to maintain. Elkanah loves Hannah, but in the way he loves his children.

God likes to choose his servants precisely from those families who have no hope of having children. It is God who gives life to the dead and hope to those who have none. The same happens with the birth of Isaac and John the Baptist

(Lk 1:5). In the book of Isaiah is a poem which starts with these words: "Rejoice, O barren woman who has not given birth!" (Is 54:1).

These pages depict for us the religious life of those days. The campaign tent which shelters the ark is at Shiloh. There is no temple yet in Israel, so pilgrims bring their animals; and the father as head of the family and priest of his household sacrifices the victims. Only after David's time will the priests of Levi's tribe be the exclusive intermediaries between Yahweh and his people.

vow.” So Hannah stayed behind and continued to nurse her son until he was weaned.

Num
15:8

²⁴When the child was weaned, Hannah took him with her along with a three-year-old bull, a measure of flour and a flask of wine, and she brought him to Yahweh’s house at Shiloh. The child was still young.

²⁵After they had slain the bull, they

brought the child to Eli. ²⁶Hannah exclaimed: “Oh, my lord, look! I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to Yahweh. ²⁷I asked for this child and Yahweh granted me the favor I begged of him. ²⁸Now, I think, Yahweh is asking for this child. As long as he lives, he belongs to Yahweh.”

And they worshiped Yahweh there.

Hannah’s Prayer

2

• ¹And this is the song of Hannah,

“My heart exults in Yahweh,
I feel strong in my God.

I rejoice and laugh at my enemies
for you came with power to save me.

²Yahweh alone is holy, no one is like you;
there is no Rock like our God.

³Speak proudly no more;
no more arrogance on your lips,
for Yahweh is an all-knowing God,
he it is who weighs the deeds of all.

⁴The bow of the mighty is broken
but the weak are girded with strength.

⁵The well-fed must labor for bread
but the hungry need work no more.
The childless wife has borne seven children,
but the proud mother is left alone.

⁶Yahweh is Lord of life and death;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.

⁷Yahweh makes poor and makes rich,
he brings low and he exalts.

⁸He lifts up the lowly from the dust,
and raises the poor from the ash heap;
they will be called to the company of princes,
and inherit a seat of honor.

The earth to its pillars belongs to Yahweh
and on them he has set the world.

Is
61:10
Lk
1:46

Ex
15:11
Is
64:3

Ps
113:9

Dt
32:39
Hos
6:1
Ps
30:4

Job
38:6
Pro
8:29
Ps
75:4

• **2.1** In her thanksgiving song, Hannah makes herself the spokesperson of all the despised people of the world.

Yahweh is the God who saves the abandoned. He rejects those who put their trust *in their arm and in their bow*, in the food assured for their household, i.e., in themselves and their possessions. He manifests his glory in shifting the differences existing between people (as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lk 16:25).

Yahweh brings down to the grave and raises up. The song of Hannah has a prophetic vision. Like Hannah, we ought to be proud of our God, even more than in the material progress of our society which blesses the rich and the powerful.

This text condemns those who seek to advance in society and promote their own welfare with the sole purpose of ensuring their family’s future. One who sides with the weak will be saved. Whereas others feel ashamed of their

⁹He guards the steps of his faithful ones,
but the wicked perish in darkness,
for no one succeeds by his own strength.

¹⁰The enemies of Yahweh are shattered,
against them he thunders in heaven.
Yahweh rules over the whole world,
he will raise his own king.
His anointed feels strong in Him.”

¹¹After that Elkanah went home to Ramah while the boy served Yahweh in the presence of Eli, the priest.

The story of Eli

¹²The sons of Eli were worthless men who had no regard for Yahweh.

¹³This is how they acted with the people. When someone offered sacrifice, the servant of the priest would come while the meat was still boiling.

¹⁴With a fork, he would reach into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot, and all that the fork brought up would be for the priests. This is how these priests treated the Israelites who went to Shiloh. ¹⁵Sometimes the priest's servant would come before the fat was burned and would say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, only raw.” ¹⁶And if the man answered, “Let the fat be burned first and then take as much as you wish,” he would say, “No, give it to me now or else I will take it by force.”

¹⁷The sin of these young priests was very great in the sight of Yahweh because they defiled the offering of Yahweh.

¹⁸Meanwhile Samuel, now a boy wearing a priest's garment, was ministering before Yahweh. ¹⁹From time to time his mother made him a little robe which she handed to him when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰Eli blessed Elkanah

and his wife with these words, “May Yahweh give you more children by this woman for the sake of the boy she asked for and then gave to Yahweh.”

²¹After the man had gone back home, Yahweh blessed Hannah with more children. She had three sons and two daughters while the boy Samuel grew in the presence of Yahweh.

²²Eli was now very old. He heard how his sons dealt with the Israelites and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ²³So he told them, “How can you do the things I hear about you from everyone? ²⁴No, my sons, what I hear from the pilgrims of Yahweh's people is really bad news for me. ²⁵When anyone sins against another person, God will mediate for him. But if he sins against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?” Yet the two would not listen to their father for Yahweh had already decided that they should die.

²⁶The boy Samuel, in the meantime, was growing in stature and worth before Yahweh and the people.

²⁷One day, a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “This is Yahweh's word: I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. ²⁸I chose them out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests, to go up to my altar, to burn incense and to wear a priest's robe in my presence, and I gave them all the burnt offerings of Israel. ²⁹Why do you now despise my sacrifice and the offerings that I myself ordered? Why do you give more importance to your

Lev
3:3

22:18
2S
6:14

Ex
38:8

LK
2:52

poor background, as laborers or farmers or of the undeveloped condition of their country, the believer knows that the poor and the hungry contribute to the salvation of the world. Where

everything is wanting, it is easier to discover the value of human persons, and to understand that no world is worthy of humankind except one where food and dignity are given to all.

sons than to me and fatten yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering made by my people Israel? ³⁰ Therefore, Yahweh, the God of Israel declares: I promised that your family and that of your father should go on ministering before me forever; but now, far be it from me! Those who honor me I shall honor, those who despise me will be despised. ³¹ The days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of all your relatives. ³² No one will live to a ripe old age. ³³ Those of your household that I do not reject from my service will be spared only to weep bitterly and live in grief; but the rest shall die by the sword. ³⁴ What will happen to your sons Hophni and Phinehas shall be a sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. ³⁵ I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall act according to my heart and mind. I will give him a lasting succession that will serve me and my anointed one forever. ³⁶ And everyone that is left of your family shall ask him for some money or a loaf of bread, saying: Appoint me, I beg you, for a priestly function so that I may have something to eat.”

God calls Samuel

3 • ¹ The boy Samuel ministered to Yahweh under Eli’s care in a time in which the word of Yahweh was rarely heard; visions were not seen.

² One night Eli was lying down in his room, half blind as he was. ³ The lamp of God was still lighted and Samuel also lay in the house of Yahweh near the ark of God. ⁴ Then Yahweh called, “Samuel! Samuel!” Samuel answered, “I am here!” ⁵ and ran to Eli saying, “I am here, did you not call me?” But Eli said, “I did not call, go back to sleep.” So he went and lay down.

⁶ Then Yahweh called again, “Samuel!” and Samuel stood up and went to

Eli saying, “You called me; I am here.” But Eli answered, “I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep.”

⁷ Samuel did not yet know Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ But Yahweh called Samuel for the third time and, as he went again to Eli saying, “I am here for you have called me,” Eli realized that it was Yahweh calling the boy. ⁹ So he said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you again, answer: “Speak, Yahweh, your servant listens.”

¹⁰ Then Yahweh came and stood there calling as he did before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant listens.”

¹¹ Then Yahweh spoke to Samuel, “Look, I am about to do something in Israel which will scare everyone who hears about it. ¹² On that day I will carry out what I told Eli regarding his family. All will be fulfilled from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I was about to sentence his family forever. He himself knew that his sons were blaspheming God, but he did not stop them. ¹⁴ This is why I have cursed the family of Eli. Their sin shall never be atoned for by sacrifice or by any offering.”

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and rose up early. Then he opened the doors of Yahweh’s house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “I am here.” ¹⁷ Eli asked, “What did Yahweh tell you? Do not hide it from me. Fear the punish-

• **3.1** God’s call to Samuel is personal and direct. The answer of the child Samuel prepares him for greater things.

How seriously Eli, in spite of his age and function, regards Samuel! He knows that spiritual maturity has nothing to do with physical age and he accepts God’s reproaches relayed through this boy.

The Bible also underlines the responsibility of those who do not discipline their children. The father’s duty to educate and correct his children, even by punishing them, instead of leaving them to do what they want, was taught in Israel. As the conscience of the child is not yet fully awake, the future liberty of the young person as a mature

adult has to be ensured through the discipline of a “Law.” (See Sir 30; Gal 4 and commentary on Jdg 8:22.)

The call of Samuel reminds us that every person has a vocation, i.e., that God calls individuals and destines them to accomplish their own irreplaceable tasks. In our society many are looked upon merely as work force and receive little appreciation. Since they have no duty or responsibility of which they can be proud, they rightly feel frustrated. They do not feel themselves “called” or needed for something big. So they lack one of the more important drives to build their future. In directing one’s life, each one has to ask: “What does God want of me?”

2K
21:12
Jer
19:3

ment of God if you hide from me even one thing he told you.”¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything to the end and Eli said, “He is Yahweh. Let him do what seems good to him.”

¹⁹Samuel grew; Yahweh was with him and made all his words become true. ²⁰All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was really Yahweh’s prophet. ²¹Yahweh would appear at Shiloh; there he revealed himself to Samuel by giving him his word.

The Philistines capture the ark

4 • ¹At that time Samuel was a prophet of Israel. The Israelites went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ²The Philistines then drew up in battle formation. They attacked Israel and after a fierce struggle, Israel was defeated, leaving about four thousand men dead on the battlefield. ³When the troops retreated to their camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why has Yahweh allowed us to be defeated by the Philistines? Let us take the ark of God from Shiloh and bring it here so that Yahweh may be with us and save us from our enemies.” ⁴So the people sent messengers to Shiloh to take the ark of Yahweh who is seated on the cherubim. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, accompanied the ark.

⁵As soon as the ark of Yahweh entered the camp, the Israelites began to cheer so loudly that the earth resounded. ⁶The Philistines heard the shouting and asked, “What does this loud shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And they were told that the ark of Yahweh had been brought to the camp.

⁷The Philistines were overcome with

fear. They exclaimed, “A god has come into the camp. ⁸Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can save us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues – and in the desert. ⁹Take courage and conduct yourselves like men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews the way they have been slaves to you. Be manly and fight.”

¹⁰So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated. Everyone fled to his home. It was a disastrous defeat; thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel were killed. ¹¹The ark of God was captured and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

¹²A man from the tribe of Benjamin fled from the battle line and arrived that same day in Shiloh. His clothes were torn and his head was covered with dust. ¹³When this man arrived, Eli was on his seat by the road, watching, for his heart trembled for what might happen to the ark of God. When the people heard the news the man brought, all the city cried out. ¹⁴Eli heard their outcry and asked, “What is all this noise?” The man came to Eli at once and told him what happened. ¹⁵Eli was by then ninety-eight years old and was already blind. ¹⁶The man said to him, “I came from the battle, for I was able to flee from it.” Then Eli asked him, “How did the battle go, my son?” ¹⁷The newsbearer answered, “Israel fled before the Philistines. There has been a disaster for our men; your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are among the dead and the ark of God has been taken.” ¹⁸As soon as the man mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate. He broke his neck and died for he was an old and heavy man. Eli judged Israel for forty years.

¹⁹Eli’s daughter-in-law, wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and was about to give birth. When she heard that the ark of God was taken and that both her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she gave birth prematurely. ²⁰As she lay dying, the women attending her

• **4.1** In their war against the Philistines, the Israelites seek the protection of Yahweh. They look for the Ark, thinking that, when it is with them, Yahweh will be obliged to grant them victory. And since the human being often doubts his God, he relies on his lucky charms.

God is not concerned with the sacred Ark, nor is he at the service of an irresponsible people. Instead, he wants to educate them by making them pay the price for their unfaithfulness. For this reason, God does not respond to them and the sacred Ark is lost.

said to her, "Do not be afraid for you have given birth to a son." But she neither answered nor listened. ²¹ She then named the child Ichabod, saying: "The glory has departed from Israel!" ²² And she said "the glory," meaning the ark of God that had been captured.

5 ¹ After they had taken the ark of God, the Philistines carried it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² There they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it up beside him. ³ Rising up early the following day, the people saw that Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of Yahweh. So they picked up Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose the following morning, the people saw Dagon on the ground again, face downward before the ark of Yahweh. His head and hands were broken off and lay at the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left where he fell. ⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and his worshipers do not tread on the threshold of his temple in Ashdod up to this day.

⁶ The hand of Yahweh was heavy upon the people of Ashdod. Yahweh afflicted the people of Ashdod and its vicinity with hemorrhoids. ⁷ Seeing this, the people of Ashdod said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel not remain with us. His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon, our god." ⁸ So they had all the chiefs of the Philistine cities gathered together to ask them, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" They answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought to Gath." So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. ⁹ But as soon as they had brought it to Gath, Yahweh raised his hand against the city, causing a very great panic. He afflicted the people there, both young and old, with hemorrhoids. ¹⁰ So they moved the ark of God to Ekron. But when the ark entered Ekron, the people there cried out, "They have brought us the ark of the God of Israel to slay us all." ¹¹ So they gathered the chiefs of the Philistine cities together to tell them, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel. Let it return to its own place lest we all die." For there was deadly panic throughout the city because of God's heavy hand. ¹² Those who did not die were stricken with hemorrhoids and the cry of the city reached to heaven.

6 ¹ The ark of Yahweh was in the country of the Philistines for seven months. ² The Philistines called their priests and diviners and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of Yahweh? Tell us how we shall send it back to its place." ³ The priests and diviners answered, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty. Instead, provide him with a guilt offering. Then you may be healed and you will know

why God dealt with you so severely." ⁴ The chiefs then asked, "What guilt offering shall we provide him with?" The priests and diviners answered, "Make five golden figures of hemorrhoids and five golden figures of mice corresponding to the number of Philistine cities, for the same plague was on all of you and on your chiefs. ⁵ So you must make images of your hemorrhoids and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will remove his hand from you, your gods and your land. ⁶ But do not harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did. After Yahweh had afflicted them, did they not have to let the people go?

⁷ Now, then, prepare a new cart and take two milking cows which have never carried a yoke. Yoke the cows to the cart but take their calves away from them. ⁸ Then, take the ark of Yahweh and place it on the cart. Put in a box beside it the golden figures which you are giving him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way. ⁹ Then, watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, through Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm. If not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, that all these things happened to us by chance."

¹⁰ The people carried out these instructions. They took two milking cows and yoked them to the cart and shut their calves in their shed. ¹¹ They then put the ark of Yahweh on the cart, along with the box with the golden mice and the images of their hemorrhoids. ¹² The cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along the way; they went mooing and they turned neither to the right nor to the left. Meanwhile, the chiefs of the Philistine cities followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

¹³ The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley when they saw the ark drawing near, and they rejoiced greatly. ¹⁴ The cart arrived in Beth-shemesh in Joshua's field and stopped there. A big stone lay nearby, so the people split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows over the stone as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Levites took down the ark of Yahweh and the box containing the golden figures, and they set these up on the big stone.

That day the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to Yahweh. The five chiefs of the Philistine cities, however, ¹⁶ upon seeing what happened, immediately returned to Ekron.

¹⁷ These are the Philistine cities which gave golden figures of hemorrhoids as a guilt offering to Yahweh: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Akron. ¹⁸ Similarly, there were golden figures of mice corresponding in

Is
19:1Zep
1:9Ex
7:12S
24:22
1K
19:21

number to all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five leaders, counting fortified cities and unwalled villages. The big stone beside which the people set down the ark of Yahweh in the field of Joshua of Bethshemesh, is a witness to this day.

¹⁹Yahweh caused the death of seventy men of Beth-shemesh who had looked at the ark of Yahweh. On seeing this, the people mourned greatly. ²⁰The people of Bethshemesh then said, "Who can stand before Yahweh, this holy God? And where can we send the ark away from us?" ²¹So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim with this word, "The Philistines have returned the ark of Yahweh. Come down and take it up with you."

7 ¹The people of Kiriath-jearim came for the ark of Yahweh. They brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to take charge of it.

Samuel awakens Israel

²A very long time passed from the day the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim. For some twenty years, all Israel mourned and longed for Yahweh.

³Then Samuel told the Israelites, "If you turn back to Yahweh in all sincerity, get rid of the foreign gods and your Ashteroth. When you have set your heart on Yahweh and serve no one but him, he will deliver you from the Philistines." ⁴So the Israelites got rid of the Baals and the Ashteroth and began serving no one but Yahweh.

⁵Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel in Mizpah and I will pray to Yahweh on your behalf." ⁶And so they gathered at Mizpah. They drew water and poured it out before Yahweh. They fasted on that day and said, "We have sinned against Yahweh." It was Samuel who led this assembly of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the chiefs of the Philistine cities

went up to Israel's land. The Israelites became afraid when they learned this ⁸and they said to Samuel, "Pray without ceasing to Yahweh our God on our behalf so that he may save us from the Philistines." ⁹Samuel then took a suckling lamb and offered it to Yahweh as a whole burnt offering, appealing to him on behalf of the people. And Yahweh answered him.

¹⁰At the very time Samuel was offering the sacrifice, the Philistines launched an attack against Israel. But Yahweh's voice thundered loudly in the midst of the Philistines; they were suddenly confused and defeated by Israel. ¹¹The Israelites left Mizpah, pursuing and slaying the Philistines to a point beyond Bethcar.

¹²Samuel, then, took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and named it Ebenezer, for he said, "Unto this place Yahweh has helped us." ¹³After this defeat, the Philistines did not dare enter the territory of Israel and Yahweh held them in check for as long as Samuel lived. ¹⁴The Israelites recovered the towns from Ekron to Gath which the Philistines had seized from Israel. Israel rescued their territories. And there was peace, even between the Israelites and the Amorites.

¹⁵Samuel was judge in Israel for the rest of his life. ¹⁶Every year he went around to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷After that he returned to Ramah for his home was there. There he judged Israel and there he built an altar to Yahweh.

The people ask for a king

8 ¹When Samuel grew old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ²His elder son was Joel and the second was Abijah, and both of them were judges in Beersheba. ³But they were not like their father; they had their vested interests, taking bribes and perverting justice.

• **7.2** The same experience recorded in Judges is repeated here. Samuel convinces Israel to return to Yahweh. Yahweh, in turn, faithful to his Covenant, grants them victory.

• **8.1** A deep transformation took place in the way of life of the ancient nomads now living

in villages and towns like the rest of the population. Former social structures adapted to life in the desert were no longer suitable, something that is often seen in the history of nations, as well as in the Church. Humankind is constantly changing, led on by events and technical evolution; differences in mentalities appear, revealing

Mal
3:2

Jdg
6:6
10:10

Gen
35:2
Jos
24:14
Jdg
6:10

Jdg
20:26

2:12
Ex
23:8
Dt
16:19

^{Ezk 20:32}
^{Ex 3:8} ⁴Because of this, all the chiefs of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel in Ramah. ⁵They said to him, “You are already old and your sons are not following your ways. Give us a king to rule over us as in all the other nations.”

⁶Samuel was very displeased with what they said, “Give us a king to rule us,” and he prayed to Yahweh. ⁷And Yahweh told him, “Give to this people all that they ask for. ⁸They are not rejecting you but they have rejected me as their king. They are now doing to you what they did to me from the day I brought them out of Egypt until now, forsaking me and serving other gods. ⁹Nevertheless, listen to them, and give them a serious warning. Tell them how they will be treated by their king.”

¹⁰So Samuel answered those who were asking him for a king, ¹¹and he told them all that Yahweh said to him, ^{2S 15:1}
^{1K 1:5} “Look, these will be the demands of your king: he will take your sons and assign them to his chariot and his horses and have them run before his chariot. ¹²Some he will assign as commanders over a thousand men and commanders over fifty. Others will till his ground and reap his harvest, make his implements of war and the equipment for his chari-

ots. ¹³He will take your daughters as well to prepare perfumes, to cook and to bake for him. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive orchards and give them to his officials. ¹⁵He will take a tenth portion of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶He will take your menservants and maidservants, the best of your cattle and your asses for his own work. ¹⁷He will take the tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When these things happen, you will cry out because of the king whom you have chosen for yourselves. But by then, Yahweh will not answer you.”

¹⁹The people paid no attention to all that Samuel said. They insisted, “No! We want a king to govern us as in all the other nations. ²⁰Our king shall govern us, lead us and go ahead of us in our battles.” ²¹Upon hearing all that his people said, Samuel repeated it to Yahweh. ²²But Yahweh said to him, “Listen to them and give them a king.” Samuel then said to the Israelites, “Go back, all of you, to your own cities.”

The story of Saul

9 ¹There was a man from the tribe of Benjamin whose name was

how ill-adapted are ancient structures to new situations. Because of this there is a permanent tension between life and institutions.

On the other hand, institutions indispensable to the life of communities have as their essential purpose to channel, order and organize this ever turbulent life; without creativity people are dead in life; without permanent institution a society turns towards anarchy. If the tension between life and institution is permanent, it becomes manifest when society is in crisis. While conservative elements think of reestablishing order as a return to the past, the innovators, looking for fresh structures in order to respond to present reality, forget too quickly what past experience has taught.

Chapters 8–12 of 1st Samuel present us such a crisis and the conflicts arising from it. The people realize their weakness as coming from division and anarchy. The temporary authority of the “Judges” is outdated; the twelve tribes must unite around a king.

Samuel is a defender of the past, and his

warnings are inspired by personal distrust. He does not recognize the advantage of a stronger and more centralized government. Instead he is in touch with reality and denounces absolute power.

Samuel reproaches the people for their lack of trust in Yahweh. Now as they face the Philistine peril, they believe they will have security in handing over to someone else, a strong leader, the responsibility of thinking and deciding for them: they are fearful of taking initiatives. When one expects everything from civil or religious authorities it means either sinking or suffering political tyranny.

According to Samuel, theoretically the king will be God’s representative and his people’s servant. In reality, he will serve his own ambitions and be the nation’s oppressor. Already in that ancient time, dictators had enough knowledge of propaganda to convince people that they were indispensable (Lk 22:25).

- **9.1** The continuation of chapter 8 is in

Kish. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a valiant Benjaminite. ² Kish had a son named Saul, a handsome young man who had no equal among the Israelites, for he was a head taller than any of them.

³ It happened that the asses of Kish were lost. So he said to his son Saul, “Take one of the boys with you and go look for the asses.” ⁴ They went all over the hill country of Ephraim and the land of Shalishah but did not find them. They passed through the land of Shalim and the land of Benjamin, but the asses were nowhere to be found.

⁵ When they reached the land of Zuph, Saul said to his boy, “Let us go back, lest my father be more worried about us than about the asses.” ⁶ But his servant said to him, “Look, there is a man of God in this city. He is a highly respected man. All that he says comes true. Let us see him for he may be able to help us find what we are looking for.”

⁷ Saul replied, “But if we go, what can we bring him? We have no more bread in our sacks and we have no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?” ⁸ The servant answered, “I still have with me a quarter silver coin. I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.”

¹⁰ And Saul said to his boy, “Well said! Come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was.

Samuel anoints Saul

¹¹ As they went up the hill to the city, they met young girls coming out to draw water and asked them, “Is the seer here?” ⁹ (Formerly, people in Israel

who went to consult God, would say, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for they did not speak of prophets, but of seers.)

¹² The maidens answered, “The seer is straight ahead. He has just arrived because they have a sacrifice today on the high place. ¹³ As soon as you enter the city, you shall find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he comes because he must first bless the sacrifice, and then those who are invited may eat. Now go up; you will meet him immediately.”

¹⁴ So they went up to the city and entered it, and saw Samuel coming out towards them on his way up to the high place.

¹⁵ The day before Saul came, Yahweh had already disclosed this to Samuel, ¹⁶ “Tomorrow, about this time, I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin and you shall anoint him to rule over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines for I have seen the affliction of my people and their cry has come to me.”

¹⁷ So, when Samuel saw Saul, Yahweh told him, “Here is the man I spoke to you about! He shall rule over my people.”

¹⁸ Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and said, “Tell me, where is the house of the seer?” ¹⁹ Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me. In the morning, before you leave, I will tell you all that is in your heart. ²⁰ As for your asses that were lost three days ago, do not worry about them for they have been found.”

10:17. Here instead the story of Saul’s vocation begins. Saul sets out to look for his father’s mules and, on the way, encounters something he did not expect.

• 11. The young Saul, just like many other Israelites, goes to Samuel. For them the prophet is a seer, a diviner, and they go to him for a solution to their economic problems. We should

not find this strange. For centuries, those who were addicted to the science of the stars also attended consultations concerning the future. Reading horoscopes was their way of earning a living. Science later departed from those practices.

In the same way in the early history of Israel, the prophet hardly seems different from a soothsayer, an astrologist and others who claim to

Jdg
10:4

Jdg
18:5

1K
14:3

Acts
9:10

Samuel added, "For whom is the first place in Israel? Isn't it for you and for all your father's kin?" ²¹ Saul answered, "I am a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the lowliest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why do you speak to me in this way?"

²² Samuel took Saul and his boy, brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of the table, before some thirty guests. ²³ Then Samuel told the cook, "Bring in the portion which I asked you to put aside." ²⁴ The cook brought in the leg with the tail portion and set it before Saul, saying to him, "This has been set aside for you. Please eat." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

²⁵ Then they went down from the high place and entered the city. On the terrace they prepared a bed for Saul where he lay down to sleep. ²⁶ Early the next morning, Samuel called to Saul, "Get up, for I must send you on your way." Saul got up and began to walk down the street with Samuel.

²⁷ As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell your servant to walk ahead. You stay here for a while and I shall give you a message from God."

10 ¹ Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on Saul's head. And kissing Saul, Samuel said, "Yahweh has anointed you to rule over and to lead his people Israel. And this will be Yahweh's sign to you that he has anointed you. ² After we part today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb at Zelzah, in the territory of Benjamin. They will say to you: 'The asses you were looking for have been found. But your father is now worried about you,

and what may have happened to you.' ³ When you go on to the oak of Tabor, you will meet three men going up to see God at Bethel. One will be carrying three kids; another, three loaves of bread; and another, a skin of wine. ⁴ They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you are to accept from them. ⁵ After that, you will come to Gibeath-elohim where the garrison of the Philistines is. At the entrance of the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place, and a choir with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre going before them. They will be in a trance as the prophets used to be. ⁶ Then the Spirit of Yahweh will seize you. You shall prophesy with them and become another man.

⁷ Now when these signs are fulfilled, do whatever seems good to you for God is with you. ⁸ You shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me, and I shall join you there to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. Wait there seven days until I come and tell you what you have to do."

⁹ As soon as Saul parted from Samuel, God transformed him into a different person and all the signs Samuel mentioned to Saul were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰ Upon entering Gibeah, a band of prophets met Saul; then the Spirit of God seized him and he began to prophesy with them.

¹¹ Those who knew him and saw him prophesying with the prophets asked one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also one of the prophets?" ¹² One of them exclaimed, "And who is his father!" ^{19:24} This, therefore, became a saying, "Is Saul also one of the prophets?" ¹³ When Saul finished prophesying, he arrived with them at the sanctuary.

¹⁴ Saul's uncle asked him and his boy, "Where did you go?" Saul answered, "To look for the asses. When we could not find them, we went to Samuel." ¹⁵ His uncle said,

know what ordinary folk cannot know; people come to consult them as does Saul for any trouble they have. But soon prophetism in Israel will find its own way: the prophet will be the one who calls people to conversion. When this chap-

ter was written, the passage was already made and v. 9 makes it clear that if before, people spoke of "seer," they now speak of "prophet."

Samuel anoints Saul with anointing oil (see commentary on Lev 8).

“Please, tell me what Samuel told you.”
 16 Saul replied, “He merely told us that the asses had been found.” But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

Saul is elected king

• 17 After that, Samuel called the people together before Yahweh at Mizpah. 18 He then spoke to the Israelites, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I brought Israel out of Egypt and I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from all the kingdoms oppressing you. 19 But you have this day rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and your distress. You have said, ‘No! Give us a king to rule over us.’ So now present yourselves before Yahweh, grouping yourselves into tribes and clans.”

^{Jos 7:16} 20 Then Samuel made all the tribes of Israel come near him and when they cast lots, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. 21 He made the families of the tribe of Benjamin come near him, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. He made the members of the family of Matrites come near him, and the lot fell to Saul, son of Kish. They looked for him but could not find him. 22 So they asked Yahweh again, “Did the man come here?” Yahweh answered, “He has hidden himself among the baggage.” 23 They ran to fetch him and when Saul stood among the people, they saw that he was a head taller than the others.
^{2K 11:12} 24 Samuel spoke and said, “Do you see the one Yahweh has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.” And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

^{Dt 17:14-20} 25 Samuel then told the people the rights and duties of the king. He wrote all these in a book and presented it before Yahweh. Then Samuel sent all the people home. 26 Saul himself went home to Gibeah with these valiant men whose hearts God had touched. 27 Some evil people, however, remarked; “How can this man save us?” And they ignored Saul and brought him no gift.

• **10.17** Here is the logical continuation of chapter 8; it is another account of Saul’s election which does not openly contradict the one related in the previous chapter, since Samuel consecrated Saul secretly.

It is interesting that here the same event is narrated in the Bible by two men of contrary opinions. The first saw the institution of kings as a good thing and in accordance with God’s plan (chapters 9–10); the second (1 S 8 and 10:17–19) saw it as a dangerous innovation which God merely tolerated.

He has hidden himself among the baggage. Here begins the tragedy of Saul, king in spite of himself. The Israelites asked for a king because of external threat (the Philistines), but in their innermost self they rejected all authority. Saul

Saul rescues the city of Jabesh

11 • 1 One month later, Nahash the Ammonite went to Jabesh-gilead and surrounded the city. The people of Jabesh told Nahash, “Make an agreement with us and we will serve you.” 2 Nahash answered, “I will make an agreement with you on this condition: I will pluck out the right eye of all of you, so that Israel will be left disgraced.” 3 The elders of Jabesh then told him, “Give us seven days so we may send messengers through all the territories of Israel. If none of them comes to save us, we will surrender to you.”

4 So the messengers went to Gibeah of Saul, breaking the news to the people. And all the people wept aloud.

5 Just then Saul came from the field with his oxen. He asked, “What has happened to make the people weep?” And they told him what the men of Jabesh had said. 6 At once, the spirit of God seized Saul and he was greatly angered. 7 He took a yoke of oxen, cut them into pieces and gave them to the messengers to be taken through all the territories of Israel with this warning, “I will do the same with the oxen of anyone who does not come out after Saul and Samuel.”

Then a holy fear came upon the people and they set out as one man.

8 When Saul inspected them at Bezek, the men of Israel were three hundred thousand; those of Judah, thirty

himself did not feel cut out for governing. In spite of his courage, as seen in chapter 11, he was not one to take risks. He was an obstinate man; attached to the ideas of his time (see chapter 25). Saul, a modest man, did not have the humility that God seeks, which consists in undertaking new and great things without being afraid of possible failure.

All the people shouted: Long live the King! We have witnessed several enthusiastic meetings such as this, which led to no positive result. As happens to many leaders, the next day Saul finds himself alone in the midst of a people who think that they have solved everything because an election has been carried out.

• **11.1** The account which was interrupted

thousand. ⁹And they sent the messengers with this answer to the people of Jabesh, "Tomorrow, by noontime, we shall come to you." When the messengers returned, the people of Jabesh were very comforted ¹⁰and they told Nahash, "Tomorrow we will surrender and you may do to us whatever you please."

^{Jdg 7:16} ¹¹The following morning, Saul divided the people into three groups. They broke into the enemy camp early in the morning and slew the Ammonites until noontime. Those who could escape were scattered, each one running his own way.

^{14:45} ^{2S 19:23} ¹²Then the people asked Samuel, "Who are these who said: Saul will never reign over us? Bring the men and we shall put them to death." ¹³But Saul said, "No man shall be put to death today, for this day Yahweh has saved Israel."

¹⁴Samuel told the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and officially proclaim the kingdom." ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal and there they proclaimed Saul king before Yahweh. They sacrificed peace offerings and Saul and all Israel celebrated.

Samuel gives way to Saul

12 ¹Samuel spoke to the Israelites, "Listen, I have paid attention to all that you have told me and have

given you a king. ²From now on, the king is here to lead you. As for me, I am old and my hair gray. My sons are with you. I have led you from my youth, and I have done so until this day. ³Now, I am here. Answer me before Yahweh and his anointed: Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I stolen? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? Have I taken a bribe from anyone? If so, tell me, and I will restore it to you." ⁴But they said, "You have not cheated or oppressed us; you have not stolen anything from anyone."

⁵Then Samuel said, "Yahweh is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they answered, "He is witness."

⁶Samuel then said to the people, "Yahweh is witness, he who sent Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. ⁷Now, stand still, that I may confront you with all the deeds of Yahweh who saved you and your ancestors. ⁸Jacob went to Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed your ancestors. Then they cried to Yahweh and he sent Moses and Aaron. They brought your ancestors out of Egypt and brought them to this land. ⁹But they forgot Yahweh, their God, and he delivered them into the hands of Sisera, commander of the army of Jabin, king of Hazor, into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the king of Moab who fought against them. ¹⁰Then your ancestors cried to Yahweh and said: 'We have sinned, forsaking Yahweh and serving the Baals and the Ashteroth. But now, deliver us out of the hands of our enemies and we will

Num
16:15
Acts
20:33

Jdg
4-5
Jdg
13-16

in 10:16 is resumed here. The people of Jabesh are disposed to accept peace. Israel weeps and shouts, but Saul decides that this situation is unbearable. His courage obliges God to act.

Who are those who asked if Saul was going to reign? There is no political life without parties. From the beginning, Saul had his allies and his foes. But he must heed even more the "tribalism" of the Israelites, especially the rivalry between the northern tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin, and the tribe of Judah, in the south. As for the people of Jabesh, they will remain grateful to their savior and will be faithful to him until after his death. (See 1 S 31:11.)

Saul is a good and generous man who does not take revenge on his enemies. Yet when one is the highest authority, one easily isolates self from others and becomes arrogant or pessimistic. Saul will refuse to listen to God and to his

relatives, and his jealousy will blind him, as it did in regard to David.

• **12.1** It was hard for Samuel to step aside to make place for Saul, as is the case for many founders or responsible persons who are unable to cede to others who are younger or more competent the care of continuing and developing the work they created.

In this opportunity Samuel reminds the Israelites that no authority can be exempted from the law of God, especially when its duty is to maintain the law. "If you yourselves and the king who rules you follow Yahweh..." For Samuel, the king, like his subjects, must faithfully observe the terms of the Covenant; unfortunately very soon the kings of Israel would consider themselves dispensed from this fidelity. No sooner is Solomon enthroned than he leaves the palace

serve you.’¹¹ And Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hands of your enemies from all sides, so that you lived in safety in your land.

¹² Now, when you saw that Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, attacked you, you said to me: ‘No! Let a king rule over us,’ although Yahweh your God was your king.

¹³ Yet Yahweh has given you the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for.

¹⁴ May you fear Yahweh and serve him! May you listen to him and not go against his commandments! May both you and the king who reigns over you follow Yahweh, your God!¹⁵ But if you will not listen to Yahweh and if you break his commandments, his hand will be against you and your king.

¹⁶ Now wait awhile that you may see the wonder which Yahweh will do before you.¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call on Yahweh that he may send thunder and rain. So you shall know and see that you have gone very wrong in asking for another king.”

¹⁸ So Samuel called on Yahweh who sent thunder and rain on that day. Then all the people greatly feared Yahweh and Samuel.

¹⁹ The people said to Samuel, “Pray to Yahweh, your God, for your servants so we may not die. For we have added to our sins this evil of asking for a king.”²⁰ Samuel told the people, “Fear not! You have done evil, but now you must not turn away from Yahweh. Serve him, instead, with all your heart.²¹ Do not go after these useless and vain idols that are unable to save.²² Yahweh will not cast away his people because of his great Name, since he has been pleased to make you his people.²³ As for me, how can I commit the sin of ceasing to pray for you? I will continue to

instruct you in the good and right way.²⁴ Only fear Yahweh and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for you have seen the wonderful things he has done for you.²⁵ But if you still persist in wickedness, both you and your king shall be swept away.”

13 • ¹ Saul became king and he ruled over Israel. ² Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with him in Michmash and in the hills of Bethel, and a thousand with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul sent the rest of the people away, every man to his home. ³ Jonathan killed the Philistine governor in Geba and the Philistines heard of this. Saul then blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!” ⁴ And the news spread throughout Israel, “Saul has killed the Philistine governor and now Israel is at war with them.” And they called everyone out to join Saul at Gilgal.

The “sin” of Saul

• ⁵ The Philistines gathered to fight with Israel – three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and troops as many as the sand on the seashore. They went up and encamped in Michmash, east of Bethaven. ⁶ When the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble, they hid themselves in caves, in holes, in rocks, in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ or crossed the fords of the Jordan River to the land of Gad and Gilead.

⁸ Saul was still at Gilgal and all the people with him were afraid. He waited

that David his father built in the lower city in the midst of the people’s houses to go and install himself beside the Temple of Yahweh. Henceforth the ordinary people would be below and God and the king, on the holy mountain, Quite symbolic! When Jesus comes, he will take up the teaching of Samuel and the prophets: “The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve and give his life...” Even in the Church, the new Israel, some who carry responsibility will be seen acting like churchlords confusing responsibility with abuse of authority.

• **13.1** Saul did not think of leaving his town of Gibeah to construct a capital for the new state of Israel. But, gradually, he created a permanent army, instead of merely depending on volunteers who came forward whenever the people were in danger (see 14:52). For years, he fought unceasingly to repel incursions of the Philistines.

• 5. Not once, but on several occasions, Saul vacillates between obedience to God and Samuel, and doing what appears to him more

reasonable (see also chap. 15). Finally, he prefers to act according to his own judgment.

Yahweh would have secured your rule over Israel. Yahweh demands more from him who is the first king of his people, and with whom he wants to establish a lasting covenant. To receive from Yahweh promises which go beyond ordinary destiny, Saul has to show complete loyalty, even when it seems that God delays or is mistaken. In this type of trial, Abraham was victorious.

In recounting the story of the kings and leaders of Israel, the Bible makes us understand that power is too heavy a burden for humans. To rule over others and, even more, to direct the destiny of a nation is somehow to partake in God’s authority. No one can measure up to such responsibilities if he or she cannot obey more than others and listen to God.

However we should note that the verses 8-15 are a later addition to the primitive text. These are most probably the work of priests who at the return from captivity edited the older texts. They

Jl
2:20

Jdg
6:2

seven days – the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not arrive at Gilgal and the people were beginning to disperse. ⁹So Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings as well.” Saul then offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰He had just finished offering it when Samuel arrived. Saul went out to greet Samuel ¹¹who threw him this question, “What have you done?” Saul answered him, “When I saw the people beginning to disperse because of your failure to arrive on time, and considering that the Philistines have mustered their forces at Michmash, ¹²I said to myself, ‘The Philistines will launch their attack against me before I get Yahweh’s blessings and so I decided to offer the burnt offerings.’” ¹³Samuel told Saul, “You have done a foolish thing by not obeying the command of Yahweh your God who would have established your rule forever. ¹⁴But now your kingship will not last, for Yahweh has chosen someone else more pleasing to him, whom he has appointed to be commander over his people because you have not done what Yahweh commanded you.” ¹⁵Samuel then left Gilgal and went on his way. Meanwhile the people went up from Gilgal with Saul to join the warriors at Gibeah of Benjamin.

Saul reviewed his men numbering some six hundred. ¹⁶While Saul and his son Jonathan stayed in Gebah of Benjamin with the men, the Philistines pitched camp in Michmash. ¹⁷Raiders came out of the Philistine camp in three

companies – one company turned to Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸the other, to Bethoron; and the third, to the border overlooking the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness.

¹⁹The Israelites had no smith anywhere in their land, for the Philistines did not want the Hebrews to make swords or spears. ²⁰To have their plowshare, mattock, axe or sickle sharpened, the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines ²¹who would charge them two-thirds of a shekel for plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening axes and setting goads. ²²And so, on the day of battle, the Israelites had neither sword nor spear. Only Saul and Jonathan had them.

²³Yet the Philistine raiders had moved on toward the pass of Michmash.

14 • ¹The same day, Jonathan, son of Saul, said to his armor-bearer, “Let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side. Jonathan did not inform his father about this. ²Saul was at that time on the outskirts of Gibeah, at Migron, under the pomegranate tree with about six hundred men. ³Also with Saul was Ahijah, son of Ahitub, brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, priest of Yahweh in Shiloh, and he was wearing the ephod to consult Yahweh. Not even the soldiers knew that Jonathan had left them.

⁴The pass through which Jonathan planned to go to reach the Philistine garrison was flanked on each side by a rocky crag: one called Bozez, the other, Seneh. ⁵One of the crags was to the north in the direction of Michmash; the other to the south, in the direction of Giba.

⁶Jonathan said to his shield-bearer, “Let us go over to the garrison of those uncircum-

Jdg
5:8

4:21

1Mac
3:18
4:30

make Samuel appear as the reasonable one, the spokesperson for God. We may read this event as proposed, but we can also wonder about the way Samuel attributes to himself the rights of God. What right has he not to keep his word and come within the promised delay? And how can he condemn Saul if Saul has acted according to his conscience? Christian tradition holds that we should always follow our conscience provided we have done all that is possible to have an enlightened conscience, even if in so doing we disobey high authority or very sacred laws. Without denying Samuel’s great merits we can say it was he who destroyed Saul.

• **14.1** Chapter 14 helps us understand the Israelites’ situation. They occupy the mountain, but the Philistines who are better organized and better armed, lord it over the plains.

The incident of Saul’s oath shows the very primitive level of religious knowledge at that time, as in the case of Jephthah (Jdg 11:30):

- an oath with a death-threat,
- the importance given to the crime of one who eats where blood has been shed (see verse 33; perhaps it was not the same as to “eat meat with blood” as in Lev 17:8),
- the practice of casting lots to get Yahweh’s response.

cised fellows. It may be that Yahweh will help us, for it is as easy for Yahweh to give victory with a few men as with many.”⁷ His armor-bearer replied, “Do whatever you think best. As for me, I follow and obey you.”⁸ Jonathan said, “Look, we will draw near and show ourselves to those men.⁹ When they see us, if they cry out: ‘Stay there and we shall go over to you,’ we shall stay quiet and go no further.¹⁰ But if they say: ‘Come up to us,’ we shall go up because that will be a sign that Yahweh has delivered them into our hands.”

¹¹ When the two were seen by the Philistines, the latter exclaimed, “Look! Hebrews coming out of their hiding places!”¹² And they challenged Jonathan and his shield-bearer, “Come over here and we will teach you a lesson!” Jonathan then told his armor-bearer, “Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered them into the hands of Israel.”¹³ Then Jonathan crawled up on his hands and feet, his armor-bearer following him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer finished them off.¹⁴ In that first slaying by Jonathan and his armor-bearer, about twenty men lost their lives within half a furlong.¹⁵ Panic struck in the camp and in the countryside, sowing terror in the garrison. Even the band of raiders was disturbed. It was like an earthquake and they were filled with a holy terror.

¹⁶ Saul’s watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin saw the commotion in the camp: the Philistines were running and scattering in all directions.¹⁷ Saul then told those who were around him, “Count our men and see who is missing.” And they discovered that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not with them.¹⁸ Saul ordered Ahijah: “Bring the ephod,” because Ahijah had taken it with him.¹⁹ But while Saul was talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp increased. Saul then told the priest, “Withdraw your hand,”²⁰ and after consulting his men, he went with them to the camp. They saw that there was complete confusion and the soldiers were striking each other with their swords.²¹ Moreover, the Hebrews who had joined the Philistines turned around and sided with the Israelites under Saul and Jonathan.²² When the Israelites who were hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they came out from hiding and pursued them.²³ And so Yahweh delivered Israel that day in a battle that extended beyond Beth-horon.

²⁴ On that day, however, as the Israelites became weary, Saul took an oath putting the people under the ban, “Cursed be the man who takes food before evening, before I have avenged myself on my enemies.” Because of this oath, no one dared touch any food.²⁵ As the men wandered into the forest, they saw honey on the ground and²⁶ although it was

freely dripping from the honeycomb, no one tasted it for fear of the oath.²⁷ But Jonathan, who had not heard of this oath, dipped the tip of the rod he was holding in the honeycomb and put it to his lips. And he felt fortified.²⁸ At this, someone said, “Though the people were tired, your father bound them with this oath: cursed be the man who takes food today.”²⁹ Then Jonathan said, “My father did you wrong. See how I have been fortified by tasting a little of this honey.³⁰ If only our men had freely eaten today of the spoil of their enemies, the Philistines would have suffered an even greater defeat.”

³¹ Nevertheless they pursued the Philistines all the way from Michmash to Aijalon. Then the people, extremely worn out,³² rushed to the spoils and took sheep, oxen, and calves and, after they had slaughtered them on the ground, they ate over the blood.³³ Saul was told that the people were sinning against Yahweh by eating over the blood. He said, “You have acted like pagan people! Roll a large stone here in front of me.”³⁴ Then he added, “Go around and tell the people to bring their oxen or their sheep to me. Slaughter them here and eat, but do not offend Yahweh by eating over the blood.” So that night, everyone brought what he had of the spoils and slaughtered it there.³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to Yahweh – the first he ever built to Him.

³⁶ Then Saul said, “Let us pursue and spoil the Philistines by night and finish them off by morning without leaving a single man alive.” To this the people replied, “Do what you think is best.” But the priest said, “We must consult Yahweh.”³⁷ So Saul asked, “Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hands of Israel?” But God did not answer him that day.³⁸ Saul said, “Call all the army officers here. We must find out who is responsible for the sin that has been committed today.³⁹ I swear before Yahweh, who has just saved Israel, that he shall surely die even if it happens to be my son Jonathan.” No one answered Saul.⁴⁰ He told the people, “Go, stand on one side while I and my son Jonathan, stand on the other.” The people answered, “Do what you think is good.”⁴¹ Then Saul said, “O Yahweh, God of Israel, why did you not answer your servant this time? If it is my son Jonathan or I who have sinned, O Yahweh, God of Israel, let the casting of lots show Urim; if it is your people Israel who have sinned, let it show Thummin.” The lot cast pointed to Jonathan and Saul, not to the people.⁴² Saul then said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” The lot singled out Jonathan.

⁴³ Saul then said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan replied, “All I did was to taste a little honey from the

Jdg
7:22

7:17

Jos
7:14

tip of the rod that I dipped in the honeycomb! Am I to die for this?" ⁴⁴Saul said, "May God strike me down if you are not put to death, Jonathan." ⁴⁵But the people protested, "By no means shall Jonathan die, he who has brought this resounding victory to Israel! Not at all! By Yahweh's life not one hair of his head will fall, for he has acted today with God's assistance." So the people rescued Jonathan from certain death. ⁴⁶After that, Saul ceased to pursue the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own country.

⁴⁷When Saul felt secure as king of Israel, he began to fight against all his surrounding enemies: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines, routing his enemies wherever he went. ⁴⁸He crushed the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who were plundering them.

⁴⁹The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua; his two daughters were Merab, his firstborn, and Michal. ⁵⁰His wife was Ahinoam, daughter of Ahimaaz. The general of his army was Abner, son of Ner who was Saul's uncle. ⁵¹Kish was the father of Saul and Ner, the father of Abner, was the son of Abiel.

⁵²Saul struggled fiercely against the Philistines all the days of his life, so whenever he discovered a strong and brave man, he recruited him into his service.

Saul is rejected as king

15 ¹Samuel told Saul, "Yahweh sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel. So now listen to what he has to say to you: ²I will punish Amalek for having stood in the way of the Israelites when they were leaving Egypt. ³Now attack Amalek and destroy completely all that he has. Do not spare them – man, woman, infant or suckling, ox or sheep, camel or ass."

⁴Saul called his men to Telaim and reviewed two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. ⁵He went to the city of Amalek, set an ambush in the valley and ⁶proceeded to warn the Kenites, "Leave the Amalekites! I do not want to punish you with them since you showed kindness to the people of Israel when they left Egypt." After the Kenites had left, ⁷Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt. ⁸He took Agag, king of the Amalekites alive, but put the rest of the people to the sword. ⁹Saul and his men spared Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs and everything that was good, but destroyed all that was worthless.

¹⁰Then Yahweh spoke to Samuel: ¹¹"I feel sorry that I made Saul king because he has turned his back on me and has not kept my command." Samuel was troubled and cried to Yahweh all night. ¹²Early next morning, he

went looking for Saul, but was told that Saul had set off for Carmel to erect a monument to himself and then had gone on his way to Gilgal. ¹³When finally they met, Saul greeted Samuel, "May Yahweh bless you," and added, "I have done what Yahweh told me to do." ¹⁴Samuel then asked him, "Why do I still hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen?" ¹⁵Saul replied, "We have brought them from the Amalekites, because the people spared the best sheep and oxen to sacrifice to Yahweh, your God. But the rest have been destroyed." ¹⁶Samuel then told Saul, "Enough! Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night." Saul replied, "Please tell me." ¹⁷So Samuel went on and said, "Though you had no confidence in yourself, you became chief of the tribes of Israel, for Yahweh wanted to anoint you king over Israel. ¹⁸Then he sent you with this command, 'Go. Completely crush the Amalekite offenders, engaging them in battle until they are destroyed.' ¹⁹Why then did you not obey the voice of Yahweh but instead swooped down on the spoil, doing what was evil in his sight?" ²⁰To this, Saul replied, "I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh and have carried out the mission for which he sent me. I have captured Agag, king of Amalek and completely destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹If my men spared the best sheep and oxen from among those to be destroyed, it was in order to sacrifice them to Yahweh, your God, in Gilgal." ²²Samuel then said,

"Does Yahweh take as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to his command? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission better than the fat of rams. ²³Rebellion is like the sin of divination, and stubbornness like holding onto idols. Since you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he too has rejected you as king."

²⁴Saul then told Samuel, "I have sinned in disobeying Yahweh's command and your instructions. I feared my own men and obeyed them instead. ²⁵Please forgive my sin and return with me so I may worship Yahweh."

²⁶Samuel refused and said, "I will not return with you because you have rejected the word of Yahweh and he has rejected you as king of Israel." ²⁷As Samuel turned to leave, Saul held onto the end of his robe, which tore. ²⁸Then Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to someone better than you. ²⁹The Glory of Israel does not change or repent as man does."

³⁰Saul then said, "I have sinned. But please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel. Return with me so that I may worship Yahweh, your God." ³¹And Samuel returned with Saul who went to worship Yahweh.

2S
4:11
1K
1:52
Mt
10:30

Ex
17:14

Is 11
Hos
6:6
Mic
6:8
Mt
9:13

Jos
10:39
Es
3:1

Gen
6:6

³² Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites." Agag stood before him with a cheerful face, thinking that he was now out of danger. ³³ But Samuel told him, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Then Samuel dealt a mortal blow to Agag before Yahweh in Gilgal.

³⁴ Samuel left for Ramah while Saul went home to Gibeath of Saul. ³⁵ From that day Samuel did not see Saul again until he died, but he was grieving over Saul because Yahweh regretted having made him king over Israel.

Samuel anoints David

16 ¹ Yahweh asked Samuel, "How long will you be grieving over Saul whom I have rejected as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way to Jesse the Bethlehemite for I have chosen my king from among his sons."

² Samuel asked, "How can I go? If Saul hears of this, he will kill me!" Yahweh replied, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice and I will let you know what to do next. You shall anoint for me the one I point out to you."

⁴ Samuel did what Yahweh commanded and left for Bethlehem. When he appeared, the elders of the city came to him asking, fearfully, "Do you bring us peace?" ⁵ Samuel replied, "I come in peace; I am here to sacrifice to Yahweh. Cleanse yourselves and join me in the sacrifice." He also had Jesse

and his sons cleansed and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ As they came, Samuel looked at Eliab the older and thought, "This must be Yahweh's anointed." ⁷ But Yahweh told Samuel, "Do not judge by his looks or his stature for I have rejected him. Yahweh does not judge as man judges; humans see with the eyes; Yahweh sees the heart."

⁸ Jesse called his son Abinadab and presented him to Samuel who said, "Yahweh has not chosen this one either." ⁹ Jesse presented Shammah and Samuel said, "Nor has Yahweh chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel who said, "Yahweh has chosen none of them. ¹¹ But are all your sons here?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, tending the flock just now." Samuel said to him, "Send for him and bring him to me; we shall not sit down to eat until he arrives."

¹² So Jesse sent for his youngest son and brought him to Samuel. He was a handsome lad with ruddy complexion and beautiful eyes. And Yahweh spoke, "Go, anoint him for he is the one."

¹³ Samuel then took the horn of oil and anointed him in his brothers' presence. From that day onwards, Yahweh's Spirit took hold of David. Then Samuel left for Ramah.

• ¹⁴ The spirit of Yahweh had left Saul and an evil spirit sent by Yahweh tormented him. ¹⁵ Saul's servants said to him, "We know that

• **16.1** *How long will you be grieving over Saul?* Sometimes, we remain grounded, immobile, longing for the past, when events in life are pushing us forward to change plans and directions.

Samuel goes to Bethlehem to meet the one whom God has chosen. Bethlehem is the city of David's family. There, Jesus will be born ten centuries later.

David, Jesse's son, is tending the flock when they send for him. He is a shepherd before he becomes king. In the Bible, the shepherd is the image of the perfect king who, rather than acting like an important man, attends to persons and serves them as the shepherd does his sheep. Jesus, King and Savior, will introduce himself as the good Shepherd whom the prophets were dreaming of (see Ezk 34 and Jn 10).

Humans see with the eyes; Yahweh sees the heart. In the adolescent David, there is yet no evidence of the moral qualities, intelligence and courage which he will display as military chief and politician. Still, God knows whom he chooses. In order to bring his work to completion, God does not choose those who pretend to be greater than they are (See 1 Cor 1:28).

In any human group, it is necessary to discover the values of each person and not allow oneself to be deceived by appearances. It is very important for Christian communities that those with responsibility know how "to look into the heart" of brothers and sisters, whether they be the quiet ones or those who show much zeal. Then it will not be long before they find the persons needed to animate the community, and can bypass the ambitious ones.

2K
9:1
Is
11:1
Ru
4:17
Mic
5:1

Dt
17:15

16:19
17:15

18:10

19:9

an evil spirit sent by God is tormenting you. ¹⁶If you so wish, your servants who stand before you will look for someone who can play the lyre so when the evil spirit from God comes over you, he will play and you will feel better.”

¹⁷So Saul answered them, “Get someone who can play the lyre well.” ¹⁸One of them said, “A son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, plays very well. He is, moreover, a courageous man, intelligent and pleasant to talk with and Yahweh is with him.”

¹⁹So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and asked for his son David who tended the sheep. ²⁰Jesse loaded an ass with bread, a wineskin and a kid and had David take all these to Saul. ²¹David then left and entered Saul’s service. Saul grew very fond of David and made him his armor-bearer. ²²Then he sent word to Jesse, saying, “Let David remain in my service for I am very pleased with him.”

²³So, whenever the evil spirit from God overpowered Saul, David would play on the lyre and Saul would feel better for the evil spirit would leave him.

17 ¹The Philistines prepared their forces for battle and gathered together at Socoh, a territory of Judah. They encamped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephesdammim. ²Saul and the Israelites, meantime, assembled and pitched camp in the valley of Elah, ready for their encounter with the Philistines. ³The Philistines took their position on one hill while the Israelites took theirs on another hill, with a valley separating the two forces.

David and Goliath

• ⁴Then a champion named Goliath came out from the Philistine camp. He was from

Gath and was about three meters tall. ⁵He wore a helmet of bronze, and a coat covered with bronze scales. His armor weighed sixty kilos. ⁶He had bronze greaves strapped on his legs and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was the size of a weaver’s rod; its head weighed seven kilos. His shield-bearer went before him.

⁸He stood in front of the Israelite ranks and shouted, “Why have you come out in battle array? I am a Philistine and you are Saul’s men! Choose a man from among yourselves who can challenge me. ⁹If he fights better and kills me, we shall be subject to you; but if I overpower him and kill him, you shall be subject to us.”

¹⁰The Philistine added, “This is my challenge to the Israelite troops this day. Give me a man who can fight with me alone!” ¹¹When they heard this challenge of the Philistine, Saul and his men were afraid and greatly terrified.

¹²Now, David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah who had eight sons. Jesse was already old during Saul’s reign but he had sent men to the army. ¹³Three of his eldest sons had joined Saul in battle: Eliab, the firstborn, Abinadab, the second and Shammah, the third. ¹⁴David was Jesse’s youngest and, while the three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵he would alternate his goings and comings to the army with the care of his father’s flock in Bethlehem.

¹⁶Every morning and again in the evening, the Philistine would come out to throw his

²⁵
^{2:14}

• 14. *We find in the Bible different traditions with respect to David’s promotion – 16:1-13; 16:14-23; 17:17-58. What is history and what is legend in each of these?*

An evil spirit sent by Yahweh (v. 14). This is an ancient way of saying that God allowed Saul to suffer some psychological disorder.

• **17.4** David’s challenge delighted the Israelites down through the centuries and still delights us today. We should not be surprised therefore that the redactors have elaborated with generous details David’s fight with “the Philistine” who was later called Goliath (see 2 S 21:19).

Those who wrote these books were inspired by God; they understood that David’s struggle with Goliath symbolized the struggle between good and evil.

You have come against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you with Yahweh. In the world, victory will not come to those who are stronger or more heavily armed.

Such people insult God by their pride and self-confidence. They will not last long if they insult the people of God, especially the lowly.

Victory belongs to the weak who trust in God’s help. Here the winner is a young man who personifies those who remain young in heart and always have a clear conscience.

Some encourage David to protect himself with Saul’s armor and arms. David understands that if he uses arms similar to those of the Philistine, he will not know how to use them and the latter will prevail over him. In the end, the Philistine dies, a victim of his own weapons.

David’s fight can easily be compared to that of the Church. She leaves behind Saul’s armor when she looks for less structure, less worry over financing her works and buildings; when she frees herself from political support. In abandoning all these securities, she makes herself freer and younger. Like David, she goes to battle trusting “in the name of Yahweh, the God of the armies of Israel.”

challenge; this he did for forty days. ¹⁷One day, Jesse told his son David, "Bring a measure of this roasted grain and these ten loaves to your brothers; ¹⁸and take these ten cheeses to the field officer. Find out how your brothers are and bring me back some token from them." ¹⁹David's brothers and the field officer were with Saul and the Israelites in the valley of Elah, facing the Philistines.

²⁰David woke up early the next morning and entrusted the sheep to a shepherd. Taking the food along with him, he left in obedience to Jesse's command and arrived at the encampment just when the army was leaving for the battleground, shouting out their battle cry. ²¹Israel and the Philistine drew up facing one another. ²²On seeing this, David entrusted his load to the baggage keeper and rushed to the ranks to greet his brothers. ²³While he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion of Gath, came up from the ranks of the Philistines and shouted out the same challenge as before, this time reaching David's ears.

²⁴When the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him terrified ²⁵and one of them said, ^{18:27}"Have you seen this man who comes up challenging Israel? Whoever succeeds in killing him will be richly rewarded by the king. He will give him his daughter in marriage and set his family free of every contribution."

²⁶David asked those who were around him, "What will be the reward for the person who kills this Philistine and lifts this disgrace from Israel? And who is this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God?" ²⁷The people answered him in the same way, "This will be the reward of whoever kills him."

²⁸When he saw David talking to the men, his eldest brother Eliab was angry and said, "Why did you come here? With whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know you are an insolent fellow. You have come only to see the battle." ²⁹David asked, "What have I done this time? I was merely asking something!" ³⁰Leaving his brother, David turned to another man and asked him the same question, and the people answered him the same way as before.

³¹David's remarks spread around and reached Saul, who asked for him.

³²David said to Saul, "Let no one be discouraged on account of this Philistine, for your servant will engage him in battle." ³³Saul told David, "You cannot fight with this Philistine for you are still young, whereas this man has been a warrior from his youth." ³⁴But David said, "When I was tending my father's

sheep, whenever a lion or bear came to snatch a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I would run after it, kill it and rescue the victim from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would hold it by its beard and slay it. ³⁶I have killed lions and bears and will do the same with this uncircumcised Philistine, for he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷David continued, "Yahweh, who delivered me from the paws of lions and bears, will deliver me from the hands of the Philistine."

Saul then told David, "Go and may Yahweh be with you!"

³⁸Saul fitted his armor on David, put a bronze helmet on his head, clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David secured his sword over the armor but could not walk because it was his first time. So he said to Saul, "I cannot move with all these trappings on me because I am not accustomed to wearing them." David got rid of all this armor, ⁴⁰took his staff, picked up five smooth stones from the brook and dropped them inside his shepherd's bag. And with his sling in hand, he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹The Philistine moved forward, closing in on David, his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When he saw that David was only a lad, (he was of fresh complexion and handsome) he despised him ⁴³and said, "Am I a dog that you should approach me with a stick?" Cursing David by his gods, ⁴⁴he continued, "Come and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field!"

⁴⁵David answered the Philistine, "You have come against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you with Yahweh, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Yahweh will deliver you this day into my hands and I will strike you down and cut off your head. I will give the corpses of the Philistine army today to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, and all the earth

Dt
28:26

1K
18:37
2K
19:19

shall know that there is a God of Israel. ⁴⁷All the people gathered here shall know that Yahweh saves not by sword or spear; the battle belongs to Yahweh, and he will deliver you into our hands.”

⁴⁸No sooner had the Philistine moved to attack him, than David rushed to the battleground. ⁴⁹Putting his hand into his bag, he took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead; it penetrated his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, felling him without using a sword. ⁵¹He rushed forward, stood over him, took the Philistine’s sword and slew him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they scattered in all directions. ⁵²The men of Israel and Judah raised the battle cry and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. Wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim to Gath and Ekron. ⁵³Returning from their pursuit of the Philistines, the Israelites plundered their camp. ⁵⁴David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem but left the armor in his tent.

⁵⁵When Saul saw David come out to oppose the Philistine, he asked his general, Abner, “Abner, whose son is that young man?” Abner answered, “I swear, O king, I do not know.” ⁵⁶The king said, “Ask whose son that lad is.” ⁵⁷So when David returned after killing

the Philistine, Abner took him to Saul. ⁵⁸Saul asked David, who stood before him holding the head of the Philistine, “Whose son are you, young man?” David answered, “I am the son of your servant, Jesse the Bethlehemite.”

David, Saul and Jonathan

18 • ¹When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan felt a deep affection for David and began to love him as himself. ²Saul kept David with him from that day and did not allow him to return to his father’s house. ³Then Jonathan made an agreement with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan, taking off the cloak he was wearing, gave it to David; he also gave him his own armor, sword, bow and belt.

⁵Wherever Saul sent David, he went and succeeded. For this reason, Saul put David in charge of the soldiers – a move which pleased Saul’s men and his officers as well. ⁶When they arrived after David had slain the Philistine, the women came out from the cities of Israel to meet King Saul singing and dancing with timbrels and musical instruments. ⁷They were merrily singing this song: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David, his tens of thousands.”

⁸Saul was very displeased with this song and said, “They have given tens of thousands to David but to me only thousands! By now he has everything but the kingdom!” ⁹From then on, Saul became very distrustful of David.

¹⁰The following day, an evil spirit from God seized Saul, causing him to rave in his house. David then played on the lyre as he used to do, while Saul had his spear in hand. ¹¹Then Saul pointed it at David thinking, “I will nail David to the wall.” But David escaped on two occasions.

¹²Saul saw that Yahweh was with David and had left him. And he was afraid. ¹³So he removed David from his presence by making

• **18.1** *Jonathan gets to like David.* The Bible describes for us this deep and loyal friendship as a gift of God, overcoming the rivalry with Saul. *He gave David his own mantle, his sword, his bow and belt...* spontaneity, frankness and a disinterested love.

Although David and Jonathan were not children but young men, we can apply to them these words of a poet. “Remember that this horrible world is yet solely maintained by the sweet complicity, continually opposed, always renewed of poets and children. Never become an important person! There is a conspiracy of personalities against childlikeness and it suffices to read the Gospel to be aware of this. God said: *Become like children.* Yet those who have

become important say repeatedly to the betrayed infancy: ‘Become like us’.”

After his victory, David is the renowned man of the kingdom. He immediately earns Saul’s envy.

Saul feared David. The subsequent chapters show us how, as David rises in people’s estimation, Saul’s mind is ravaged by jealousy. Saul is guilty, the book tells us, since he departed from his obedience to God. His fault is that of many rulers and his punishment is the same: he becomes a prisoner of his office which he cannot, or knows not, how to give up. He guesses that David is God’s choice, but he cannot share power with him and does not see any other solution but to kill him.

19:1
23:16-
18
25
1:26

Ex
15:20
Jdg
11:34

16:14

him chief of a thousand men. David went ahead of his troops ¹⁴and was successful each time because Yahweh was with him. ¹⁵The more successful David was, the more afraid Saul became. ¹⁶But all Israel and Judah loved David because he led them in their expeditions.

¹⁷Saul said to David, "You know my eldest daughter, Merab. I will give her to you as your wife; be brave and fight Yahweh's battles." For Saul thought, "Let the Philistines strike him instead of myself." ¹⁸David answered Saul, "Who am I? And what is my father's family in Israel that I should be the king's son-in-law?" ¹⁹Yet when it was time for Merab to be married to David, she was given instead to Adriel the Meholathite.

²⁰Now, Saul's daughter, Michal, fell in love with David. When this came to Saul's knowledge, he was very pleased ²¹for he thought, "I shall promise her to him and it will be a snare to him." ²²The Philistines will kill him." So, Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." ²³Then he commanded his servants to talk to David privately and say, "The king and all his servants like you. You should become the king's son-in-law!" ²⁴Saul's servants repeated these words to David who replied, "Do you think it is easy to become the king's son-in-law, poor and unknown as I am?" ²⁵When Saul's servants repeated to the king what David had said, Saul ordered them to tell David, "The king wants no marriage gift other than a hundred Philistine foreskins to take revenge on his enemies." For Saul wanted David to fall into the hands of the Philistines. ²⁶Saul's servants told this to David and it seemed to him that he could easily become the king's son-in-law. ²⁷David and his men set out and killed two hundred Philistines. And they brought the king the foreskins so that David could become the king's son-in-law. So Saul had to give his daughter Michal to David to become his wife.

²⁸Saul feared David for he knew that Yahweh was with him. But Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him. ²⁹Saul feared David more and more and was his enemy until the end.

³⁰Whenever the Philistine chiefs engaged David in battle, he succeeded more than any of Saul's officers, in earning great fame for himself.

19 ¹Saul told his son Jonathan and his servants of his intention to kill David. But Jonathan, who liked David very much, ²said to David, "My father Saul wants to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning and hide yourself in a secret place. ³I will go out and keep my father company in the countryside where you are and I will speak to him about you. If I find out something, I will let you know." ⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul and said, "Let not the king sin against his servant David for he has not sinned against you. On the contrary, what he has done has benefited you. ⁵He risked his life in killing the Philistine and Yahweh brought about a great victory for Israel. You yourself saw this and greatly rejoiced. Why then sin against innocent blood and kill David without cause?" ⁶Saul heeded Jonathan's plea and swore, "As Yahweh lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷So Jonathan called David and told him all these things. He then brought him to Saul and David was back in Saul's service as before.

⁸War broke out again and David set out to fight the Philistines. David crushed them so badly that they had to flee. ⁹Then an evil spirit from Yahweh seized Saul as he sat in his house holding his spear while David was playing on the lyre. ¹⁰Saul made an attempt to pin David to the wall with his spear. David, however, dodged the blow and the spear hit the wall instead. David fled and escaped.

¹¹That night Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep an eye on him as he intended to kill him the following morning. But David's wife, Michal, told him, "If you do not run for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." ¹²So Michal let David down through the window, allowing him to escape.

¹³Next Michal took the household idol, laid it in the bed and put a bundle of goat's hair on its head. She then covered this with a blanket. ¹⁴When Saul sent messengers to capture David, Michal told them, "He is sick." ¹⁵Saul sent messengers back to David and said, "Bring him up to me on his bed for me to kill him." ¹⁶But when the messengers entered, they saw the household idol in the bed with the bundle of goat's hair at its head. ¹⁷Saul, therefore, asked Michal, "Why did you deceive me and allow my enemy to escape?" Michal answered, "He threatened to kill me if I did not let him go!"

• **19.1** Chapters 19–25 are about the life of David as a fugitive. He becomes chief of a band of not very desirable companions and lives with them in the marginal parts of the country.

David is no "saint," as we would actually imagine one. He is God's friend in the way people can be in a primitive society. In spite of his defects, he becomes an example of what God can do with a person who allows himself to be guided by him.

The Bible highlights David's magnificent soul and his generosity while living with outlaws and everything that this implies. David is always conscious of his mission. He faces dangers without fear, acts as an educator of his companions and is a man with prophetic intuitions.

When God wants to entrust a great mission to someone, he sets that person apart from his or her usual environment for a time. Like Moses, David also goes to the desert.

2S
11:15

18:10

Jos
2:15
2Cor
11:32

Saul and the prophets

• ¹⁸David had fled and was in safety. He went to Samuel at Ramah and related all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel then went to live at Naioth. ¹⁹Saul was told that David stayed at Naioth in Ramah, ²⁰so he sent messengers to capture David. But when they saw the band of prophets prophesying (signifying that they had fallen into a trance) with Samuel leading them, the spirit of Yahweh came upon them and made them prophesy.

10:5

²¹Upon hearing what happened, Saul sent more messengers who also began to prophesy. Saul sent more the third time and the same thing happened.

²²Then Saul himself went to Ramah and arrived at the deep well in Secu. He asked, "Where can I find Samuel and David?" The people answered, "They are at Naioth in Ramah." ²³So Saul proceeded to Naioth in Ramah but the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him as well. And he walked along prophesying until he reached the entrance of Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴He took off his clothes and prophesied in Samuel's presence. Then he fell down naked, remaining in that position all day and all night. Hence sprang the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

20 ¹David fled from Naioth in Ramah and went to Jonathan to ask him, "What have I done? What am I

guilty of? What sin have I committed against your father that he wants to kill me?" ²Jonathan, however, assured him, "No! You shall not die. My father does nothing small or great without informing me. Why should he hide this from me? No, this cannot be."

³But David replied, "Your father knows very well that you are pleased with me, so he thinks it is better not to tell you and grieve you. But I swear there is but one step between death and me!" ⁴Then Jonathan told David, "What can I do for you?" ⁵David answered, "Tomorrow is the new moon and I should be dining with the king. But let me hide myself in the open country until the evening of the third day. ⁶If your father looks for me, say to him: 'David asked me to let him go over to Bethlehem because they have their yearly sacrifice there with the entire family.' ⁷If he says, 'Good' then I am in no danger. But if he gets angry, then you can be certain that he wants to harm me. ⁸Do this for me according to our agreement. But if I am guilty, kill me yourself. Why hand me over to your father to be killed?"

18:3

⁹Jonathan answered, "Nonsense! If I knew that my father wanted to harm you, would I not warn you?" ¹⁰David then asked him, "Who will tell me if your father answers you angrily?" ¹¹Jonathan said, "Come, let us go into the open country." So they both left for the open country.

• 18. Israel lives its faith with songs and dances, celebrating Yahweh's deeds. That is why they need those groups of prophets. Here, they are mentioned for the first time in the Bible. These men excited themselves to the point where they fell into a frenzy very similar to a state of hysteria. At that time, nevertheless, such manifestations were considered to be the work of the Spirit of Yahweh. In their beginnings, the prophets of Israel were not very different from the "prophets" of other neighboring pagan peoples. Later in the Bible other prophets who are very different appear, and are called by God for an exceptional mission. These prophets will retain only a semblance of that primitive religious frenzy.

It is good to compare these actions of the prophets with others manifested in the early Church (see Acts 21), and to read what Paul says with respect to the manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12–14. No manifestation of the Spirit is solely the work of the Spirit of God. It depends also on the capabilities of those in whom the Spirit acts, just as the light of the sun takes on the color of the glass through which it passes. In groups consisting of simple and uneducated people, the Spirit of God acted (and still acts) by arousing ecstatic manifestations which, in fact, are also observed in non-Christian religions. But these things strengthened them in their faith.

• ¹² Then Jonathan said to David, “Yahweh, the God of Israel, be our witness. About this time tomorrow or the following day, I shall be sounding out my father. If he is well-disposed toward you, I shall send you word. ¹³ But if my father intends to do you harm, may Yahweh punish me if I do not warn you that you may escape safely. Surely Yahweh will be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ If I live, always be kind to me. But if I die, ¹⁵⁻¹⁶ never cut off your friendship with my family even when Yahweh takes vengeance on David’s enemies and wipes them out from the face of the earth.”

2S 9
21:7

So Jonathan made a covenant with the family of David. ¹⁷ And he made David swear once more because of the affection he felt for him for he loved David as himself.

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said, “Tomorrow is the new moon. Your absence will be noticed because your seat will be vacant. ¹⁹ On the third day it will be noticed all the more. So go and hide yourself where you hid before and stay beside the heap of stones there. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows near the stones as if I were aiming at a target. ²¹ I will then send a lad with this instruction: ‘Go, look for the arrows.’ If I say to the lad: ‘The arrows are on this side, pick them up,’ then you may come out for, I swear, you are not in danger. ²² But if I say to the lad: ‘The arrows are beyond you,’ leave, for Yahweh is sending you away. ²³ But as to our covenant, Yahweh is our witness forever.”

²⁴ So David hid himself in the open country. On the day of the new moon the king came to dine. ²⁵ He took his usual place on the seat against the wall while Jonathan sat facing him and Abner was beside him. David’s seat remained vacant.

²⁶ Saul did not say anything on that day, thinking that something may have happened and David was unclean. ²⁷ On the second day of the new moon, David’s seat was still vacant and Saul asked his son Jonathan, “Why has the son of Jesse not come to table yesterday and today?” ²⁸ Jonathan answered, “David asked leave to go over to Bethlehem for he said, ²⁹ ‘Our family is offering a sacrifice in the city and my brothers insisted that I be present. So please allow me to go and visit my brothers.’ This is why he has not come to the king’s table.”

³⁰ Saul became very angry at Jonathan and told him, “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Do I not know that you prefer the son of Jesse to your shame and your mother’s shame? ³¹ For as long as the son of Jesse lives, neither you nor your Kingdom can stand. Send for him and bring

him to me for he is doomed to die!” ³² Then Jonathan asked his father, “Why should he die? What has he done?” ³³ At this, Saul pointed his spear at him and Jonathan understood that his father intended to kill David. ³⁴ Jonathan rose angrily from the table and did not eat that second day of the month, grieving for David, because of what his father said against him.

18:11
19:3

³⁵ The next morning, Jonathan went to the open country with a young man, according to what he and David had agreed on. ³⁶ He told the lad, “Run, fetch the arrows.” While the lad was running, Jonathan shot an arrow that flew beyond the lad. ³⁷ When the lad reached the spot where Jonathan had shot the arrow, Jonathan called after him and said, “The arrow is beyond you! ³⁸ Run quickly and do not waste time!” The lad picked up the arrow and ran back to his master. ³⁹ The lad knew nothing of Jonathan and David’s agreement.

⁴⁰ After that, Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad and commanded him to take them to the city. ⁴¹ When the lad had gone, David came out from behind the mound and lay on the ground. The two embraced each other and wept with one another until David was through. ⁴² Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have made an oath to one another in Yahweh’s name when we said: Yahweh shall be between you and me and between your descendants and mine forever.”

David and the priest Ahimelech

21 • ¹ David went on his way while Jonathan returned home. ² David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came to meet him and asked trembling, “Why are you alone?” ³ David replied, “The king sent me on a mission and strictly ordered me not to tell anyone about it. Because of this I have decided on a place where I shall meet my men. ⁴ What do you have here? Can you give me five loaves of bread or whatever you have?” ⁵ The priest answered David, “I do not have ordinary bread at hand; there is only holy bread. If your men have had no relations with women they may eat it.” ⁶ David answered, “Indeed we have abstained from women these days since I set out. The young men re-

• **20.12** Here follows the account of David and Jonathan’s friendship. The Bible shows how David never forgot his pact with Jonathan (2 S 21:7).

remained sexually clean though it was an ordinary expedition and today they are clean.”⁷ So the priest gave him holy bread for there was no other bread. This was the bread of Presence which had been replaced by fresh bread on the day it was removed.

Mt
12:3
Mk
2:26

⁸Yet one of Saul’s men was there on that day. He was Doeg, the Edomite, and Saul’s chief shepherd.

⁹David asked Ahimelech, “Do you have a spear or a sword with you? I did not take my arms with me because the king’s order was urgent.”¹⁰The priest replied, “I have here, wrapped in a piece of cloth behind the ephod, the sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah. You can take this if you wish, for I have nothing else here.” David said, “There is none like it. Give it to me.”

¹¹That same day, David fled far from Saul. He went to Achish, king of Gath.¹²Achish’s servants remarked, “O king, is this not David? Did the people not dance on his account and sing: ‘Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?’”¹³David understood these words and began to fear Achish, king of Gath.¹⁴So he pretended to be mad, making marks on the doors of the gate as he let his spittle run down his beard.¹⁵At this Achish told his servants, “Look, it is a madman. Why did you bring him to me?”¹⁶Am I short of madmen that you have

18:7

to bring this fellow to act foolishly in my presence? Will this fellow come into my house?”

David begins his wanderings

22 • ¹David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adulam where his brothers and his father’s family came down to him.²Then those who had problems or debts or were embittered joined him there. Thus he became their chief; he had with him about four hundred men.

³From there, David went to Mispheh in Moab and asked the king of Moab to let his father and mother stay with him until he found out what God would do for him.⁴So David left them with the king of Moab and they stayed there as long as David remained in the refuge.

⁵The prophet Gad said to David, “Do not stay in the refuge; go to the land of Judah.” So David left and entered the forest of Hereth.

⁶Saul heard that David and his men had been seen. Saul was in Gibeah at the time, sitting under the tamarisk tree on the high place, his spear in hand, while his servants were standing by.⁷Saul addressed them, “Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields of vineyards? Will he make each one of you a commander over a thousand or over a hundred men that you should all be conspiring against me?”⁸Why, then, did no one tell me that my son made an agreement with the son of Jesse? No one among you had mercy on me and told me that my own son had stirred up my servant to conspire against me as is the case today.”

8:12,
14

⁹At this, Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with the officers of Saul, spoke up,¹⁰“I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, in Nob. Ahimelech consulted Yahweh for him, provided him with food and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine as well.”

21:8

• **21.1** The *loaves of presence* represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were offered every sabbath and remained on the altar for the entire week, signifying thereby the people’s loyalty to Yahweh. Only the priests could eat of them (Lev 24:5-9).

Jesus refers to this text when his disciples do not observe the rules about the sabbath (see Mk 2:25). Jesus wants to free us from the slavery of the “sacred,” because a person is more sacred than anything else.

• **11.** David has to pretend madness. The Bible shows how this chosen one of Yahweh was humiliated before he could sit on his throne, thereby mysteriously foretelling Christ’s humiliations. Jesus loved us to the point of madness

when he humbled himself to the extent of living as a servant and undergoing an ignominious and painful death on the cross (see Phil 2:7-9).

• **22.1** Chapter 22:2 does not hide the fact that those who went to David were those who found themselves in difficult straits, in debt or embittered. The wars that made it possible for the people of God to live and progress were not the doings of pure saints. The same happens with struggles waged anywhere in the world for the sake of justice. In the best causes are found questionable or corrupt elements. It will be fortunate if leaders have, like David, a very elevated sense of their mission and of solidarity with their people.

This text refers to the practice of consulting

¹¹ On hearing this, the king sent for Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub, and all his family who were priests in Nob. They all came to the king. ¹² Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub." He replied, "Yes, my lord." ¹³ Saul asked him, "Why did you conspire with the son of Jesse, giving him food and a sword and consulting Yahweh for him so that he could rebel against me as is the case today?" ¹⁴ Ahimelech answered the king, "Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and honored in your house? ¹⁵ Is today the first time that I have consulted Yahweh for him? By no means! Let not the king accuse me or any member of my family of such a thing for I knew nothing at all about the entire matter." ¹⁶ But the king said, "You and your entire family shall die, Ahimelech." ¹⁷ And the king at once commanded the guards who were standing by, "Turn and kill the priests of Yahweh for having assisted David. They knew very well that David was a fugitive but they did not tell me anything at all." The king's servants, however, refused to lift their hands against the priests of Yahweh. ¹⁸ And so the king turned to Doeg and commanded him, "Come and stab the priests." And so Doeg the Edomite drew near and stabbed the priests.

On that day he killed eighty-five persons who were wearing the linen ephod. ¹⁹ After that, Saul put Nob, the city of priests, to the sword, killing men and women, children and infants, oxen, asses and sheep.

^{23:6} ²⁰ A son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to David. ²¹ Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of Yahweh. ²² David said to him, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of all your family. ²³ Stay with me and do not be afraid for he who wants to kill you must also kill me. You will be safe with me."

How David consulted God

23 ¹ David received a report that the Philistines were attacking Keilah and plundering the threshing floors. ² He, therefore, consulted Yahweh and asked, "Shall I go and fight with these Philistines?" The answer was, "Go and attack the Philistines and rescue Keilah." ³ But David's men protested and said, "Look, here in Judah we are in danger and afraid. What then if we go to Keilah and face the Philistines?"

^{2S}
^{5:19} ⁴ So David consulted Yahweh again and got this answer, "Go down to Keilah for I will

deliver the Philistines into your hands." ⁵ David went with his men to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, seizing their cattle and causing a great slaughter among them; and he rescued the inhabitants of the place.

⁶ When Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, fled to David at Keilah, he took along the ephod. ⁷ When Saul was told that David had come to Keilah he said, "God has delivered him into my hands for he has shut himself in by entering a city with gates and bars." ⁸ He then called on all the people to go down to Keilah and engage David and his men in battle. ⁹ When David found out that Saul meant to harm him, he told the priest Abiathar to bring the ephod. ¹⁰ Then he consulted Yahweh, "O Yahweh, God of Israel, listen to your servant for I have heard that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the city on my account. ¹¹ Will Saul come down as I heard? O Yahweh, God of Israel, speak to your servant." Yahweh answered, "He will come down." ¹² Then David asked, "Will the lords of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?" Yahweh answered, "They will hand you over to him." ¹³ So David set out with his six hundred men. He left Keilah and wandered from one place to another. When Saul was informed that David had escaped from Keilah, he abandoned the expedition. ¹⁴ Meanwhile David stayed in the strongholds in the hill country of the desert of Ziph. Saul, however, kept on searching for him but God did not deliver David into his hands.

¹⁵ David knew that Saul had come out to kill him. And he remained at Horesh in the desert of Ziph. ¹⁶ Saul's son, Jonathan, went to him and encouraged him in God's name with these words, ¹⁷ "Have no fear, for my father Saul will not harm you. Even my father Saul knows that you shall be king over Israel and that I shall be second to you." ¹⁸ The two made an agreement before Yahweh in Horesh, after which David remained there while Jonathan returned home.

¹⁹ Some of the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David is hiding among us in the refuges of Horesh on the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon." ²⁰ Come down, therefore, O king, whenever it may please you and we shall deliver him into your hands." ²¹ Saul replied, "May Yahweh bless you for you have had mercy on me. ²² Go and make sure where he has been and who has seen him there for I am told that he is very cunning. ²³ Check all the places where he may be hiding and come back to me, and I will go with you. If he is in the region, I will search him out among all the clans of Judah."

Yahweh by using the *ephod*, an object which contained lots. This was an ancient practice, in ordinary use among the priests of Israel. Later,

this practice fell into disuse when prophets ceased to make predictions (see chap. 9).

²⁴ So they went off to Ziph ahead of Saul. At this time, David and his men were in the desert of Maon, in the valley south of Jeshimon.

²⁵ When David learned that Saul and his men were looking for him, he went down to a ravine in the desert of Maon. Saul heard of this and pursued David into the desert of Maon. ²⁶ Saul moved along one side of the mountain, and David along the other. David was hurrying to escape from Saul who with his forces was closing in on him and his men. ²⁷ It was then that a messenger came to Saul and said, "Come quickly because the Philistines have invaded the land!" ²⁸ Saul then left off pursuing David and went to face the Philistines. This is how that place came to be called the Ravine of Parting.

David spares Saul

24 • ¹ David then went up from there and stayed in the hiding places at Engedi. ² When Saul returned from his pursuit of the Philistines, he was told that David was in the desert of Engedi. ³ So Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men to the east of the Wild Goat crags. ⁴ When he came to the sheepfolds along the way, he entered a cave to relieve himself.

⁵ Now David and his men were far back in the cave. David's men said to him, "This is the day which Yahweh spoke of: look I will deliver your enemy into your hands and you will do with him as you see fit." So David moved up and stealthily cut off an end of Saul's robe. ⁶ But afterward, David regretted having cut off an end of Saul's robe,

⁷ and he said to his men, "Let me not lay my hands on my master, for he is Yahweh's anointed." ⁸ With these words, David restrained his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. Saul then left the cave and went on his way.

⁹ Then David himself stepped out of the cave and called after Saul, "My master, the king!" When Saul looked back, David knelt and then bowed to the ground in homage and asked him, ¹⁰ "Why do you listen to those who say that I want to harm you?" ¹¹ Look, today you have seen that Yahweh delivered you into my hands in the cave, and I was told to kill you but I held myself back and I said: 'I will not lift my hands against my master who is Yahweh's anointed.' ¹² My father, look at this end of your robe which I am holding! I cut off the end of your robe but did not kill you. Now you may know that I mean you no harm or treason. I have done you no wrong and yet you are hunting me down to kill me. ¹³ May Yahweh be judge between you and me and may he exact justice from you in my case, but I shall do you no harm.

¹⁴ As the saying goes, 'From the wicked comes wickedness'; as for me, my hand shall not harm you. ¹⁵ But who is it you are after, O king of Israel? Are you pursuing a dead dog? A flea? ¹⁶ May Yahweh be judge between you and me. May he see and uphold my cause and deliver me from your hands."

¹⁷ After David had spoken these words, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, my son David?" He wept aloud ¹⁸ and said to David, "You are right and I am wrong, for you have repaid with kindness the harm I have inflicted on you. ¹⁹ This day you have shown your righteousness to me by not taking my life when Yahweh put me into your hands. ²⁰ For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go

9:16
31:4
25
1:14

• **24.1** David's respect for "the anointed one" of the Lord (since Saul had been anointed by Samuel), gives evidence of his faith.

Persons instructed in the Scriptures know that leaders share with God duties and power which exceed the capabilities and the rights of a human being. Though we should replace evil or ineffective leaders, we must respect their person and the fearful responsibility God has delivered into their hands (Rom 13:1).

God will do me justice. This is not the grudging complaint of someone who did not even try to defend himself but the certainty of one who fights for what seems to him to be just, but recognizes that God alone is the master of history. In particular cases, he renounces his rights as a way of showing his full confidence in God. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 5:38-42.

unharméd? May Yahweh reward you for what you have done for me today. ²¹ Now I know for certain that you shall reign and the kingdom of Israel will be firm in your hand. ²² Now swear to me by Yahweh that you will not wipe out my descendants and erase the name of my family.”

²³ David swore to this before Saul after which Saul went home while David and his men went up to the hiding place.

David and Abigail

28:3 **25** • ¹ The day Samuel died, all Israel gathered together to mourn him; after which they buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David went down to the desert of Maon. ² A very rich man, owner of three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, lived there and had his farm in Carmel.

³ This man was named Nabal; his wife, Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful; but the man himself, a Calebite, was rough and ill-mannered. He was at the time shearing his sheep in Carmel.

⁴ When David heard in the desert that Nabal was shearing his sheep, ⁵ he sent ten young men to the farm with this instruction, “Go to Nabal in Carmel and greet him for me

Lk 10:5 ⁶ in these words: peace be with you and your family; peace be with all that is yours. ⁷ I hear that you have shearers with you. Now when your shepherds were with us, we did not harm them; neither did they miss anything while they were in Carmel. ⁸ Ask your servants and they will tell. So be kind to my servants since we come on a festive day; please give them and your son David whatever you can.”

⁹ When David’s young men arrived, they delivered this message to Nabal in David’s name and then waited. ¹⁰ But Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? Many nowadays are the servants who run away from their masters. ¹¹ Must I take my bread, my wine, my meat which I have slaughtered for my shearers and give it to men who come from I don’t know where?” ¹² At this, David’s young men left and returned to him, reporting everything Nabal had said. ¹³ David then said to his men, “Let every man strap on his sword!” And every one of them, including David, strapped on his sword. About four hundred men followed David while two hundred remained with the baggage.

30:10 ¹⁴ One of Nabal’s servants told Abigail, his wife, “David sent messengers from the desert

to greet our master but he shouted at them. ¹⁵ Yet these men were very good to us. We suffered no harm and did not miss anything while we were living among them during our stay in the open country. ¹⁶ They were like a wall for us night and day while we were tending the sheep in their midst. ¹⁷ Now think over what you should do; for our master and his entire family are surely doomed to die, but he is so wicked no one can speak to him.”

¹⁸ Abigail hurriedly prepared two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five measures of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of pressed raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs and loaded them on asses. ¹⁹ Then she said to her servants, “Go on ahead and I shall follow you.” But she told her husband nothing of this.

²⁰ As she rode down the mountain on her ass, David and his men were coming down from the other direction. When she met them, ²¹ David was reflecting, “It was useless guarding all that this fellow has in the desert. Although he lost nothing belonging to him, he has returned me evil for good. ²² May God do so to David and more if by morning I leave a single male alive among those who belong to him.”

²³ On seeing David, Abigail quickly dismounted from the ass and threw herself on the ground before him. ²⁴ As she fell at his feet she said, “My lord, let the blame be on me! Let your handmaid speak to you; listen to her words. ²⁵ Let not my lord pay attention to this ill-mannered man, Nabal, for he is just what his name says: he is a fool. I, your handmaid, did not see the young men whom you sent.

²⁶ Now, my lord, as Yahweh lives and as you live, it is Yahweh who prevents you from shedding blood and avenging yourself. Let your enemies and those who seek to harm my lord become like Nabal! ²⁷ And now let this present which I have brought you, my lord, be given to the young men who follow you, ²⁸ and please forgive me.

Yahweh will certainly give you a lasting family because you are fighting the battles of Yahweh and no evil shall be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹ Should anyone make an attempt on your life, may the life of my lord be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of Yahweh, your God. May he hurl away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.

³⁰ So when Yahweh fulfills his promises and appoints you as commander over Israel, ³¹ you shall have no reason to grieve or to feel

• **25.1** The incident we read here compares two men and two mentalities: the person with possessions has no advantage over the other. This means that wealth has to be shared.

The role of the woman is highlighted. Her

wisdom is able to ward off a disaster provoked by men. David is humble enough to see that his impulsive temperament leads him to violence and injustice.

any grief or regret for having unrightfully shed blood or taken revenge yourself. May Yahweh bless you, and you, my lord, remember your handmaid.”

³²David then said to Abigail, “Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today!³³Blessed be your good judgment and may you yourself be blessed, for you have prevented me from shedding blood and avenging myself today! ³⁴For as Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, he has prevented me from hurting you. If you did not hurry to meet me, not a single male belonging to Nabal would have been alive by morning.”

³⁵David accepted what she had brought him and told her, “Go back home in peace. I have listened to you and granted your request.”

³⁶Abigail went back to Nabal and found him holding a feast in his house.

He was joyful and very drunk so Abigail did not mention anything to him until the following day. ³⁷When morning came and Nabal had slept it off, his wife spoke to him about all these things. On hearing it Nabal had a stroke and remained paralyzed. ³⁸Ten days later, Yahweh let him die.

³⁹When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be Yahweh who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal and has prevented me from doing wrong. Yahweh himself has made Nabal’s wrongdoings fall on his own head.”

⁴⁰David then sent his servants to Abigail in Carmel to propose marriage to her saying, “David has sent us to you to say that he wants you to be his wife.” ⁴¹Rising and bowing to the ground, Abigail answered, “May I be as a slave to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.”

⁴²She quickly rose and mounted an ass and, attended by five of her servants, she left with David’s messengers and became his wife.

⁴³David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, making both her and Abigail his wives. ⁴⁴Saul, in the meantime, had given Michal, his daughter and David’s wife, to Palti, son of Laish who was from Gallim.

26 • ¹Ziphtes came to Saul in Gibeah to tell him that David was hiding on the hill of Hachilah, east of Jeshimon. ²On hearing this, Saul went down with three thousand picked men of Israel to the desert of Ziph in search of David. ³He encamped on the hill of Hachilah beside the road east of Jeshimon. ⁴When David who was in the desert saw that Saul had come after him, he sent out spies who confirmed Saul’s arrival. ⁵David came to Saul’s place of encampment and saw where Saul was resting with Abner, son of Ner, chief of his army. Saul was sleeping in the center and his men were around him.

⁶David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai, son of Zeruiah and Joab’s brother, “Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?” Abishai answered, “I will go down with you.” ⁷So, that night, David and Abishai went into the camp and found Saul sleeping in the center, his spear thrust into the ground at his head, while Abner and the rest of the soldiers were sleeping around him. ⁸Abishai said to David, “God has delivered your enemy into your hands this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not repeat it.” ⁹But David answered Abishai, “Do not harm him. For who could harm Yahweh’s anointed and not be punished? ¹⁰As Yahweh lives, only Yahweh may strike him; either he dies on the day appointed or is killed in battle. ¹¹Don’t let me harm Yahweh’s anointed! Instead take the spear that is at his head and the water jug and let us be on our way.”

¹²So David took the spear and the water jug from near Saul’s head and they left. Nobody saw, nobody knew, nobody woke up. All remained asleep, for a deep sleep from Yahweh had fallen on them.

¹³On the opposite slope David stood at a distance, on top of the hill, ¹⁴and called out to both Abner son of Ner and the soldiers, “Why don’t you answer, Abner?” Abner answered back, “Who are you to awaken the king?” ¹⁵David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then did you not closely guard your lord the king? An ordinary man has broken into the camp and made an attempt on the life of the king your lord. ¹⁶Is this the way you fulfill your duties? You deserve to die because you did not guard your lord, Yahweh’s anointed. Now look for the king’s spear and the water jug that were at his head.”

¹⁷Saul recognized David’s voice and asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” David answered, “It is my voice, my lord, O king! ¹⁸Why does my lord pursue me? What have I done? What am I guilty of? ¹⁹Now, let my lord the king hear my words. If it is Yahweh who has incited you against me, may an offering appease him; but if men have done so, may they be cursed before Yahweh, for they have made me an exile to this day and have driven me from my share of the inheritance of Yahweh as if saying to me: ‘Go and serve other gods.’ ²⁰Let not my blood flow to the ground far from the presence of Yahweh! For the king of Israel has come to seek out a flea as a man hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

²¹Then Saul said, “I have done wrong. Come back, David my son. I will not harm you anymore since you valued my life this day. I

Jdg
7:10
1Chr
2:16

• **26.1** This is another way of expressing what we already read in chapter 24.

have acted like a fool and have made a great mistake.” ²²David answered, “I have your spear with me, O king! Let one of your servants come over to fetch it. ²³Yahweh rewards a righteous and loyal man. Today he delivered you into my hands but I refused to harm Yahweh’s anointed. ²⁴As I valued your life today, may Yahweh value my life and deliver me from all distress.”

²⁵Finally Saul told David, “Blessed are you, David my son! You shall succeed in everything you do.” Then David went his way and Saul went home.

David among the Philistines

27 ¹David thought, “Some day I shall die at the hand of Saul. It is better for me to escape to the land of the Philistines where I shall be beyond his reach and Saul will get tired of searching for me within the borders of Israel.” ²So David went with his six hundred men to Achish, son of Maach, king of Gath. ³He and his men lived with Achish in Gath; each one had his family with him and David had his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal’s widow. ⁴When Saul was informed that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

⁵David said to Achish, “If I meet with your approval, let me have a place to live in one of the country towns. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?” ⁶That very day, Achish gave David Ziklag, which since then and up to the present time has belonged to the kings of Judah. ⁷David lived one year and four months in the country of the Philistines.

⁸David and his men raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites – all these lived in the land extending from Telem to Shur and the land of Egypt. ⁹David would attack the land leaving neither man nor woman alive and carrying off their sheep, oxen, asses, camels and garments. Then he would come back to Achish. ¹⁰Whenever Achish asked, “Whom did you raid this time?” David would answer, “The Negeb of Judah,” or “The Negeb of the Jarahmeelites,” or “The Negeb of the Kenites.” ¹¹David left neither man nor woman alive. For he said, “If I brought them to Gath, they could talk against us and say: This is what David did.” Such was his practice as long as

he lived in the country of the Philistines. ¹²Achish trusted David and said to himself, “David is now hated by his own people. He shall be my servant forever.”

Saul consults the witch of Endor

28 ¹In those days, the Philistines mustered their forces to fight against Israel, and Achish told David, “I want you to know that you and your men must join me to fight this battle.” ²David answered, “Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do.” Achish said to David, “I will make you my permanent bodyguard.”

³Now Samuel had died and when all Israel had mourned for him, they buried him in his own city, Ramah. Meanwhile, Saul had driven those who consult spirits of the dead and fortunetellers out of the land.

⁴As the Philistines gathered together and encamped in Shunem, Saul also mustered the Israelite forces and encamped in Gilboa. ⁵But on seeing the Philistine camp, Saul was afraid and his heart failed him. ⁶Saul consulted Yahweh but Yahweh gave no answer whether in dreams or by the Urim or through prophets. ⁷Then Saul said to his servants, “Find me a woman who consults the spirits of the dead, that I may go and consult her.” His servants told him, “There is a medium at Endor.”

⁸Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and left with two men. He arrived at night and said to the woman: “Tell my fortune through a ghost and call the spirit I shall name.” ⁹But the woman answered him, “Do you not know that Saul has driven medium and fortunetellers out of the land? Why do you set a trap for me to bring about my

Dt
18:11

1K
14:2

• **28.1** Nowhere else does Saul appear so human and so close to us. While David, trusting in Yahweh and loved by all, courts danger with the utmost serenity, Saul carries all by himself the burden of his anxiety. His opponent, Samuel, with whom he could at least discuss and quarrel is no longer there. God himself does not speak, and the man remains alone, facing hostile circumstances, tortured by his own doubts and anxieties.

Saul wanted to wrest from God a favorable response. He gets a death sentence from Samuel, and then leaves peacefully since what weighed on him was not so much the fear of death as the solitude which was his lot while he was in power. The man who “surpassed everyone in height from the shoulders upwards” has become like all the rest and depends on the assistance of a poor woman, a sinner according to God’s law, but someone full of understanding.

death?” ¹⁰But Saul swore to her by Yahweh, “As Yahweh lives, you will not be in trouble for this.”

¹¹Then the woman asked him, “Whom do you want me to call up?” Saul said, “Call up Samuel.”

¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” ¹³The king then told her, “Have no fear. What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see him rising from the ground. He is a god.” ¹⁴Saul asked her, “What does he look like?” She replied, “The one rising is an old man clothed in a mantle.” Saul knew that it was Samuel. He knelt and bowed face to the ground in homage.

¹⁵Samuel spoke to Saul, “Why did you disturb me by summoning me up?” Saul answered, “I am in great distress, for the Philistines are waging war against me and God has abandoned me. He no longer answers me either through prophets or in dreams. Because of this I have called you to tell me what I should do.”

¹⁶Samuel said, “Why do you ask me, if Yahweh has abandoned you and turned against you? ¹⁷Yahweh has done to you what he foretold through me. He has torn the kingdom from your hand and has given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸Remember that you disobeyed Yahweh by not executing his fierce anger against Amalek; that is why Yahweh has done this to you today. ¹⁹Now Yahweh will deliver Israel, together with you, into the hands of the Philistines. By tomorrow, you and your sons shall be with me when Yahweh delivers the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

²⁰Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, terrified by what Samuel said. He had no strength left because he had not eaten anything all that day and night.

²¹The woman drew close to Saul and, seeing how frightened he was, said

to him, “Look, your maidservant has obeyed you and risked her life doing what you have asked her to do. ²²Now it is your turn to listen to me. Let me give you something to eat so you may have strength when you go on your way.” ²³Saul refused and said, “I will not eat.” But on the insistence of his servants and the woman, he agreed, rose from the ground and sat on the bed. ²⁴The woman had a fattened calf in the house which she immediately butchered. She also took some flour, kneaded it and baked unleavened bread, ²⁵and set it before Saul and his servants. They then ate and left that night.

29 ¹Now the Philistines mustered all their forces at Aphek; the Israelites were encamped beside the spring in Jezreel. ²While the Philistine rulers went ahead of their groups of thousands and hundreds, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. ³The Philistine chiefs asked, “Who are these Hebrews?” Achish replied to the Philistine chiefs, “This is David, servant of Saul, king of Israel. He has been with me for over a year and since he fled to me up to the present day I have found no fault in him.” ⁴But the Philistine chiefs were angered at this and said to him, “Send that man back! Let him return to the place where you assigned him. He must not go down into battle with us lest during the battle he turn against us. How better could this fellow regain his master’s favor than by bringing him the heads of our men? ⁵Is this not the David for whom they danced and sang: Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands?”

⁶So Achish called David and said to him, “As Yahweh lives, you are honest and I would like you to be with me in the camp for I have found nothing wrong in you since you came to me up to the present day. But you displease the lords. ⁷So it is better for you to leave and go back quietly and do nothing to displease the Philistine lords.” ⁸David asked Achish, “But what have I done? Have I done anything since I entered your service until the present time that would bar me from joining the fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” ⁹Achish replied to David, “I myself hold nothing against you, but the Philistine chiefs are determined not to allow you to join us in battle. ¹⁰Now, therefore, get up early tomorrow morning and leave with the soldiers who came with you.” ¹¹So David and his men left early in the morning and returned to

the land of the Philistines. The Philistines, in the meantime, went on to Jezreel.

The sack of Ziklag

30 • ¹David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day, but the Amalekites had just raided the Negeb and Ziklag, storming it and burning it to the ground. ²They had taken captive the women and all who were in the city, young and old. They killed no one but carried them off when they left.

³When they reached the town, David and his men found it burned to the ground and their wives, sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴Then David and those with him wept aloud until they could weep no more. ⁵David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, widow of Nabal of Carmel had also been taken captive. ⁶Now David was greatly distressed because the people were talking of stoning him; for they were embittered because of what had happened to their sons and daughters. But David found strength in Yahweh his God.

^{23:9} ⁷David told Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, to bring him the ephod. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David ⁸who then consulted Yahweh, "Shall I go after these raiders? Can I overtake them?" The answer was, "Go after them for you shall surely overtake them and recover the captives."

^{25:13} ⁹David set out with his six hundred men and they reached the brook of Besor. There, two hundred men stayed behind, for they were too exhausted to cross the brook, ¹⁰and David continued the chase with four hundred men.

¹¹They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. They gave him food, which he

ate, and water to drink. ¹²They gave him a piece of fig cake and two pieces of raisin cake. The Egyptian ate and recovered his strength, for he had been three days and three nights without eating or drinking. ¹³David then questioned him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He answered, "I am an Egyptian, slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴We raided the Negeb of the Chere-thites, the territory of Judah and the Negeb of Caleb and set Ziklag on fire." ¹⁵David then asked him, "Will you lead me to this raiding band?" He replied, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master and I will lead you to this raiding band."

¹⁶So the Egyptian led David to the raiding band whom they found scattered all over the ground, eating, drinking, dancing and feasting with the spoils they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷David fought them from early morning to the evening of the following day, allowing no one to escape except four hundred young men who mounted their camels and fled.

¹⁸David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken and rescued his two wives. ¹⁹Nothing and no one was missing, small or great, son or daughter, booty or anything the Amalekites had taken. David brought back everything. ²⁰He then gathered flocks and herds and the people drove them before him, saying, "These are David's spoils!"

²¹David reached the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, and were left behind at the Besor

• **30.1** This is one of those events in which David appears totally crushed.

But David found strength in Yahweh, his God. Even when he has reached the bottom of the pit, he does not lose hope.

The share of those who go down to battle

and of those who remain with the baggage shall be the same. David refuses to allow that kind of distribution which we sometimes make, distinguishing between those who serve and those who do not serve. This concept of social solidarity is the very thing which animates all of Deuteronomy's legislation.

brook. These men came to meet David and those who were with him. David then drew near and greeted them. ²² But the malicious and worthless people among those who had accompanied David said, "Since they did not come with us, we shall not share the booty with them; let each of them take his wife and children and leave." ²³ But David said, "My brothers, you shall not do that after what Yahweh has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the band that raided us. ²⁴ Who would agree to what you have said? The share of those who go down to battle and of those who remain with the baggage shall be the same; they shall share alike." ²⁵ From that day to the present, this has been a statute and custom for Israel.

Num
31:27

²⁶ When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent part of the booty to the elders of Judah, to each of his friends, saying, "This is a gift to you from the booty of Yahweh's enemies: ²⁷ to those in Bethel, in Ramoth-negeb, in Jattir, ²⁸ in Aroer, in Sipmoth, in Eshtemoa, ²⁹ in Racal, in the Jerahmeelite cities, in the Kenite cities, ³⁰ in Hormah, in Borashan, ³¹ in Athach, in Hebron, and in all the places where David and his men had stayed.

Death of Saul

31 ¹ Now the Philistines fought against the Israelites who, in their flight, fell mortally wounded on Mount Gilboa. ² The Philistines surrounded Saul and his sons and killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, Saul's sons. ³ The battle raged around Saul, and he was afraid when he saw that the archers had found him.

⁴ Then Saul commanded his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through lest these uncircumcised men come and stab me themselves, making fun of me." But his armor-bearer did not move because he was greatly terrified. So Saul drew his own sword and fell upon it. ⁵ Seeing that Saul was dead, the armor-bearer also fell upon his sword and died with him. ⁶ Thus, Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer and all his men died together on the same day.

⁷ When the Israelites on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. Then the Philistines came and occupied those cities.

⁸ The following day, the Philistines came to strip the slain and found Saul and his three sons lying dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹ They cut off his head and stripped off his armor and then sent messengers throughout the Philistine lands to proclaim this good news in the temples of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰ They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroath and pinned his body on the wall of Bethshan. ¹¹ When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all their warriors set out, marched through the night and removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Bethshan. They then returned to Jabesh and burnt the bodies there. ¹³ Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, after which, they fasted for seven days.

• **31.1** There will be no further question of Saul in the Bible: no competition with David. But it had to be a respectful silence. All his people shared the responsibility of his failure because of

the little support they had given him, and could they condemn him without accusing God and Samuel?