
1 SAMUEL 1-15

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INTRODUCTION

1 Samuel is continuation of the story starting in Genesis and running through 2 Kings, telling the story of Israel from the creation to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hand of the Babylonians. It is a transition work that moves Israel from the tribal organization portrayed in Judges to a centralized government (or shortly two governments) led by a king.

In these chapters, we are introduced to Eli, considered a judge in the tradition of the book of Judges (and continuing the theme of judges becoming more corrupt), Samuel, a prophet and the last judge in Israel, who follows God's command to establish a king, and the man who became that first king, Saul. The tripartite government that is established in 1 Samuel remained in place for Israel's pre-exilic history—king, prophet, and priest,

sometimes agreeing and sometimes in sharp disagreement.

Anciently, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book as were 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Their division into two books in Hebrew was apparently a medieval event, though it first occurred in the Greek Septuagint translation prior to the birth of Christ. The earliest sources of Samuel (and Kings and Chronicles), such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, have them each as one book. The Dead Sea Scrolls versions of Samuel (and the Septuagint, which in many cases more closely matches the DSS) contain many variations from the Hebrew text commonly used today (the Masoretic text). There are also helpful Joseph Smith Translation changes in Samuel. Some of these differences will be noted in the commentary below.

SAMUEL THE PROPHET (1:1 – 7:17)

INTRODUCTION

Like other leaders in the Bible and other ancient literature, Samuel's story starts with a miraculous birth. He was called in a miraculous manner as a youth to serve God. His life was dedicated to service from his birth and he presided over the transition from judges to kings. In that role, Samuel is

considered the first prophet (Acts 3:24; 13:20; and 3 Nephi 20:24), though clearly others had served as the mouthpiece of God prior; it was with Samuel that the office became an official part of the government of the Israelites.

COMMENTARY

Samuel's birth (1:1-28)

In the town of Ramathaim-zophim (or Ramah in verse 19, just a few miles from Beth-el where Deborah of Judges lived) was a man named **Elkanah** ('God has possessed' or 'God has created') with this two wives, **Hannah** ('grace') and **Peninnah** ('jewel'). Elkanah was a Levite (1 Chronicles 6:16, 22-28). Peninnah was able to have children but Hannah was not and Peninnah "provoked her sore" (1:6) because of it. But Elkanah loved Hannah and "gave her a worthy portion" (1:5) of the meat of their offerings, even though she lacked children. When she expressed her frustration, he comforted her as best he could: "am not I better to thee than ten sons?" But Hannah still grieved. Jewish tradition holds that Hannah was the first wife and was married to Elkanah ten years when he took Peninnah to wife because she was barren. The same source says that Hannah was married a total of 19 years before she finally had a child (Olson, 130), meaning she possibly endured Peninnah's harassments for nine years.

It was their custom each year to go the place of the Tabernacle (Shiloh at this time) "to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts" (1:3). The time they went was likely the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, due to the reference to fasting before feasting and the types of offerings they brought (Olson, 133). As they made this annual trek, Peninnah's provocations were enough to make Hannah cry and lose her appetite (the phrase "adversary" in 1:6 can also mean 'rival wife,' though the Septuagint (LXX) version makes no mention of Peninnah being the problem, just the fact that Hannah was barren—

Brenton, 355). Once after everyone had enjoyed the food and wine of the feast, Hannah went to the Tabernacle to pray, during which she vowed that if the Lord would give her a son, she would "give him unto the Lord all the days of his life" (1:11), as with a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6).

The priest at the Tabernacle, **Eli**, saw her silently praying but moving her lips, and rebuked her for being drunk (something that might be expected with the feast going on). She assured him she was not but was just petitioning the Lord. Eli's response was, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thine petition that thou hast asked of him" (1:17). This response greatly satisfied Hannah, who replied in kind, "Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight" (1:18).

Upon returning home, Hannah shortly became pregnant. The requested son was born, and she named him **Samuel** ('his name is El' or 'the name of God' or even 'heard of God'). Hannah told Elkanah her husband that she was not going to go to Shiloh until Samuel was weaned because after that she was going to "bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (1:22). The DSS adds to this verse: "And I will dedicate him as a Nazarite forever, all the days of [his life]" (DSSB, 215, bracketed text added). Elkanah's response in the KJV is enhanced in the DSS: "May the Lord establish the words of your mouth" (DSSB, 215), meaning that Elkanah recognized the inspired nature of his wife's pronouncements.

When Samuel was weaned (perhaps about three years of age but possibly as old as five or six), she

took him (“to Shiloh” clarifies DSSB, 216, adding that Elkanah personally slew the offering, which agrees with the LXX) along with their offerings. The KJV says she took “three bullocks” (1:24) which would be excessive. The DSS instead says one three-year-old bull, which agrees with verse 25. In an act of great faith, she gave the boy to Eli, leaving this young child in that priest’s care.

Thought Question: How can Hannah’s story help you appreciate someone who might be different than you?

Hannah’s prayer (2:1-10)

Chapter 2 opens with Hannah’s prayer, which is much like a psalm. In Christian circles, this is sometimes referred to as the Old Testament ‘Magnificat’ because of its similarity to Mary’s poetic exclamation known by that name (because of its opening line) in Luke 1:46-55. In other words, Mary’s poem is likely modeled on Hannah’s (see the Appendix for a side-by-side comparison).

Samuel’s childhood (2:11-26)

Living with Eli, Samuel was exposed to the wickedness of Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, which the text describes as “sons of Belial” (2:12), a transliterated Hebrew word meaning both ‘worthless’ and ‘wicked.’ The text describes the practice of how the priests selected their portions from the offerings given by the people and how these men selfishly took far more than allowed by the Law of Moses. This results in the statement that they “abhorred the offering of the Lord” (2:17), meaning “they were treating the Lord’s offering with contempt” (NIV). Eli (aged 98, according to DSSB, 218) appeared to be incapable of dealing with his sons’ wickedness. When he tried to correct them (focused more on how bad their deeds looked to others than their offense to God), the text records no reaction on their part, but does not their continued disobedience.

In contrast, Samuel somehow managed to stay faithful while he “ministered before the Lord” (2:18), somehow uninfluenced by the examples of these sons of Eli. The conclusion about him is that he “was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men” (2:26).

In one of their visits, Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah that she would bear other children, which she did, having a total of four sons and two daughters. Hannah showed her continued love to Samuel by making him “a little coat” (2:19) (and outer garment), a substantial task as she raised and sheered the sheep, cleaned and spun the wool, wove the cloth, and sewed it to fit his growing body each year.

Eli and sons condemned (2:27-36)

A “man of God” (2:27) came to Shiloh to speak with Eli. His message from the Lord started by reminding Eli that God had led his fathers out of Egypt and chosen Eli’s ancestor, Aaron, to be the priest for the people. Then he asked Eli, “Wherefore kick (or ‘trample’) ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering” (2:29) and honor or revere his sons above the Lord. As punishment, Eli was told that his “house” would be cut off, such that “there shall not be an old man in thine house” (2:31), and that his own two sons would both die “in one day” (2:34).

The word used to describe how Eli felt about his sons (“honourest thy sons above me,” 2:29) is used often in these chapters but first here, intentionally repeated as a theme. The word is *kābad*, which has many nuances of meaning, including ‘honor’, ‘become heavy’, ‘glorify’, and ‘harden’. It is used again in the man of God’s speech: “for them that honor me [God] I will honour” (2:30), which could also be loosely expressed, ‘for those that put priority on a relationship with me will I also prioritize in my actions.’

The Lord speaks to Samuel (3:1 - 4:1a)

In telling Samuel’s story here, the editor first let us know how unusual it was for God to speak at this time: “a revelation of the Lord was uncommon and vision infrequent” (3:1, NAB). Then we are told that Eli’s vision “began to wax dim” (3:2), inviting us to make the comparison.

But Samuel was listening as he slept in the Tabernacle. He heard the Lord’s voice calling him but thought it was Eli. Two times he ran to Eli’s bed, eager to be of service. But Eli said he had not called, so Samuel returned to bed. The reason for Samuel’s confusion is given: “Samuel did not yet know the

Lord” (3:7). He was worthy and willing but lacked experience with revelation. So when it happened a third time, Eli counseled Samuel to stay put and respond, “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth” (3:9). So the Lord came a fourth time and “stood” (3:10), meaning he presented himself to Samuel. He told Samuel that soon he would do the things that he (through the man of God) had already spoken against Eli and his house. The sons were judged because they “made themselves vile” and Eli because “he restrained them not” (3:13).

In the morning, Samuel rose and did his chores, avoiding Eli because he did not want to tell him the message. But finally Eli insisted, likely knowing what was coming because of what the man of God had already said. When Samuel told him, Eli’s response was, “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good” (3:18), hearkening back to the last verse of Judges where everyone did what seemed good to themselves (Judges 21:25).

This apparently wasn’t the only instance as Samuel began to speak the word of the Lord or see the Lord in vision. The people all recognized that God “did let none of his words fall to the ground” (3:19), meaning everything Samuel said was fulfilled.

Thought Question: How was Samuel able to stay faithful the Lord even when so many around him were corrupt and disobedient?

The ark taken by the Philistines (4:1b – 7:2)

On the heels of Samuel being chosen by God comes a sad story in Israel’s history. They were battling the Philistines and “Israel was smitten” (4:2). Wanting some additional help, the elders called for the ark of the covenant to be brought to the battle, so Eli’s sons brought it to them. This first brought joy to the Israelites and fear to the Philistines who, though the story was not quite right, recognized the ark as a symbol of the power of the God of Israel who had brought them out of Egypt with miracles. The problem is, the people looked to the ark like a talisman or good luck charm, thinking its presence would somehow give them victory. But the true power of the ark was as a symbol of their covenant, which they had forgotten, so the ark offered them no reward. Israel was again beaten by the Philistines,

who captured the ark and killed many, including Eli’s sons. A courier ran to Shiloh to inform the nearly 100-year-old Eli (who was sitting “watching” (4:13) even though he could not see), who promptly fell from his stool and broke his neck under the weight of his huge body, made fat by the many offerings of the people and perhaps by the thievery of his sons. The text says that Eli was “heavy” (4:18) which is the same word as how he honored his sons— *kābad*.

Eli’s son, Phinehas, has a pregnant wife. When she heard the news, she went into labor. She gave birth to a son, dying shortly afterwards, but not before giving him the name Ichabod because the glory was gone from Israel that day. “Ichabod” (4:21) is again *kābad* preceded by a negative, meaning ‘no glory’ or ‘no weight.’ The text doesn’t mention it because the focus turns to the ark itself, but this is apparently when the Philistines overran Shiloh and destroyed the city and the Tabernacle itself (see Jeremiah 7:12-14 and Psalm 78:60; Arnold, 893-894).

The Philistines brought the ark first to Ashdod, one of their five principle towns, and put it in the temple of Dagon as a sign of triumph. But the next day, Dagon’s statue was fallen to the ground. Lifting him up, they likely attributed it to a natural phenomenon. But the next day he was fallen again, this time with the head broken off as well as the hands. This was symbolic of conquest; victorious armies often cut off the heads or hands of those slain in battle to make a count without hauling around the entire body.

Next a plague came upon the city. The nature of the plague is unclear; the Hebrew word translated “emerods” in the KJV (*tēhor*) can mean a tumor or hemorrhoids (the root word has to do with burning). It also appears that the people perceived it had to do with rats (see 6:5; the LXX also mentions mice with the plague in 5:6), something Ashdod would have known well as a port city. Thus many scholars believe it was the bubonic plague which is borne by rodents and can cause tumors and is often fatal, as the text describes, where hemorrhoids are not. Whatever the plague, the text says “the hand of the Lord was heavy” upon the Philistines, using the same word already mentioned (*kābad*) four times in this

account of the ark. A final mention is when they are called upon not to harden (*kābad*) their hearts in 6:6.

At any rate, they sent the ark on to Gath, another of their cities (the home of Goliath later), but the men there suffered the same curse. So they sent it to Ekron, but the people there had already heard about the events at the other cities so wanted nothing to do with the ark. The people asked their own priests what to do and were told to make five gold tumors and five gold mice (rats) and send them with the ark as a sin offering. They put the ark on a cart pulled by two milk cows and turned it loose, deciding that if the ark went back to Israel, it was indeed the source of their suffering. The cows defied their expected nature and left their young calves to haul the cart to Israelite territory, straight to the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh ('house of the sun') where the Levites used the cart the cows to offer sacrifice to God for the return of the ark. Some of the men of Beth-Shemesh took it upon themselves to look in the ark, perhaps thinking there might be more gold or something, but they were killed "with a great slaughter" (6:19), thus suffering even more than the Philistines. So they sent a message to the people of Kirjath-jearim to come get the ark, fearing additional consequences for themselves. The ark was thus in that place for twenty years.

Thought Question: What did the ark represent and how did the Lord use it to teach the Philistines and the Israelites important principles?

Samuel leads and judges (7:3-17)

Samuel had become a strong leader, a prophet and a judge. He called the people to repent and turn their hearts to the Lord, and they responded by putting away their Ba'als and Asherahs. Samuel gathered the people to Mizpeh and re-enacted the covenant with them. The Philistines heard of the gathering of the people at Mizpeh and sent an army to attack. The people were afraid but Samuel sacrificed and cried out to the Lord, and "the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited [confused] them" (7:10). Chasing the Philistines in disarray, the Israelites won the day. In celebration, Samuel took a stone and set it in place, calling it "Eben-ezer" (7:12, *eben-hā-‘āzer*), 'stone of help.'

Samuel enjoyed peace the rest of his days, ministering and judging "in circuit" (7:16) between Beth-el, Gilgal, Mizpeh, and his home town of Ramah, where he built an altar.

SAUL THE KING (8:1 – 15:35)

INTRODUCTION

The next eight chapters shift the focus from Samuel to Saul, the first king of Israel. Samuel still plays a role, but moves to a background, supporting player, while Saul comes to the front of the stage.

Saul starts well, humble and uncertain of himself, showing faith and even the gift of prophecy. But it doesn't last as Saul falls into the pattern of so many others in power, thinking of himself first and caught in his authority so much that he forgot who gave it to him in the first place. Thus these chapters could be called the rise and fall of Saul the king—not that his story ends with chapter 15, but the end of his kingdom has been decided.

Some scholars seeing the various accounts of Saul becoming king here argue for a variety of different sources that have been redacted into a single story. They see pro-monarchical and anti-monarchical attitudes both reflected in the text, strengthening the argument for multiple authors and time periods. But both of these points are easily reconciled with an understanding of the context and setting. The anti-king sentiments are expressed by Samuel acting under the direction of the Lord to warn the people of the consequences of their choice, while the pro-king statements are actually neutral; they happen when Samuel is simply taking the actions required to establish the king. As for the three differing accounts of Saul's coronation, there is no conflict. He was

made king in stages, according to a pattern established even with the judges—first a private call to service, then a proof of the call, then the full support and acclamation of the people. In many ways, that pattern is followed in the Church today,

with calls coming privately from those in authority, a ‘proof’ of the call as the Lord confirms it to the person called, and a public sustaining where the congregation offers full support. That was Saul’s experience just as it is ours today.

COMMENTARY

The people want a king (8:1-22)

Though the passage of time is probably long—“Samuel was old” (8:1) when this chapter begins—we are meant to see the contrast between the peoples’ repentance and the victory attributed solely to the Lord in chapter 7 with their sinful desire to be just like their neighbors and have a king in chapter 8, forgetting what Gideon had told them not long before: “the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23).

Samuel had at least two sons, Joel and Abiah, whom he made judges over Israel as he aged. Settling at Ramah, his birth city, he seems to have left the governing to them. Sadly, they “turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment” (8:3).

Leaders of the people came to Samuel to bring this to his attention. Their request, however, was not just for correction, but became a call for a king to rule over them. This greatly upset Samuel for many reasons, one of which was that it appeared to be a personal attack on him and his sons—he felt the people were rejecting him after these many years of effort and service to judge them. Now they wanted a king “to judge us like all the nations” (8:5).

Taking it to the Lord, he was told that the people were not rejecting Samuel but were rejecting God. He was supposed to be their king but instead they wanted an earthly king. Nevertheless, the Lord instructed Samuel to give them what they asked for, though he was to first “protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them” (8:9).

Samuel told the people that a king would take their sons and make his own army, take their daughters to make food for himself, take their fields and crops to feed himself and his entourage, take their slaves for his own needs, and they would end up as his slaves.

He warned that they would eventually cry for relief, “and the Lord will not hear you in that day” (8:18). But the people were adamant: “we will have a king over us” (8:19). Going back to the Lord, Samuel was again told to listen to the voice of the people and give them a king. With that promise, he sent the people home.

Thought Question: While we may not clamor for a king today, in what ways do we try to be like our neighbors, asking for things that might show our rejection of God?

Saul becomes king (9:1 - 11:13)

Chapter 9 introduces us to a man named Kish (‘bent’) of the tribe of Benjamin, which tribe had nearly been wiped out at the end of the book of Judges (chapters 20-21). Kish had a son named **Saul** (*šā’ûl*, meaning ‘desired’), described as taller and more handsome than anyone in all of Israel. One day his father’s donkeys became lost so he went looking for them. Little did he know that this trip would change his life. He passed through several areas but did not find them. Making a nearly 30-mile loop, he was on his way to return to his home in Gibeah, fearing that his father would worry less about the donkeys than about them because they had been gone so long. But his servant persuaded him to first stop and talk to the “man of God” (9:6) who was nearby to see if he could help them. Worried they had no gift for the man, the servant produced a “fourth part of a shekel of silver” (9:8) and they went to the city Ramah to find Samuel.

As they entered the city, they asked some girls fetching water about him. The girls said he was in the city and just getting ready to start a feast with the people. As they entered the city, Samuel was just leaving “to go up to the high place” (9:14) to sacrifice at the altar he had built in Ramah.

It turns out that the previous day the Lord had “told Samuel in his ear” (9:15) that he was going to meet the man that would be “captain over my people” (9:16). The word translated “captain” is *nāgîd*, meaning ruler or leader. The word “king” (*melek*) is not used with Saul here but is later.

When Samuel saw Saul, the Spirit told him, “Behold the man whom I speak to thee of!” (9:17). Not knowing him, Saul asked Samuel if he could direct him to the seer’s house and Samuel told him, “I am the seer” (9:19). He directed Saul to the high place, inviting him to eat with him. He then explained that the donkeys were already found, but that “the desire of Israel” (9:20) was on Saul and his father’s family. Perplexed, Saul wondered what this meant, given that he came from a humble family in the smallest of tribes. Samuel gave Saul a huge portion from the meal that had been prepared, then took Saul to his home. As Saul was leaving the next day, Samuel asked him to stop near the gate (where business is transacted), where he took oil and anointed him. To this point, only priests had been anointed but now the Lord had directed Samuel to anoint a “captain over his inheritance” (10:1), meaning Saul was captain over the Lord’s property.

Samuel gave Saul a series of signs to establish the truth of what he had told him—he would see men who knew about his donkeys, he would cross paths with men who would give him bread (“for a wave offering,” clarifies DSSB, 223), and he would encounter “a company of prophets” (10:5) and join them. He told Saul that he would prophesy with these men and then he would “be turned into another man” (10:6). Then he told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there for Samuel. Everything happened just as Samuel had said, and “God gave him another heart” (10:9).

Running into his uncle, Saul was still reluctant to share what Samuel had told him about being the captain of Israel. But Samuel called all the people together at Mizpeh, warned them again that their desire for a king was a rejection of God, but still gathered the people around and drew lots to discover who would be their king. The lot fell to the tribe of Benjamin, then the family of Matri, then to Saul. When they tried to find him, though, he had “hid himself among the stuff” (10:22), meaning the

utensils and furniture at the place. Saul was found and brought before the people as Samuel declared, “See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen” and the people replied, “God save the king” (10:24), or better translated, ‘life to the king’.

Samuel wrote down how the kingdom should be run in a book “and laid it up before the Lord” (10:25). Saul went home but a number of men supporting him went along, while others “despised him” (10:27), wondering how he would lead them. They would soon find out.

Saul’s first challenge arose from across the Jordan River. The story begins abruptly in the KJV and all other ancient versions except the Dead Sea Scrolls (though alluded to in Josephus), which include a large section preceding and providing background to verse 1 (italicized text is unique to DSSB, 225):

Nahash king of the Ammonites oppressed the Gadites and the Reubenites viciously. He put out the right eye of all of them and brought fear and trembling on Israel. Not one of the Israelites in the region beyond the Jordan remained whose right eye Nahash king of the Ammonites did not put out, except seven thousand men who escaped from the Ammonites and went to Jabesh-gilead. Then after about a month, Nahash the Ammonite went up...

Thus Nahash’s motivation in going against Jabesh-gilead was to get the 7,000 who had escaped him. The leaders of the town asked for seven days to solicit help and sent messengers to their new king, Saul, who was out in his field working with his animals. In the pattern of the judges, when Saul heard the news of the oppression, “the Spirit of God came upon Saul” (11:6), driving him to action. He took a pair of oxen and cut them up, sending pieces throughout Israel. Perhaps he was evoking the story of the Levite who previously cut up his murdered concubine (killed in Gibeah) and sent her body parts off to the tribes to rally them (Judges 19-20). But the threat that went with his message was, ‘Come join me or the same thing will happen to your oxen,’ so the people came.

Sending the messengers back to tell the people of Jabesh-gilead they were coming the next day, Saul’s army marched forward. The people in the besieged city told Nahash that “To morrow we will come out

unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you” (11:10). Nahash thought this meant victory but the people of Jabesh-gilead meant they were going to attack with Saul’s help.

Saul arrived when it was still dark (“in the morning watch,” 11:11, meaning in the hours just before dawn) and attacked from three sides, scattering the Ammonites “so that two of them were not left together” (11:11).

In their excitement to support their new king who had just led them to victory, some wanted to put to death any who had denigrated Saul previously, but he magnanimously refused, wanting nothing to detract from the Lord’s victory that day.

Samuel’s teaching about kings (11:14 – 12:25)

Samuel proposed a grand meeting at Gilgal to “renew the kingdom there” (11:14). This was Saul’s official coronation ceremony, now that he had proved that he was God’s choice by his great victory against the Ammonites.

But Samuel also took advantage of the gathering to give a last warning about kings. He reminded the people he had done exactly what they had asked in giving them a king. He reminded them of his lifetime of service and asked everyone present to witness that he had never defrauded them, oppressed them, or taken bribes. The people all agreed, with God and the new king as witnesses. Samuel recounted how the Lord had miraculously brought them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and preserved them against other enemies like Sisera. He had given them judges to lead and protect them, like Gideon (Jerubbaal) and himself (Samuel) who had “delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side” (12:10).

Still the people clamored for a king, so he presented Saul who was “the king whom ye have chosen” (12:13) and admonished them to “fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel” (12:14). If they did this, both people and king could still prosper. But if not, they would be punished. Then as a sign of such punishment, Samuel prayed for and the Lord sent a nasty thunderstorm to damage some of the wheat crops waiting to be harvested. He concluded:

“Turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart . . . But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king” (12:20, 25).

Saul rebuked (13:1-15)

In his second year as king, Saul determined to fight the Philistines. They had not fought in many years and the reason is not given in the text why they should start now. **Jonathan**, Saul’s son, attacked at Geba and was victorious, which helped rally the people to Saul’s side at Gilgal. But when the Philistines came, their army was so huge and impressive that it brought fear to Israel, some of whom scattered into caves, thickets, high places and even crossed over the Jordan to escape. Even the bravest ones who were still with Saul trembled.

Samuel had evidently told Saul he would be there in seven days. So when the time passed without Samuel arriving, Saul took it upon himself to offer sacrifices to God, hoping to stir the spirit of the people.

Right after doing this, however, Samuel did arrive and asked Saul what was going on. Rebuking him for this act of defiance, Samuel told Saul, “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people” (13:14). In other words, the rebuke left Saul in place as king but said his line would not establish a dynasty. Thus began Saul’s downfall less than two years into his reign. Not waiting for Samuel and presuming to have authority to offer the sacrifice were grievous enough sins to merit such a severe declaration.

Battles with the Philistines (13:16 – 14:52)

Dividing into three armies, the Philistines moved out from their stronghold at Michmash to the north (toward Ophrah), the west (toward Beth-horon) and the east (to the wilderness). In contrast, the small Israelite army didn’t even have swords or spears, but farming instruments to use against the chariots of the Philistines.

Taking initiative but not telling anyone, Jonathan took his armor bearer and crossed the valley between the two cities—Geba where Israel was

camped and Michmash for the Philistines. Jonathan showed both bravery and faith as he approached the Philistine garrison, telling his armor bearer, “it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few” (14:6). They determined just to reveal themselves to the Philistines and test the result, Jonathan reasoning that if the guards said, ‘Wait here,’ that they would flee but if the guards said, ‘Come into the city,’ they would know the Lord was with them. The latter happened, challenging Jonathan to a fight. He and the other man climbed up the hillside leading to the city “upon his hands and upon his feet” (14:13) and when they got close, the two of them slew the guards, taking out twenty men.

Saul heard the noise from across the valley and quickly took stock, realizing Jonathan and his armor bearer were missing. Saul called the priest who was there and asked him to consult the Urim and Thummim (“withdraw thine hand” in 14:19) and getting a positive response, led the full army to battle. Others in the area joined in the battle and the Philistines were routed.

Before going out to battle, Saul swore a curse on anyone who ate food before the day was over and the battle won. But Jonathan had left early and not heard that condition, so when he saw some honey on the way back, he ate some. One of the men that had joined him warned him of Saul’s oath, but Jonathan could see how hungry everyone was, and reasoned that a person can’t fight as well on an empty stomach.

Returning to camp, Saul again asked the priest to determine if they should press the battle further that night. But the answer was no, frustrating Saul. Wanting to know why, he determined it was because someone had eaten food contrary to his oath and vowed to kill whoever had done that. When lots were drawn (the LXX adding that people were divided into two groups and then a yes/no or either/or question was asked, with Urim being ‘yes’ and Thummim meaning ‘no’ or Urim indicating one group and Thummim the opposing group), it fell on Jonathan, who confessed that he had eaten a little honey. Saul moved to keep his oath and slay Jonathan but the people spoke up and said, “Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation

in Israel?” (14:45). Thus rescued by the people, Jonathan’s life was saved.

Saul continued fighting battles until he consolidated the kingdom, vexing all their enemies and building up a powerful army: “when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him unto him” (14:52).

Thought Question: How can we avoid making a rash pronouncement that has lasting consequences?

Saul rejected (15:1-35)

This chapter is another example of Saul and Samuel clashing, with Samuel asserting God’s and the prophet’s right to judge and dictate to the king and Saul wanting to act more independently. Samuel came to Saul and reminded him that the Lord had cursed the people of Amalek because of their treachery to Israel many years before (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19) and told Saul the day had come to kill all the people and even animals of Amalek. So Saul led a group against them, warning the Kenites (the descendants of Moses’ brother-in-law) to get out so they were not harmed in the battle. Saul was victorious against them but spared the king’s life, whose name was Agag. The people also spared many of the animals, ostensibly for sacrificing to the Lord. But this was all contrary to Samuel’s instructions.

The Lord told Samuel what had happened, “and it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night” (15:11). In that verse, the JST changes the part about the Lord repenting to Saul not repenting even though he had sinned. When Samuel arrived, Saul exclaimed, “Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (15:13). But Samuel heard the bleating of the sheep and Saul explained that the people have saved some for sacrifice. Samuel reminded Saul that when he was first called as king, he was humble, “little in thine own sight” (15:17), but now Saul was not inclined to obey the Lord. Saul argued that he did obey because he destroyed the people but he saved Agag alive as the king and the people just saved a few animals. Samuel’s response is classic: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of

rams” (15:22). Because Saul had “rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (15:23). It was no longer a question of his dynasty not continuing but now Saul himself had lost the kingship due to his disobedience, his pride, and his unwillingness to follow the Lord’s commands with exactness (see Alma 57:21).

Saul belatedly tried to seek forgiveness but it was insincere and too late, and Samuel told him so. Samuel turned to leave and Saul grabbed his clothing and tore it trying to stop him. Samuel replied that just as Saul had torn his clothing, “The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou” (15:28). He reminded Saul that God doesn’t lie or repent—this was a permanent decision.

Saul asked Samuel to at least stay and offer sacrifice. Samuel cared for Saul and so did so. Before he left, Samuel had Agag brought to him. Agag was pleased, thinking the threat of death was past, but the old man Samuel raised his own sword and killed Agag before the people, doing the work that Saul should have done. Then Samuel went home to Ramah and Saul returned to Gibeah, “And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul” (15:35). The JST concludes by changing “the Lord repented” to “the Lord rent the kingdom from Saul, whom he had made king over Israel.”

Thought Questions: *What are the results of our sometimes being stubborn and rebellious? How can we recognize and overcome these attitudes?*

APPENDIX

A comparison of 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Hannah’s prayer) and Luke 1:46-55 (Mary’s words of praise). While the two are certainly not identical in wording or length, a pattern or theme can be traced in both that makes the similarity worth noting.

1 Samuel 2:1-10	Luke 1:46-55	Notes
1 My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.	46 My soul doth magnify the Lord,	<i>Joy in the Lord and his salvation</i>
2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.	47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.	
3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed.	48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.	<i>Humility leads to the Lord's support</i>
4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.	50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.	<i>The Lord strengthens the faithful and the weak</i>
5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.	49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.	
6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the	51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in	<i>Reference to motherhood</i>
		<i>The blessings and struggles of life all come from the Lord</i>

<p>grave, and bringeth up. 7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. 8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. 9 He will keep the feet ["path" in DSSB, 216] of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; [DSSB, 216 adds: "He grants the request of the one who prays. He blesses the years of the righteous."] for by strength shall no man prevail. 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.</p>	<p>the imagination of their hearts. 52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.</p>	<p><i>The triumph of the Lord and his king</i></p>
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