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1 Samuel: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

The story of 1 Samuel begins in an unexpected way and with a surprising person. If we were telling the story of the rise of the kingdom, we would not tell the story this way. Perhaps we would begin with the battle of Aphek, or maybe we'd jump to Israel's demand of a king in chapter 8. Yet it begins with Hannah, a woman who is barren, and a woman who is in rivalry with a fruitful wife, Peninnah.

In the situation of Hannah, it is as if the whole story and situation of Israel is condensed. The oppressors are fruitful, yet the faithful are barren. As a barren wife, Hannah should remind us of the wives of the patriarchs.

Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel were all barren also, and the opening of the barren womb is a crucial theme throughout the scripture. As the barren and oppressed wife who calls out to the Lord, Hannah represents the entire nation, the nation waiting for the promised seed of the woman to deliver them from their condition. And the fact that the narrative of Samuel begins at this point, rather than many years later when Samuel reaches maturity, gives us insight into the priorities of the Lord and the way that he works and views the world.

As in the story of the Exodus and in the story of Ruth, covenant history seems to have broken down irreparably, and it's through the prayers and the courage of faithful women that a new future becomes possible. In the midst of this gathering gloom of history, God plants the seeds of his future in unexpected places. In praying for a son, Hannah promises that if the Lord hears her request, she will dedicate him to the Lord, and he will be a Nazarite all of his life.

Like Samson and John the Baptist, Hannah's son would be a dedicated servant, bound by a vow of special service for all of his life, and a daughter of a barren woman whose womb was opened. The Nazarite was a person who exercised a priest-like task within the wider world, with many of the same limitations that the priests were under in their service, and Hannah's son would be set apart for a lifelong special mission, a form of holy war, preparing the way for the establishment of the kingdom to come. At the beginning of 1 Samuel, Israel languishes under wicked and spiritually dull rulers.

We can see something of this in chapter 3, there's a threefold parallelism. We're informed that the word of the Lord was not heard in those days, that Eli the high priest was losing his sight, and that the lamp of God would soon be extinguished. It's a world without light, without the light of revelation and prophetic vision, without the light of spiritual and physical perception in the high priest, and without the symbolic light of God's presence.

And the little light that remains is guttering, is about to be snuffed out, and the world of the tabernacle will fall back into darkness in the story of the battle of Aphek, as the ark of God is captured. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are wicked and corrupt priests who despise the offering of the Lord and violate the women at the tabernacle door, the virgins who were to represent Israel's holiness as the Lord's betrothed bride. Eli himself is very old, and the woman Hannah, with whom the story begins, has a closed womb, and is sorely provoked by a fruitful counterpart, Peninnah.

The story is then framed in terms of themes of hopelessness, social decay, corrupt power, and bitter struggle with oppressive and ascendant rivals. During their yearly visit

to Shiloh for worship and sacrifice, Hannah leaves the festivities in order to cry out to the Lord at the tabernacle, weeping in her anguish. She vows to the Lord that if he gives her a son, she will dedicate him to the Lord, and that he will be a lifelong Nazarite.

Eli, the high priest, mistakes the fasting Hannah's pouring out of her soul to the Lord for drunkenness. This is suggestive of his lack of spiritual perception, and this lack of perception may be a sign of things to come, that he is about to be toppled from his perch, quite literally later on, and then going to be replaced by a faithful leader of the people. The Lord remembers Hannah, in her womb, and gives her a son, whom she names Samuel.

The Lord's remembering and hearing of the woman who cries out might recall the Exodus for us, where the Lord heard the groaning of his people, remembered them, and opened the womb of Egypt for the birth of his firstborn son that was dedicated to him. Hannah names her son for the fact that she asked him from the Lord, Samuel's name suggesting, heard of God. A strange aspect of this, however, is that the explanation that she gives would fit better with the name Saul than with the name Samuel.

This perhaps sets us up for the juxtaposition between Samuel and Saul later on in the story, perhaps also juxtaposing Hannah's asking for a son and Israel's asking for a king. When Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him up to Shiloh to give him to the Lord. Samuel was adopted as a son of Eli, although as we'll see later on, Samuel is the one who's dedicated to the Lord, he sleeps in the tent of the Lord, is primarily the son of the Lord, with Eli as his guardian.

And the theme of adoption is very important in 1 Samuel. Peter Lighthouse writes, Eli's paternal relation to Samuel forms the background for the contrast between Samuel and Eli's natural sons that is developed in chapter 2. Father-son relations are moreover prominent throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. Samuel's troublesome sons provided a pretext for the people to ask for a king, and Saul was adopted as Samuel's son.

Later David became a son-in-law to Saul, and much of the account of David's reign in 2 Samuel is taken up with the recording David's difficulties with his sons. In each of these cases biological sons were replaced by an adopted son, just as Eli and his sons lost the priesthood and were supplanted by Samuel, so Samuel's sons were supplanted by Saul, and Saul's son by David. In contrast to Genesis, the true son in 1 and 2 Samuel is not a younger biological son, but an adopted son who comes from outside the genealogy.

1 and 2 Samuel thus makes the typology of Genesis more precise by showing that the seed would not come through the normal channels of fleshly descent, but would be pre-eminently the one born according to the Spirit. In 1 Samuel chapter 1, rather than focusing upon the corridors of power, the first moves of God's great national and cosmic purposes in history appear in the unwitnessed intimacy of domestic and personal struggles, and in the persevering faith of an obscure person without political power or

public influence. In this and a number of other stories like it, special attention is given to women.

The struggle of childbearing and rearing is not consigned to a largely sentimental private realm, but is rendered integral to the great drama of salvation history. The stories of the matriarchs of Israel and of women such as Ruth and Hannah are not romanticised. They are stories with much suffering and oppression and bravery and significance, but they are stories of persevering and overcoming faith in dark places, of quiet and unsung victories whose fruit will one day erupt into public consciousness.

Whereas most people would tell the story beginning at the point where the plant first broke the surface of the soil, God tells the story in a way that begins with the first germination of the seed. These are stories of unrecognised turning points in the tide of history, not least because God is a God who remembers and who attends to the people that others may ignore. God answers the prayers provoked by the personal struggles of faithful women such as Hannah, in a manner that affects more public and radical social turnarounds through them.

The many biblical accounts of women struggling to give birth and being answered by God cast childbearing as a profoundly active calling requiring stubborn and persevering faith, and the frequency and prominence of these accounts, their priority in books such as Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, 1 Samuel and Luke, also makes clear that despite the hiddenness of their labour, God regards and honours these women as prominent actors on the stage of his history, and never disconnects the dramatic socio-political harvest of his purpose from the unseen work in sowing and nurturing its seeds. There is a great danger of neglecting or denying the significance of the obscure and personal struggles and victories of the faithful, those struggles and victories that do not assert themselves on the grand public stage of society and history. When our eyes scan for the signs of social and political reversal, we wouldn't think about looking at the agonised prayer of a barren woman like Hannah.

Like Eli the high priest who lacked spiritual perception, we can fail to recognise the importance of people and actions we've grown accustomed to ignoring perhaps. We can give people the false message that the capacity to make great social and political difference is something that belongs to the rich and the prominent public figures alone. We can deny the value, the necessity and the potential of quiet and private callings.

We can push people into worldly moulds of influence. But yet we serve a God who attends to the weak and the vulnerable, who remembers the forgotten and the ignored, and who hears the silenced and the oppressed. The greatest of social earthquakes can find their unseen epicentres in the most unexpected of places.

A question to consider. If 1 Samuel chapter 1 gives us a window into the way that history really works, the way that things are actually turned around, in what ways might it

inform and change the ways that we seek to make a difference in our society? In 1 Samuel chapter 2 Hannah responds to the birth of her son Samuel with a prayer of rejoicing. It's a prayer which provides the pattern for Mary's Magnificat in the Gospel of Luke.

The story of Hannah began with a prayer of sorrow and desperation in the temple, and it concludes with a prayer or song of joy. Much as the parents of Noah, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus, Hannah realises that the birth of her son Samuel heralds more than her own vindication against Peninnah. It is a sign that the Lord is about to turn Israel upside down, throwing down the rich and mighty and raising up the weak and the poor.

Hannah's prayer praised the Lord that he was about to tear down the corrupt house of Israel and re-establish it again upon righteous foundations. Like the prophetess Anna, who prayed fervently in the temple like her many centuries later, Hannah sees in a young child the sign of the redemption of Israel and declares the joyful news to others. Hannah's prayer makes the startling association of the reversal of the spiritual and political fortunes of the nation with God's answers to the prayers of an unknown woman for a child.

While the connection between the quiet and private victories of obscure individuals and the grand turnarounds in history are generally only seen in retrospect, on the very rare occasions where they are seen at all, by the spirit faithful Hannah is able to recognise in God's answer to her distress the faintest foreshock of forthcoming seismic events in Israel's history. In God's gift of life to her barren womb, Hannah recognises the working of a resurrection power. The Lord kills and brings to life, he brings down to Sheol and he raises up.

And this cannot but lead to radical social upheaval in the future. God has vindicated her and he will vindicate his people. She praises the great works of the Lord in visiting those in need.

She speaks of the exalted horns of the anointed. It begins with the exalted horn of Hannah and it ends with the exalted horn of the anointed King of the Lord. In verse 10, the lifting up of Hannah initiates a series of events that will lead to the lifting up of the King.

In the time when Hannah is praying this prayer, Israel is being oppressed by the Philistines. Hannah is being oppressed by Peninnah. And there are parallels between these two things.

The wicked are prospering and oppressing the righteous who are languishing. Yet in all the situations where the righteous are suffering, in lack of food, in their weakness, in their barrenness, in their suffering, whatever it is, the Lord is going to intervene and there is going to be a great reversal. We might relate this to the beginning of Jesus'

teaching in the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, another set of teachings that speak of a great reversal that is about to come.

Likewise, the prayers and the prophecies in the opening chapters of the Book of Luke set the terms for understanding the entire book. They prepare us for the action that will follow. And it's the same here.

Hannah's prayer here is the Book of Samuel in miniature. God is going to act in a corrupt society and he's going to turn things upside down. We need to read Hannah's prayer alongside the rest of the chapter also.

It foreshadows the judgement on Eli and his sons. They are the full who will end up hiring themselves out for bread. They've been getting full on the sacrifices of the Lord which they've been taking from the Lord and also from his people.

In verse 5 Hannah talks about those who will hire themselves out for bread and in verse 36 we read that this is the state to which Eli's descendants will be reduced. All of this is part of a greater event of resurrection. The God who brings life from the dead is going to act in Israel's history.

The Lord is creator and he is the judge. He will set the world to rights and establish justice in his world. It's a remarkable declaration of confident faith in the darkest of times.

Samuel is now left at the temple. The seed of the new order that the Lord is about to establish is deep in the soil as it were. And there are constant juxtapositions of Samuel's growth and the decay and the sin of Eli and his sons.

Brief references to Samuel's growth regularly punctuate the narrative in verses 11, 18, 21 and 26 and he is the alternative and the contrast to the evil sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, because he will ultimately take their place. Samuel's steady growth frames the description of the wickedness of Eli's sons. Samuel has been adopted into the house of Eli and he will take the place of the wicked sons who will be destroyed.

He is described as acting in a priest-like fashion, even as a child. He is clothed with a linen ephod and he ministers to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest. His mother brings him a robe every year, again connected with the garments of the priest.

Samuel is presumably working alongside the Levites. We discover that he was a Levite himself in 1 Chronicles 6. Eli's sons despise, by contrast, the sacrifice of the Lord. They take what isn't theirs to take.

In Leviticus 7, verses 28-34 we read the portions of the sacrifices that belonged to the priests. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons, and the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice

of your peace offerings. Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion.

For the breast that is waived and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, then, are robbing the Israelites of their proper portions of their peace offerings, preventing them from enjoying blessed meals in the presence of the Lord in the way that they ought to. They also robbed the Lord and treated him with contempt by taking raw meat from the Israelites before the fat had been given to the Lord.

They even threatened force if they were not given the meat that they demanded. From this gross sin against the Israelites and against the Lord, we turn to Hannah and Samuel again. The chapter is juxtaposing these two things, Hannah and her son and Eli and his sons.

Hannah visits for the yearly sacrifice. She is blessed by the Lord and ends up with three sons and two daughters. On the other hand, Hophni and Phinehas sleep with the women at the tabernacle.

The serving women at the tabernacle, which we also read of in Exodus chapter 38, were presumably virgins who were dedicated to that service. In their dedicated virginity to the Lord, they would represent Israel. But Hophni and Phinehas are violating them, violating the people of Israel, the bride, and violating the Lord, their husband.

Phinehas is also acting in a way that greatly contrasts with the actions of his namesake in the book of Numbers. In Numbers chapter 25, Phinehas stands up and intervenes to stop the plague by driving a spear through a couple engaged in inappropriate sexual relations. Far from standing in the gap and maintaining the holiness of the Lord's people, Phinehas is violating them and repeating the sorts of sins that almost got Israel destroyed.

Eli rebukes his sons, but only in a very vague, general, and toothless manner. They don't listen, understandably. It is a rebuke with little strength.

The Lord sends a man of God to Eli, and he brings a message of condemnation. Eli and his family had been uniquely honoured by the Lord, but they had scorned the Lord's sacrifices. They had responded to honour with dishonour.

Eli had also seemingly become fat on the portions of the sacrifices that his sons had stolen. In this way, he was a participant and implicated in their sins. Eli's house, the word house is repeated on a number of occasions in this section, would be brought low.

This is the beginning of the reversal that the Lord had promised through Hannah. Samuel

is growing up, but Eli's house is being brought down. The book of Samuel contains three different models of leadership that Israel could have taken.

It begins with Eli the judge and the high priest. It moves on to Samuel the judge and the prophet. And then it moves on to the king, David.

Here we see the failure of the priestly ruler, the way that Eli and his family utterly failed to guard the holiness of the Lord and his people. A question to consider. What can we learn from the parallels between Hannah and the women at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke? First Samuel chapter 3 begins with a lengthy setting of the scene in its first three verses.

It begins with a three-fold lack of light. First there's the lack of the light prophetic vision of the word of the Lord. Second, there's the lack of the light of the eyes of the high priest.

They have grown dim and he clearly lacks perception, spiritual perception, not just physical perception. He failed to perceive that Hannah was praying in the temple. He fails adequately to perceive the wickedness of his house.

And then third, it seems as though the lamp of God was soon to go out. The light symbolises the spirit's illuminating presence and the presence of the anointed servant in the Lord's sanctuary. It's the lamp that God has established to represent the high priest and other things like that.

The word of the Lord is paralleled with vision and its rarity at this time is a sign probably of judgement. The lamp of God is described in Leviticus chapter 24 verses 1 to 4. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Samuel is lying down in the temple of the Lord and the immediate impression reading this is that he was in the holy place, the main chamber of the tabernacle building. The ark of God is there although it will be captured in the next chapter.

The book of Samuel speaks of the temple but we're still dealing with the tabernacle building here. However, the tabernacle has probably developed into a larger complex of settled buildings at this point. In reality Samuel was probably not in the holy place where he would not have been permitted but he was somewhere else in the temple complex.

However, Samuel is represented as being remarkably close to the Lord's presence. He has been given to the Lord by his mother yet he doesn't yet know the Lord. His presence in the temple itself associates him with the Lord in a way that others are not.

He is, as it were, in his father's house. While Samuel is lying down he's called by the Lord and this is the first of a number of calls and there's a rapid series of events. He responds, here I am.

He runs to Eli, he speaks to him. Eli denies that it was him who called Samuel. Samuel goes and then he lies down again.

Samuel is presenting himself to his father figure. When he hears the voice of the Lord it sounds like the voice of Eli and so it's Eli to whom he goes. The same thing happens a second time and here we're informed that Samuel did not yet know the Lord.

He didn't have a personal relationship with or acquaintance with the Lord. He merely served him in his house. Having been sent back by Eli a second time Samuel is called once more.

This third time Eli now recognises what is happening and he instructs Samuel how to respond if it happens again. We should see the significance of a three-fold repetition here. This is often a narrative device that highlights important event.

When the Lord addresses Samuel the fourth time he speaks to Samuel. Samuel, Samuel. This two-fold declaration of Samuel's name might remind us of previous occasions when this occurred.

In the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 22 verse 11 when the angel calls to Abraham. Or in the story of Jacob in Genesis chapter 46 verse 2. Or in the story of Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3 verse 4. These are pivotal events in these stories and Samuel here is about to be set apart as a prophet of the Lord. We are told that the Lord does not just speak but he stands.

There may be a theophanic or visual element to the appearance of the Lord to Samuel here. The Lord declares to Samuel the doom of Eli's house. He repeats a message that the man of God from the previous chapter had delivered to Eli and Samuel is now set up as a second witness.

He is also now acting as a prophet. He's going to be a prophet to the high priest and the Lord has chosen to speak to him over Eli and through him to Eli. This itself should probably be seen as a judgement upon Eli and his house.

Eli's eyesight is growing dim and his spiritual perception is being lost but the Lord speaks to this young lad in his house. After hearing this word from the Lord Samuel lies down until the morning and then he opens the doors of the house of the Lord. The presence and the word of the Lord is now coming forth.

Eli is by the doorpost of the house when Hannah first prays for a child. Doors can be connected with birth and with death and the opening of doors are often connected with the opening of wounds in the story of the Exodus for instance or the story of the annunciation of Isaac's birth. Here as it were there's a new sort of birth event taking place.

There's something new that's going to begin and perhaps we should see in the opening of the doors of the house an act that is promising for the way that God will act through Samuel in the future. After Samuel three times mistakenly believed that Eli called him now Eli actually does call him and Samuel responds, here I am. By this point we should probably pick up on some light allusions to the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis chapter 22.

In the earlier chapters of this book Samuel is the son who is offered up to the Lord by his mother. In that respect he's a sort of Isaac figure. Here we see a father and son relationship.

Note the way that Eli refers to Samuel as his son and the difficult word of the Lord coming between them as it were. However here the difficult word comes to the son in the relationship not to the father. In both this story and the story of the binding of Isaac the expression here I am is a repeated and crucial expression.

Abraham declares here I am both to the Lord and to his son Isaac. Samuel declares it both to the Lord and to Eli his father figure. The chapter ends with a description of Samuel's growth and maturation.

It addresses the situation that was introduced at the beginning. Now there is the light of God's word and it is coming through Samuel. This chapter involves a movement from the dominance of Eli to that of Samuel.

Samuel starts off ministering to the Lord before Eli and now at the end Eli is dependent on Samuel to receive the word of the Lord and Eli retreats from view as the Lord speaks to and then through Samuel. Samuel transitions from functioning as the son of Eli to functioning as the son of the Lord and now Eli's house is going to be judged. A question to consider.

What parallels can we see between Samuel in this chapter and Jesus and John the Baptist in the early chapters of the Gospel of Luke? The first sentence of 1 Samuel chapter 4 concludes the narrative of the preceding chapter. Samuel is established as a prophet of the Lord but now he drops out of the picture for the rest of the chapter and for the chapters that follow which concern Israel and Eli's house. Later he will reappear in a story that can be compared and contrasted with this story of the battle of Aphek, the story of the battle of Ebenezer in chapter 7. Ebenezer, meaning rock of help, is mentioned at the beginning of this story as the place where the Israelites camp.

However there is no Ebenezer for Israel in this battle. This is all taking place in the west of the hill country of Ephraim. It is almost certainly also taking place during Samson's lifetime.

There is an overlap between the book of Judges and the book of 1 Samuel. Having

sustained some serious losses, the elders of Israel send for the Ark. They seem to have an important ruling function alongside the Judges in Israel at this time, presumably representing the congregation.

The Ark was the footstool of God's throne. The Lord is enthroned above the cherubim. This is a repeated expression found in 2 Samuel 6.2, 2 Kings 19.15, 1 Chronicles 13.6, Psalms 80.1, 99.1, Isaiah 37.16. The Lord's presence is associated with the cherubim and the cherubim are associated with this object, the Ark of the Covenant.

The mercy seat that was placed above the Ark of the Covenant included two cherubim. Israel thinks that by bringing this throne, as it were, of the Lord into the battle, that they can treat it like a talisman. God will act on behalf of them because they have brought his footstool into the battle.

They want the Ark to deliver them. The Lord, for them, can be manipulated by this box. It's a fetishised object.

The Ark of the Covenant is something that allows you to control God, to pull his strings. Essentially, it's acting as a sort of idol. The Ark had been taken around Jericho and in that story there was a great shout and they brought the walls down with the shout and it initially looks similar.

The Ark of the Covenant comes into the camp, there's a great shout, the Philistines are afraid and it looks like the tide of the battle has turned but things work out very differently. The Philistines wonder at the meaning of the shouting and they learn that the Ark has entered into the camp. A god has joined the Hebrews and this is presumably one of the gods who struck the Egyptians.

In Genesis chapter 10 the Philistines are associated with the Egyptians and they have clearly heard the story of the Exodus and all the things that were involved there. Even centuries later the stories are still being told. The question here seems to be who will serve whom.

There are two nations struggling for dominance and whichever wins this battle will make the others their servants. Fearful and desperate, the Philistines are called to act like men, to courageously fight what might be their last stand and they fight hard and utterly defeat the Israelites. The Israelites scatter, they don't just retreat as a military force, they flee to their homes.

The military force has been disbanded. The Ark is then captured and the two sons of Eli are killed, fulfilling the prophecy that was given by the man of God to Eli. A Benjamite runs from battle, there has been speculation that this was Saul, perhaps it sets us up for the events that come later in the story of the kingdom being established through Saul.

Eli is seated, he is concerned for the Ark, perhaps he is seated on his seat of office at the

gates of the city. Eli, like the Philistines earlier, wonders at the reason for the outcry. Perhaps we are to associate Eli with the Philistines at this point.

He is however especially concerned for the Ark of God and it is at the news of its loss that he falls over backwards and dies. He is described as being very heavy and old. The chapter ends with death.

This is similar to the death of Rachel in Genesis chapter 35 verses 17-18 as she dies giving birth to Benjamin. And when her labour was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, Do not fear, for you have another son. And as her soul was departing, for she was dying, she called his name Ben-Oni, but his father called him Benjamin.

Perhaps there is also a contrast to be observed between Hannah and the mother of Ichabod. In many respects this could be read as the end of an old covenant order. After the capture of the Ark, the tabernacle worship was never truly restored again.

The tabernacle and the Ark would always be separate, a broken house of the Lord, until the Ark was finally brought into the temple. Phineas's wife dying in childbirth is another sign of the desolation of Israel. She names her son Ichabod, inglorious, because the glory has been exiled from Israel.

The Ark of the Covenant, the throne chariot of the Lord, upon which the glory of the Lord rode, had been taken away from the nation. On the other hand, the Lord had entered into exile for his people. The story of the Mosaic tabernacle order began with the death of two sons of the High Priest, and here it ends with the death of the two sons of the High Priest.

At the end of chapter 4 we see the complete destruction of the House of Israel. The High Priest has died, as have his two sons, devastating the priestly house and lineage. The house of the Lord, the tabernacle, has been, as it were, torn in two, with the Ark taken into captivity, and the House of Israel has been ravaged by their enemies and has lost 30,000 men, in not just a great defeat but an event of national apostasy, akin to that with the golden calf at Sinai.

A question to consider, what are some ways in which we might seek to manipulate and control God as Israel tried to do with the Ark of the Covenant in this chapter? In 1 Samuel chapter 5, after the battle of Aphek, the Ark leaves Israel to go into exile. This is not too dissimilar from what we see in Exodus chapter 33 verses 7-11, where the presence of the Lord leaves the camp after Israel's apostasy. The grace of the Lord is seen at this point, in that rather than sending Israel into exile, he went into exile for them.

The previous chapter witnessed a complete breakdown of the order of life in Israel, the death of the High Priest, his two sons, a catastrophic loss in battle, and the birth of a son named Ichabod, whose name testified to the collapse that had just occurred in Israel.

However, to the tragic birth story of Ichabod, we have a response in the New Testament. Ichabod's birth is described as follows, And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, Do not be afraid, for you have born a son.

But she did not answer or pay attention. 1 Samuel chapter 4 verse 20. In the New Testament we encounter another woman who is told not to be afraid that she will bear a son.

Luke chapter 1 verses 30-31 And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. The woman in 1 Samuel chapter 4 calls her child Ichabod, saying, The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God had been captured, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured. The birth of a new child, associated with the death of his grandfather and the collapse of an old order, is answered in the New Testament with the birth of a child who heralds a new age. A child held in the arms of an old man, witnessed by a praying woman called Anna, and heralded with the words, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. If the story of Ichabod is the story of the glory departing from Israel, the story of Christ is the story of the glory of Israel returning.

I was alerted to this particular connection by my friend Elliot Ball. The ark is brought to Ashdod and is placed in the house of Dagon, the Philistines' god, beside the statue of Dagon. The lord is presented as a defeated vassal of Dagon, the supposedly greater god.

Spoils and symbols of defeated enemies would often be placed in such temples, as an expression of the superiority of the idol that was worshipped there. However, the next morning the Philistines come to the temple of Dagon to find Dagon prostrate before the ark, as if bowing to the lord. The lord's throne has been set up in Dagon's temple, and far from Dagon seeming to be the victor, Dagon himself bows down to the lord.

They restore Dagon to his upright position, but the next day they find that Dagon is prostrate before the ark again. This time, however, the head of Dagon and the palms of his hands have been removed. The decapitated Dagon is like a defeated serpent whose head is crushed, and the removal of his hands signifies the removal of his strength.

In 1 Corinthians 10, verses 8-10, the Philistines bring the head of Saul to the temple of Dagon and fasten it there. If it was customary for the Philistines to display the decapitated heads of defeated enemies there, it adds an extra level of irony to the lord's

decapitation of Dagon in his own temple. The falling of Dagon, and his being broken at the neck, also recalls the death of Eli in the previous chapter.

Just as the judge of Israel is broken, so shall the God of the Philistines be. We are reminded in this chapter that God is the God of the Exodus, and there are a number of Exodus motifs that we see in this story. God goes into exile for his people, but God is going to Exodus his own ark and bring it back to the land.

One of the great Exodus themes is the defeat of false gods, or the humiliation of idols. As the lord humiliates Dagon, strips him of his power, and triumphs over him in his own temple, decapitating him in the very place where the heads of his defeated enemies would be presented. We can see this theme re-emerge.

The lord is above all of the gods of the nations, and can prove his supremacy in the very places of their presumed power. The hands of Dagon may have been cut off, but the hand of the lord was heavy on Ashdod and the surrounding region. They are struck with a great plague.

The people of Ashdod determine that the ark must be removed from their city, for their own safety and for the well-being of their beleaguered deity Dagon. The men of Ashdod want the ark to depart from them, much as the Egyptian people desired the Israelites to leave them, as they were plagued by the lord. The ark is then brought to Ekron, where the same sorts of things happen.

The Ekronites insist that the ark be sent back to Israel, because they feared complete destruction at the lord's hands. Peter Lighthouse has observed a number of Exodus allusions in the language of the text. He writes, 1 Samuel 5, verse 6 says that the hand of the lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and smites them with tumours.

Similarly, in Exodus 9, verse 3, we read that the hand of the lord brought severe pestilence on Egypt. When the plagues hit, the cry of the city went up to heaven. 1 Samuel 5, verse 12 Similarly, on the night of the Passover, there was a great cry throughout the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12, verse 30 In 1 Samuel 5, verse 11, the people pledged with their leaders to get the ark out of Philistia. Similarly, in Exodus 10, verse 7, Pharaoh's servants advised Pharaoh to let Israel go before Egypt was completely destroyed. Philistia's priests and diviners advised the rulers how to get the ark out of the land.

In chapter 6, verse 2, just as the Egyptian magicians warned Pharaoh to remove Israel. In chapter 6, verse 6, we learn that the priests and diviners even know part of the Exodus story about Pharaoh hardening his heart, and they warn the Philistines not to do the same. The effect of the whole series of events was that the Philistines came to know Yahweh.

Chapter 6, verse 9 And this was also the issue throughout the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. There are also many verbal similarities. The word smite is used in both Exodus 3, verse 20 and 1 Samuel 5, verses 6 and 9. The phrase strike with plague occurs in both Exodus 9, verse 14 and 1 Samuel 6, verse 4. And the phrase destruction of the land is repeated in Exodus 8, verse 20 and 1 Samuel 6, verse 5. When the ark was brought out to the battle at Aphek, the Israelites were expecting a miraculous and mighty deliverance and the defeat of their enemies, seemingly powerless.

The great strength that they had associated with the ark, which had been involved in the crossing of the Jordan and the defeat of Jericho, was not displayed, however. Instead, the ark seemed to be characterized by a tremendous impotence. It was powerless, and it did not even defend itself from capture.

The Philistines then placed the ark in the temple of their God, at the very power center of their civilization. And it is there, like a timed explosion, that the might of the Lord finally breaks forth. The Philistines had unwittingly served in the Lord's plan, bringing the ark to the very place where the Lord's victory over them and their God might be most dramatically displayed.

A very similar disaster befell the Philistines, probably not many years after this. We should remember that the chronologies of Judges and 1 Samuel overlap. In Judges chapter 16, Samson is betrayed by one close to him, Delilah, much as Joseph was betrayed by his brothers.

Taken captive by the Philistines, his eyes are removed, and he becomes a slave, grinding in the prison. The lords of the Philistines gather together at the temple of Dagon to sacrifice and celebrate the defeat of their enemy, Samson. They bring Samson out to perform in front of them, to make a mockery of him, and to gloat over him.

Samson's strength returned to him at this point, and he took hold of the pillars of Dagon's temple and pushed against them, bringing down the entire building, crushing the heads of all the lords of the Philistines and the others within the building, giving up the spirit and dying with them. And there again we have the theme of deception, or outwitting the serpent. If the lords of the Philistines had known what Samson and the ark would do, they never would have taken them to the temple of Dagon.

At the very climax of their apparent victory, the foe that they thought they had vanquished rose up and dealt them a deadly blow from which they could not easily recover. This god, one who seems to be utterly stripped of power, who is then taken to the very heart of the dragon lair, then rises up to crush the head of the beast. That is, of course, the god that we know in Jesus Christ.

A question to consider. What further parallels between the story of the Ark of God in the land of Philistia and the story of Christ can you observe? In 1 Samuel chapter 6 we learn

that the Ark was in Philistia for seven months, finally returning at the time of the wheat harvest, around the second month of the year. All of the five cities of Philistia appear to suffer the plague.

We encounter five cities in a number of key connections in scripture. As usual, James Jordan has some interesting observations on this front. He recognises that in Genesis chapter 14 verse 2 we see that there were five cities of the plain, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admar, Zeboim and Zoar.

All of these, save for Zoar, were destroyed by the Lord. And the Philistines are also associated with five cities, Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. Jordan observes that there is an association drawn between both of these sets of five cities and Egypt, which is also associated with five cities in Isaiah chapter 19 verses 18 to 19.

The five cities of the Philistines should remind us of the five cities of the plain in Genesis. They are both Egypt-like civilisations that Abraham and his children had to relate to while in the land, and both sets of cities that were judged by the Lord. The Philistines had sent the Ark from city to city, perhaps suspecting that the God of the Israelites would be weaker in certain conditions.

Perhaps there's something about the terrain of Ashdod that makes the Lord more powerful there. Move him to another location and he'll be weaker. But it turns out that is not the case.

The Lord is powerful in all of their cities. The lords of the Philistines, the priests and their diviners, consult about their best course of action. They determine that the Ark must be returned, but it must be accompanied by a trespass offering, offering restitution for their sacrilege.

In the discussion of the Philistines, the Ark is, as it were, personified, spoken of as a slave to be released. The statement, if you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, in chapter 6 verse 3, is a significant one. The freed slave was not to be released empty-handed, but was to be sent away with many gifts.

We see this in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 12 to 14. The Ark is treated as a slave that must be allowed to go free and treated according to the law for released slaves. And once again, Exodus parallels are underlined here.

The Philistine lords decide to send five golden tumours and five golden rats with the Ark. The golden tumours represent the five cities of the Philistines and the golden rats their surrounding villages. The tumours also represent the afflictions with which the lords struck them.

Once again, the Philistines seem prepared to learn from the lessons of the Egyptians. They do not want to harden their hearts as Pharaoh did and court the level of destruction

that he faced. The sending of the Ark with gifts also relates to the plundering of the Egyptians in the Exodus.

Wanting to rule out the slightest possibility that the plagues that had befallen them in Dagon were purely chance occurrences, unrelated to their taking of the Ark, the Philistines set a test. They hitched two milk cows that had never previously been yoked, separated them from their calves, and saw whether they would bring the Ark back to the land of Israel. They did, and they brought the cart bearing the Ark up towards Beth Shemesh, a Levitical city.

As Peter Lighthouse points out, the people of Beth Shemesh sin in a number of respects. They offer a false sacrifice. They offer the milk cows instead of the bulls required by the law in Leviticus 1. They placed the Ark on a stone and looked within it or at it.

It should have been kept covered and never touched, even by the Kohathites who were charged with carrying it around. In Numbers 4, verse 5 we read, So Aaron and the priests would cover it, then the Kohathites could take it, but they would not see it. The people of Beth Shemesh were struck with a dreadful plague as a result.

They suffered the same sort of judgment as the Philistines had. The men of Beth Shemesh, fearful of the Lord's judgment, wished to be free of the Ark, much as the Philistines sought to be. The men of Kiriath-Jerim bring the Ark there and leave it at the house of Abinadab, who consecrates his son to keep it.

The city of Kiriath-Jerim was one of the cities of the Gibeonites, we find in Joshua 9, verse 17, which means that its population was primarily Gentile while under the rule of Israel. And the Ark's resting in a Gibeonite city and not being restored to the tabernacle is a sort of wilderness period. It's after a lease but prior to settlement and restoration.

It would almost be a century before the Ark was brought up to Jerusalem, in 2 Samuel 6, and even longer before the pieces of the torn house of the Lord were brought back together in the new Solomonic Temple. When it is returned, as Leithart has observed, there is an exact reversal of the pattern of events that occurred when it was first taken. So the Ark is first taken in 1 Samuel chapter 4, and that's the time when the house of Eli is destroyed.

It's taken in the Battle of Aphek and then it's exiled in Philistia, and in chapter 5 to the middle of chapter 6, it's in Philistia. At that point, in chapter 6, which we have just read, the Ark is returned on a cart, and there is a sin concerning the Ark at that point. A sin that delays the Ark arriving at its destination.

The Ark is then left with Abinadab, and that happens in the next chapter in the first two verses. The Ark remains in the house of Abinadab for a great many years, and does not actually return until 2 Samuel chapter 6, where we see the same sort of pattern playing

out again in reverse. The Ark is returned upon a cart, there's a sin concerning the Ark, this time by Uzzah, and then the Ark is housed with the Philistines.

In 2 Samuel chapter 6, verses 10 to 11, the Ark is left in the house of Obed-Edom, the Gittite. A Gittite was someone who came from the city of Gath, one of the Philistine cities. And so, there is a reversal of the pattern here, and then the Ark is finally restored at the time of the removal of the house of Saul, in chapter 6 of 2 Samuel verses 12 to 19, where Michael, Saul's daughter, is judged.

Recognising the prominence of this pattern might help us to be more alert to the importance of the theme of the Ark of the Covenant, and what it represents regarding God's presence to his people, and the sanctuary at the heart of the people. The story of 1 and 2 Samuel is in large part a story of the movement towards the final resting place of the Ark of God, the movement from the old corrupt order that we see at the beginning in Eli and his sons, to the new temple that will be formed by David's greater son. A question to consider.

One of the primary things that the Exodus accomplished was a revelation of the Lord's glory, name, power, and character to the nations. How do you think that the Philistines' knowledge of the Lord changed between 1 Samuel chapter 4 and the end of 1 Samuel chapter 6? At the end of the previous chapter, in 1 Samuel chapter 6, the men of Beshemesh were judged as a result of their treatment of the Ark, were fearful of it, and so brought it to Kiriath-Jerim. At the beginning of chapter 7, the men of Kiriath-Jerim bring the Ark of God to the house of Abinadab, and his son Eliezer is consecrated to look after it.

Kiriath-Jerim was one of the cities of the Gibeonites, which means that its population was predominantly Gentile, even though it was under the rule of Israel. The Ark in Kiriath-Jerim is in a sort of wilderness period. It's waiting to be installed in the house once more, but for now the tabernacle remains divided.

It would be almost a century before the Ark was brought up to Jerusalem, something that we see in 2 Samuel chapter 6. It would be even longer before the house and everything within it was reunited in the Temple of Solomon. Twenty years after the return of the Ark to Israel, Samuel and the Israelites re-establish and affirm the covenant at Mizpah. They acknowledge their sin, they forsake their foreign gods, and they ask Samuel to pray for them.

They recognise their need to turn to the Lord from the heart, and not merely to manipulate the Lord into delivering them, as they had attempted at Aphek. They pour out water before the Lord, and perhaps this symbolises the pouring out of their hearts. In Lamentations chapter 2 verse 19 we read, There's another symbolic pouring out of water in 2 Samuel chapter 23 verses 16 to 17.

Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the Lord and said, Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this.

Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did. Here it seems most likely that the pouring out of the water represents the pouring out of their hearts.

Hannah's words in chapter 1 verse 15 might give further support to this. Peter Lighthouse suggests that it might be a symbol of the Spirit, and God's blessing being poured out on Israel again, like water on parched ground. That would be another possibility.

As they are doing this, the Philistines gather together and go up against Israel. And the contrast with the battle of Aphek is quite striking here. Here the Israelites are the fearful ones, not the Philistines, as in chapter 4. However, even though they do not have the Ark of the Covenant to bring to the battle, the storm chariot of the Lord fights for them.

The Lord thunders against the Philistines and confuses them so that they are overcome, and they flee before the Israelites. This is another great battle that seems to be won not by military might, but by worship. Samuel here is like Moses at the battle against the Amalekites in Exodus chapter 17.

The lifting up of Moses' hands to the Lord was the means by which that battle was won. And here Samuel's offering of the suckling lamb, his calling out to the Lord, and the people's repentance are the means by which the Lord achieves his victory. Samuel's offering of the lamb seems to violate the regulations of Deuteronomy concerning the one central sanctuary.

However, when we consider the fact that the central sanctuary had been torn apart, we can see that the regulations concerning it were suspended. Once the heart problem of the people has been addressed, the conquest of the land could occur in earnest. At the very place where the Philistines had camped 20 years earlier, prior to the Battle of Aphek in chapter 4 verse 1, Samuel established a memorial stone, Ebenezer.

It marks the help of the Lord that they had received to that point. All of the territory that they had lost to the Philistines is now recovered, the Philistines are driven back, and the Lord judges the Philistines for all of the days of Samuel. This is a more sustained judgment upon the Philistines than there was at the time of the Ark's sojourn in the land of Philistia.

In chapter 7, then, we see Hannah's prayer coming to fruition. The corrupt house of Israel has been torn down at Aphek, and the rich and the oppressors have been crushed. First, with the Battle of Aphek and its aftermath, the plaguing of the Philistines, and then

in Samson's crushing of the heads of the Philistines in the Temple of their God, an event that probably occurred in the intervening 20 years.

Now the poor and the weak are being raised up from the dust, as they return to the Lord in humility and repentance. A story that began with Hannah pouring out her heart to the Lord, now comes to its height in Israel pouring out its heart to the Lord. A question to consider, what can we learn in our struggles from the contrast between Aphek and Ebenezer? When reading Scripture, we often want things to be simple.

We want to know who are the good guys, who are the bad guys, what are sinful actions, what are righteous actions, what is driven by unbelief, and what is driven by faith. But Scripture is a very great deal richer and more complex than this, and 1 Samuel chapter 8 is a very good example. Many people reading Scripture are expecting texts that straightforwardly take sides.

Abraham is a good guy, Esau is a bad guy, David is a good guy, Saul is a bad guy. And coming to 1 Samuel chapter 8, the burning question in many people's minds is, was the monarchy a misguided course of action for Israel? Was getting a king a good thing or a bad thing? However, the book of Samuel has a far more subtle and multifaceted portrayal of the monarchy. Its concern is not to present it simplistically as a good or a bad thing, but to portray the actual reality of monarchy in all of its complexity and ambiguity.

A common feature of many contemporary readings of Scripture is the assumption, often derived from philosophers like Michel Foucault, that claims to truth are typically veiled claims to power. Narrative is propaganda. It's designed to rationalise regimes or parties, and to counteract the propaganda of texts.

Many will try to deconstruct them, observing details within texts themselves that subvert, betray, unsettle, or otherwise push against the message that is supposedly essential to them. Such reading strategies are very popular among feminist theologians, for instance, who will often try to re-read biblical narratives from the perspectives of their female characters, against what they regard to be the male-centred character of the text. However, one of the great problems with such reading strategies is that the Scriptures can make such readings a bit too easy.

It's almost as though the Scripture intended for such complicating voices to be present within it all along, and trying to force them into the text is like trying to kick down an open door. A character like Hagar, for example, is not silenced in service of a pro-Abraham narrative, but plays an integral speaking and acting part in the entire story, a part that resonates throughout the entirety of the book of Genesis, long after Hagar herself has left the surface of its pages. In their recent book, *The Beginning of Politics, Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel*, Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes remark upon the problems with reading scriptural texts like the book of Samuel as partisan narratives,

observing that those advancing such positions can end up attributing different parts of the book to different authors.

It is assumed that there must be some pro-monarchical sources and then some anti-monarchical sources. The idea that there might be a single author having both of these different voices together is hard for people to fathom. Indeed, the power of a book like Samuel is that it vastly exceeds propaganda.

It does not paint a flattering portrait of any of its characters and endorses no particular side. They write, Rather than writing a piece of political propaganda then, the author of Samuel wrote a book that sheds light upon the character and the challenges of political power more generally. The vision of kingship in the book of Samuel stands out from that of surrounding societies in the ancient Near East.

Halbertal and Holmes write again, Elsewhere, for the most part, monarchy was understood as part of the permanent furniture of the cosmos itself. In the canonised scribal accounts of the ancient Near Eastern kings and their deeds, the deification of kingship and general veneration of political authority meant that an unblinking look into the moral trespasses, ambiguous virtues and personal shortcomings of monarchs and empires was exceedingly rare. Scripture represents an exception to this because of its unique account of kingship, an account founded upon the conviction that the Lord himself was the one true king.

Gideon had rejected the kingship in Judges 8, verses 22-23. Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian. Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you.

The Lord will rule over you. Halbertal and Holmes observed that the conditions for true political thought emerged when a third alternative to the positions of the king is a god and god is the king emerged, namely, the king is not a god. Chapter 8 of 1 Samuel begins with the problem.

Samuel is old and his sons aren't walking in his ways. The sinfulness of Samuel's sons might recall the sinfulness of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. The leadership of this Moses-like prophet, Samuel, might have seemed to be a good alternative to the judgeship of the high priest Eli, but it doesn't seem to be working.

His sons aren't following in his ways. They're situated in the extreme south of the country in Beersheba. Perhaps, as Peter Lighthouse suggests, Samuel has purposefully put them there to limit their influence.

There is a continuing threat of the military power of the Philistines, and the people are deeply concerned. They want a leader to unite the nation against their enemies, to lead

them out into battle. They also have had enough of the episodic character of the delivering judges.

They want continuity in their rule. Samuel's mode of rule was that of the prophet, who interceded for the people and more directly represented the kingship of the Lord over them as his people. However, his sons don't seem to be doing this.

They were directly flouting the prohibitions of the law in places such as Deuteronomy 16, verses 18-19. You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns, that the Lord your God has given you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice, you shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.

In this situation, the Lord's kingship seems distant and often absent. A king like the other nations, by contrast, would feel very close. It would make Israel much more like the other peoples that surrounded them.

Samuel takes this situation very personally, to the point that the Lord has to correct him. They hadn't rejected Samuel so much as they had rejected the Lord himself. Kingship was already anticipated in Genesis, Deuteronomy, and also in Judges, which talked about the situation prior to the arrival of the king and many of the problems with that situation.

Genesis, chapter 35, verses 10-12 speak of the expectation of a king arising from Jacob. And God said to him, Your name is Jacob, no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. So he called his name Israel.

And God said to him, I am God Almighty, be fruitful and multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you. There's another expectation of kingship in Genesis, chapter 49, verse 10, in the blessing upon Judah.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Deuteronomy, chapter 17, verses 14-20 is the fullest declaration of the laws and instructions concerning the king. When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you, whom the Lord your God will choose, one from among your brothers you shall set as king over you.

You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother, only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, you shall never return that way again. And he

shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

While Genesis presents the arrival of kings as a blessing, Deuteronomy presents the monarchy in more ambiguous terms than the other offices of leadership. The monarchy comes in response to a request of the people of dubious merit, rather than being directly established by God's own positive intent. It surrounds the monarchy with restrictions, to ensure that the monarchy does not exalt itself inappropriately.

The king was also instructed to write out a book of the law. He would rule under God and under his law, as God's vice-gerent, rather than as a divine figure himself. He was expected to be obedient, humble, and a brother of his people.

There would be a way to have a king that wouldn't entail a rejection of the kingship of the Lord. Having a king didn't seem to be wrong per se. However, the way that the people asked for a king was driven by a desire to be like the surrounding nations, from which they were currently set apart by the kingship of the Lord.

Rather than appealing for a king under the Lord, they seemed to want a human king instead of divine kingship, and such a request is idolatrous by nature. The Lord tells Samuel to obey the people's voice. The Lord will accommodate the people's desire for a king, ordering it under his kingship, while warning them of what they let themselves in for when they idolatrously pursue a human king, rather than divine kingship.

Oppression may not be a necessary consequence of choosing a king, but it will be the natural tendency. Given the earlier positive statements in Genesis about the future monarchy, the more guarded teaching of Deuteronomy, the sinful character of the people's request in this chapter, the negative portrayals of a situation without a king in the Book of Judges, and the very mixed portrayals of both Saul and David, both positive and negative, in the narrative of 1st and 2nd Samuel that follows, something of the ambivalence of the monarchy, and of human political power more generally, can be clearly seen. Samuel, instructed to do so by the Lord, warns the people of the character of the king that they have chosen.

The people want a king to be their head and to fight their battles. They want a ruler to serve them. However, Samuel makes clear that the type of ruler that they want would make them his servants, and conscript them to fight his battles.

The repeated pronoun his in Samuel's speech tells the story. The king will need to gather manpower and resources to fight battles and to defend the people. Yet this extractive power will come to be used to serve his own glory, and as he pursues his own glory, the people will be progressively enslaved to their king and to those in his regime.

The people want this powerful political system, without considering the way that they will become prisoners of that very system. Their idolatrous rejection of the Lord for this system strips the people of their capacity to subject their king to any higher principle. The king will start to act in a way that sets himself up as a new capricious deity over them.

He will take the best of their men and animals. Rather than the Lord, he will demand a tithe. Such a king would become a god before the Lord.

The king that they choose for themselves will end up acting like a new oppressor. We see a good example of this in the story of Solomon, who ends up breaking each of the three prohibitions of Deuteronomy, and takes on the character of a new pharaoh, placing heavy burdens on his people's backs, building a great war machine and extracting incredible wealth and labour from the population. The Lord had formerly given them over to the hands of their surrounding enemies, and now he will hand them over to the ruler that they had chosen for themselves.

The people refuse to listen to Samuel and insist upon having a king. They make their intent clear again. They want to be like all the nations.

They have been set apart from the nations, but now they want to become like them. In their response to Samuel, they shift the pronouns in a noteworthy way, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. They are rejecting Samuel's warning about what will actually happen.

They do not believe him. Holmes and Halbertal sum up the situation as follows. At the heart of politics lies an existential urge for physical security, and the people proved willing and even eager to relinquish whatever unsupervised freedom and entitlements they enjoyed in the state of divine anarchy, and to surrender to a political sovereign who will freely tax and conscript them, so long as he can also safeguard them from their pitiless enemies.

Sovereignty does not emerge in the Samuel narrative out of a Hobbesian state of nature, therefore. It does not arise out of an imaginary war of all against all, but rather out of a historical state, realistically described as a weak confederation of frequently feuding tribes where political and military power was fragmented, intermittent and dispersed. Although sharing a common religious bond, the various Israelite tribes had been unable to achieve unity and stability.

They clashed repeatedly among themselves and were increasingly vulnerable to attacks from outside forces. The constituent building blocks of a proposed united kingdom, therefore, were not atomistic individuals, but extended families or tribes. In describing what is lost as well as what is gained in unifying the Israelite tribes under a single dynastic monarch, the Book of Samuel provides us with our earliest account of the arduous, contested and historically contingent emergence of this worldly sovereignty.

The centralisation of political-military authority is admittedly accompanied by priestly anointment and bestowed by the grace of God, but as will become evident as the narrative unfolds, sovereign authority is actually consolidated much less sacramentally through a hard-fought struggle by tactically ingenious applications of force and fraud deployed to overcome considerable human resistance. A question to consider. In what ways can this passage inform our own understanding of the promise and danger of human government? 1 Samuel chapter 9 is a strange start to the story of Saul's kingship.

However, as is usual with biblical narrative, the details matter and are an important part of the meaning. Reading closely and paying attention to those things that we might initially think are extraneous details, we will learn a lot more than we would do otherwise. This story is dense with narrative elements that connect with and play off other stories in illuminating ways.

At points it's like watching a film, where subtle thematic snatches in the soundtrack, details of the cinematography and subtle features in the setting serve subliminally to create a richer and more evocative scene for most viewers and greatly heighten the attention of those who are more alert to such matters. An intelligent cinephile will pay attention to lots of details of a scene, and readers of the scriptures must learn to do the same. The theological message of scripture is often to be found in the artistry by which stories are told, inviting comparisons and contrasts, framing stories by other stories, juxtaposing characters, carefully foregrounding certain details by the way that the story is structured, etc.

1 Samuel chapter 9 is a good example of this. Many readers might wonder why so much of this chapter is devoted to details that aren't seeming to serve any greater purpose. However, observant readers will recognise that this text is communicating a lot in those details, the details that fill out the surface picture.

Saul is introduced to us as someone who comes from a wealthy family. The language used of Kish here is also used of Boaz in the Book of Ruth. Saul is a man of Benjamin.

In Genesis chapter 35 it is in the context of Benjamin's birth that Jacob is told that kings will come from his loins. In chapter 36 of Genesis, immediately afterwards, there are a number of ways in which we might see connections between Benjamin and Saul and Esau and Edom. The first king of Edom is called Bela.

The first son of Benjamin was called Bela too. In that chapter we are told of a man who was looking after the donkeys of his father when he found springs. We also encounter a king of Edom called Saul, who was most likely king at the same time as Saul was king in Israel.

Later Benjamin was treated as the chief of the brothers by Joseph. The kings would ultimately come from Judah, but it was fitting that the first king came from Benjamin. There were only 600 fighting men of Benjamin left at the end of the Book of Judges.

They were almost completely exterminated by the rest of the nation after the sin of Gibeah. Saul himself comes from Gibeah, compared to Sodom in Judges. As we read on in the story, it will invite comparison with that earlier story.

Saul means asked. In 1 Samuel 1.20 the meaning of Samuel's name is given. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, I have asked for him from the Lord.

The language of lending Samuel to the Lord in 1.28 also relates to Saul's name. It seems that there is some connection between the identities of Saul and Samuel. They are connected in some strange way.

Saul becomes, in some respects, a new son to Samuel. Just as Samuel replaced the unfaithful sons of Eli, Hathanai and Phinehas, Saul replaces the unfaithful sons of Samuel, Joel and Abijah. Saul is introduced as a physically attractive and physically imposing man.

In the Old Testament the attractive physical appearance of characters can be a sign of the positive role that they have to play. It's an auspicious sign of someone who is going to play a significant role at the head of the people. Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon are all described in these sorts of ways.

Saul is also taller than everyone else. He is the giant of Israel. That's important to remember when we read the story of David and Goliath.

Saul is the most handsome man in Israel. He is also the tallest man in Israel. From the outset he is introduced to us more as a romantic hero than as a future political operative.

As we shall see, however, that is no accident. The king is the lover of his people. Politics is suffused by Eros.

The king is someone who excites love, loyalty and desire. He is someone who ideally has a strong physical presence, charisma, charm, virility. The connection between politics and Eros is perhaps most overt in the Song of Solomon.

But it is everywhere in the Book of Samuel too. In choosing a king for his people, the Lord is choosing a bridegroom for them. Our own politics continue to have such elements.

Nations don't elect their leaders purely on the basis of policy and competence, but can be drawn to them as persons. This story is told in a way that draws the reader's attention to this dimension of kingship. The story of Saul begins with lost donkeys.

In the Book of Judges donkeys appear on several occasions, representing the princely authority of Judges' sons. Donkeys are also associated with Judah's royal status in Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49, verses 10-11. There might be subtle reminders here of the tragic story of Gibeah too, which Saul reverses in some senses, but ends up repeating in others.

That horrific story began as follows, in Judges 19, verses 1-3. Both of these stories are a quest for the lost. The lost concubine in Judges and the lost donkeys in 1 Samuel both involve an accompanying servant and some donkeys, and both involve a woman.

In Judges, the woman is the concubine, who ends up being dismembered, a concubine that also symbolises the people, with the Levites symbolising the wicked rulers. In 1 Samuel, the woman is the bride, Israel, represented by the women Saul meets in the city. In the story of Saul, the appalling end to Judges is being repaired.

A better bridegroom is coming for the bride. Benjamin, the son, the tribe that was almost utterly destroyed at the end of the book of Judges, is also being restored. The way that the story is told highlights the lack of intention of the figures involved.

Saul and his servant are following lost donkeys. As Saul is about to turn back, his servant happens to mention that there is a man of God in the city, who might be able to tell them where the donkeys are. The servant happens to have a quarter of a shekel of silver to give to the man of God.

The seer just happens to have come into the city for a sacrifice, etc. The point of all of this is that the Lord is superintending all events. This is not something engineered by man.

Rather, these are the signs that the Lord is orchestrating events. As they go to the city, Saul meets young women coming out to draw water. Now, we've read in Scripture of many people meeting women drawing water at wells.

It's what's been called a type scene. Abraham's servant meets Rebekah at a well. Jacob meets Rachel at a well.

Moses meets Zipporah at a well. Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a well. Saul's encounter with the women here should attract our attention, especially when we look

more closely and see further parallels with the story of Abraham's servant meeting Rebekah.

There is a similar series of events in both places. The women come out to draw water. This phrase is very rare, but it's found both here and in Genesis chapter 24.

They are both looking for someone. Abraham's servant is looking for a bride for Isaac. Saul and his servant are looking for the donkeys.

However, Samuel, unbeknownst to Saul, is looking for the new king of Israel. In both cases, the Lord will identify the person he has selected to the seeker. In both cases, the one who is sought comes out soon afterwards.

So we read, Behold, Rebekah came out. And then, Behold, Samuel was coming out. In both cases, there is then a meal and the revelation of a secret and a great and significant match made that would shape Israel's history thereafter.

These are two stories of chosen persons, one selected for marriage, the other selected for kingship. Rabbi David Fulman observes the importance of what is occurring here. Isaac and Rebekah was the marriage of the son of Abraham and Sarah.

It was the first step towards the fulfillment of the fruitfulness and multiplication of Abraham's seed that had been promised to him, a first step in moving towards a greater people. Saul was the first step towards the fulfillment of the promise that Israel would become a kingdom. It constitutes Israel on a greater level.

Israel is not just a multitude of people. It isn't just a nation. In relating to a king, they are far more robust as a collective entity.

They become a we, symbolized by the king himself. Coronation is a sort of marriage on a national scale. And this story is the betrothal, the point when Samuel appoints Saul as the future bridegroom, as the designated prince.

Recognizing the character of this relationship will help us to observe things about marriage and things about kingship that we might not otherwise have recognized. For instance, consider Samuel's warning to Israel in the previous chapter. They wanted a king to act on their behalf, yet the king would rule over and oppress them.

This is similar to the dynamic that intrudes upon marriage after the fall. The woman desires her husband. She wants a man to act on her behalf, but he will end up ruling over her and oppressing her.

The story switches from Saul's perspective to Samuel's perspective. We learn that Samuel has been told beforehand that he will encounter Saul, and that the Lord identifies Saul to Samuel. Samuel here is like Abraham's servant, but seeking a

bridegroom for the daughter of the Lord.

Samuel delivers his secret to Saul, much as Abraham's servant delivered the secret to Rebekah. Yet it's still cryptic at the beginning. It's not necessarily clear at the outset that it is the kingdom that is in view.

Saul's response to Samuel reminds us of Gideon's response to the angel of the Lord in Judges 6, verses 12-15. Saul is a humble man. He is a dutiful, faithful and considerate son.

God is not giving Israel a bad man, but a man suited for the role in a great many ways. We will see Saul replaying the sins of the judges in many respects in the chapters that follow, and it draws our minds back to specific stories in the specific failures that he makes. But this will be a tragic twist for a man who has so much going for him.

Samuel gives Saul the priestly portion of the peace offering. In Leviticus 7, verses 33-34 we read, Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waived and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual Jew from the people of Israel.

This portion only belonged to the priests and their sons. So what's happening here is, among other things, a sort of adoption ceremony. Saul is seated in the seat of the firstborn.

He's given the firstborn's portion, the portion that belongs to the priest, Samuel himself. Samuel will now act as his father. Saul is now the one appointed to become the guardian of Israel, to succeed his new father, taking the place of Joel and Abijah.

This story is one of the raising up of Saul, with a number of literal ascensions. Saul goes up the hill to the city. He goes up to the high place.

He goes up to the head of the table. And then he goes up to the roof to sleep. Saul is being elevated as the new ruler here.

The chapter ends on the cliffhanger. Saul is about to hear from Samuel the message concerning the kingdom, that the Lord has appointed him to become the king who will lead Israel. A question to consider.

At the end of this chapter, what are some of the features of Saul and his character that set him apart as someone who's a good potential king? 1 Samuel chapter 10 is the second half of a there and back again narrative. It begins with Saul setting off in search of his father's donkey in chapter 9, and then he returns when he discovers that they have been found. Of course, rather a lot happens between these two events.

In the previous chapter, Saul had met Samuel and had experienced a series of ascensions, going up to the city, going up to the high place, going up to the head of the table, and then going up to the top of the house. He has been given the priestly portion of the sacrifice, the portion belonging to Samuel himself. Saul has been treated as if Samuel's new son.

He has been set apart as the one to judge Israel after Samuel. He is taking the place of the unfaithful sons of Samuel, Joel and Abijah. The last chapter ended with Samuel waking Saul up at the break of dawn and sending him on his way.

Saul's servant was then sent on ahead, while Samuel remained with Saul to speak with him in private. That's where we take up the narrative again in this chapter. Samuel now anoints Saul with a flask of oil and kisses him, as he had been instructed to do in chapter 9, verse 16.

Saul is anointed as the prince. This isn't the coronation, it's a designation of Saul as the future king. He is now the prince over the Lord's heritage.

The land and the people are the Lord's, and Saul must rule over them under the Lord. In order to assure Saul that he will be the prince, the Lord gives him three signs. We might again be reminded of the signs that the Lord gave to Gideon before his victory over the Midianites.

The signs take the form of predictions of things that will happen to Saul as he goes along his way. They show, among other things, God's providential oversight over the actions of men, animals and creation more generally. This has been an important and recurring theme in 1 Samuel to this point.

We might recall the cows bearing the ark back to Israel from the land of Philistia. This demonstrated God's providential power to the Philistines. The various chance occurrences leading to Saul and Samuel meeting are another example of this.

God is overseeing this entire process, and by giving these signs to Saul, it's a further manifestation that it is God behind this, not just Samuel. There are three stages to the sign. In the first stage of the sign, there are two men by Rachel's tomb, with news of the donkeys.

Rachel had died giving birth to Benjamin. Saul was a Benjaminite. That had happened back in Genesis chapter 35, and it was there that God had first promised that Israel would have kings.

This happened on the road to Bethlehem. The question of where exactly is a matter of some debate. They were some way from Bethlehem, but it's not entirely clear whether it was just outside Bethlehem, or whether the road was the Bethlehem Road, and they were some further distance from their destination.

If the latter is the case, then maybe it was near Ramah. In Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 15, Rachel is described as weeping in Ramah for her children. In this location, Saul is told about the donkeys.

The donkeys have been found, which confirms the message of Samuel, but also, given the connection between donkeys and rule, maybe suggests something about the kingdom. Hearing about the finding of the donkeys near the tomb of his ancestress is probably a significant event. From there he will proceed and see three men going up to God at Bethel, presumably to worship.

One carries three young goats, another carries three loaves of bread, and the third carries a skin of wine. And they will give Saul two loaves of bread. This occurs near the Oak of Tabor, which some have speculated is the same oak as the oak beneath which Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, was buried in Genesis chapter 35 verse 8. That might be important to notice, because the death of Deborah and the death of Rachel sandwiched the first promise of the kings.

The gift of the bread to Saul again suggests some sort of priestly status that he will enjoy. David enjoyed something similar when he was given the showbread by the priests at Nob. In Numbers chapter 18 verse 11 we're told, Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

Finally, Saul will arrive at Gibeath Elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. This gives us a sense of the way in which the Philistines were an occupying force in many respects at this time. At that point he will meet prophets playing musical instruments as they come down from the high place.

A connection between prophecy and music can also be seen in such places as 2 Kings chapter 3 verse 15, where Elisha instructs a musician to be brought so that he will prophesy with the music, the spirit of the Lord coming upon him as the music plays. While the spirit does come upon Saul suddenly, it is not necessarily ecstatic or trance-like. This seems to occur at Gibeah.

These locations seem to be significant. They were important places in the life of Israel and particularly of the tribe of Benjamin. The tomb of Rachel was associated with the death of the ancestress.

The oak of Tabor was possibly associated with the death of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, which with the death of Rachel sandwiched the promise of kings. And Gibeah, of course, was the site of the tragic events of Judges chapter 19, events that almost led to the complete destruction of Benjamin. Benjamin's mother, Rachel, had died in childbirth, giving birth to Benjamin.

And then Benjamin himself had almost been extinguished because of the sin concerning

the concubine at Gibeah. Perhaps in the background of these three locations we're supposed to see three women. We're supposed to see Rachel, Deborah, and the unnamed concubine of the Levite.

In making the sites of the deaths of these three women, sites where the signs of the promised kingdom are given, something of God's gracious redemption of Israel's history is being shown. Where sin and death abounded, God's grace will abound much more. We have a reminder of these three signs in 1 Samuel chapter 16, verses 19-23, when David is sent to Saul, with elements of these three signs bound up with him.

Saul sent to Jesse, saying, David comes with all the signs of the kingdom that Saul receives in this chapter. We might also think of the New Testament, where in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives three sets of instructions to his disciples, telling them things that will befall them as they follow them. First of all, they will find the cult and bring it to him.

The donkeys have been found. Then they will go into the city and see a man with a water pitcher going up to the upper room, and he will show them where they will eat the meal, the meal where they will be given bread by Christ. Then they are told to wait in Jerusalem, and they will be clothed with power from on high.

They will become new people, just as Saul became a new person. Once these things happen, Saul is told that he should do what his hand finds to do. He should confidently undertake his calling, knowing that God is with him.

Samuel instructs Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there for seven days. This is a perplexing detail, especially given the events of chapter 13, that seem to reference just such an instruction, an instruction that Saul fails to keep. Yet this is many years beforehand.

The kingdom is renewed at Gilgal in chapter 11, verses 14-15. Perhaps what is in view here is that Saul was expected to prepare himself for entry into kingly office, as the priests had to wait for seven days before their installation into priestly office. And then, on the eighth day, Samuel would officially install him into his new position.

Saul receives a new heart. The spirit rushes upon Saul as he came upon the judges in the book of Judges, and he rushed upon Samson in particular. Saul begins to prophesy, and people who know him, he's in Gibeah, which is his hometown, start to question, is Saul also among the prophets? And who is their father? Saul doesn't seem to have any prophetic pedigree.

But yet, as he has been adopted, as it were, by Samuel, he is now among the prophets. He's now also one who enjoys some priestly status. Arriving back, Saul is questioned by his uncle, possibly Abner, as we see in chapter 14, verse 50, Abner the son of Ner was Saul's uncle.

Saul tells him about the message that he had received from Samuel concerning the

donkeys, but does not divulge the secret of the kingdom. Samuel now summons all of the people of Israel to Mizpah. Mizpah is a site of assembly, as we saw in chapter 7. At this point, only Saul and Samuel know that Saul has been designated as the one who will be king.

For the rest of the nation, all of the other events since chapter 8 are unknown to them. Samuel declares the indictment of the Lord upon their choice, that they have rejected the Lord who delivered them, and chosen a human king in his place. While the Lord will establish Saul as his vice-gerent, the people's desire for a king was very much a rejection, an idolatrous rejection of the Lord as king over them.

They wanted a human king in the place of the Lord, someone who was far easier to relate to, someone who made them more like the other nations. The tribes are presented before the Lord, and they are chosen by lot, the Lord selecting the tribe of Benjamin, and then the clan of the Matrites, and then finally Saul, the son of Kish. Yet Saul is nowhere to be found, just as David will not initially be found when Samuel seeks to anoint one of the sons of Jesse.

Saul is in fact hiding among the baggage, seemingly reluctant to enter into his new role, which is probably a good sign. People who are hungry for power are usually not the best people to trust with it. When the people see Saul, they recognise he is head and shoulders above everyone else, he's someone who has the fitting appearance of a king, he's not someone who's hungry for power, he seems a gracious man as well.

When people oppose him, he does not seek vengeance over them. The people generally recognise and welcome him as king. God has given them a good king, a king that is far better than they ever deserved, a king who will rule under him, despite the people's idolatrous intent.

God gives them a king that will not be an idol, protecting them from the full force of their decision. At this point Samuel also writes out a document with the rights and duties of the kingship, and the relationship between the people and the king. The Kingdom of Israel is a constitutional one, it's governed by the law.

In addition to Samuel's document, the constitution for the kingdom, Saul would probably also have had to write out the document of Deuteronomy 17, verses 18-20. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law, and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel. A question to consider, in this chapter and the one preceding, Saul enjoys some priestly privileges, he is also given the sign of some prophetic gift.

How can we understand the relationship between the king and the offices of priest and prophet? What sort of overlap or analogy is there between the roles, and what differences exist? Saul has just been marked out as the crown prince of Israel. He is the man who would inherit the throne. However, he has not yet been anointed.

In chapter 11 he must play the part of a judge first, and his first test is provided by Nahash the Ammonite. The Ammonites are to the east of Israel, they threaten the Transjordan, and the Philistines threaten the southwest. Saul needs to deal with these twin threats.

Nahash's name is significant, it means serpent. Is Saul going to be the righteous Adam, and protect the bride from the serpent? Will he crush the head of Nahash and his men? That's the question that we're asked at this point. Nahash attacks Jebesh Gilead.

Jebesh Gilead is some distance inside the territory of the Transjordan, and so to reach Jebesh Gilead, the Ammonites would already have won several victories, and conquered many parts of the land. Jebesh Gilead is a place that we have encountered once before, in the book of the Judges, where it plays a very important role at the end. Jebesh Gilead was the city that failed to respond to the summons to fight against Benjamin, after the sin of Gibeah, when Benjamin was almost wiped out in the final chapters of the book.

At that point Jebesh Gilead itself was destroyed, save for a remnant of its young women, whom the Benjaminites took as their wives. We should probably presume that Jebesh Gilead has subsequently become a sort of Benjaminite enclave within Gilead. Now a man of Gibeah, Saul, is going to come to the aid of Jebesh Gilead.

Painful loose threads in Israel's past history are now going to be woven into a tapestry of redemption again. What was Nahash's plan? The Ammonites' cruel humiliation of the men of Jebesh Gilead would be a sign of dominance. It would render the men of the city unable to fight, they would not have perspective, as they would lose one of their eyes.

It would also send a signal to other cities in the land. Why did they give the men of Jebesh Gilead this window of opportunity to send men throughout the land, looking for help? Most likely because it gives them the opportunity to avoid the costly burden of siege warfare. The Ammonites are not expecting anyone to come to the rescue of Jebesh Gilead, and if the men of Jebesh Gilead will surrender to them after seven days, it saves them many costly and difficult months of besieging the city.

For the slight risk that some people will come to their aid, this is a gamble worth taking. When the messengers bring the news to Gibeah, the people all weep aloud. This might again recall the end of the book of Judges, where there are a series of events where the people weep about the fate of Benjamin and the bitter situation of fighting with their brothers.

We find accounts of this weeping in Judges 20, 23, 26 and 21, 2. The messengers do not seem to be aware yet that Saul is the crown prince. Saul will also prove his fitness for the office of king before he is raised to it. When Saul hears the news, the spirit rushes upon him like the spirit rushed upon Samson and came upon the other judges.

Saul acts in a judge-like capacity in this chapter, and he cuts up the yoke of Oxen and sends them throughout Israel. This is a threat to anyone who won't assemble for their brothers in Jebesh Gilead. It's also an expression of the state of a divided nation.

They must come together if they are to survive the twin threats of the Ammonites and the Philistines. And Saul notably calls them to follow him and Samuel. Saul is acting as if Samuel's son.

This is reminiscent of the Levites' gruesome cutting up of his concubine and sending parts of her body throughout Israel in Judges 19, just as that was a means of summoning Israel to avenge her death. So the cutting up of the Oxen is a means to summon Israel to act on behalf of Jebesh Gilead. Recalling the summons of Judges 19 and 20 is important here, because the men of Jebesh Gilead had failed to respond to that summons, and were destroyed as a result.

Now a man of Gibeah, the city that first provoked that summons in the Book of Judges, is sending out such a summons to Israel on their behalf. There is a sort of reversal of the past history here. Saul gathers 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 from Judah.

There is much debate about the meaning of such large numbers in scripture. More liberal scholars have often suggested that they are exaggerated for rhetorical or literary purposes. Conservative scholars have generally taken them literally.

However, there are other possibilities, with arguments for and against. One example is the possibility that thousand, in such cases, refers to a large unit, a unit that may have been considerably smaller than a thousand men in size, much as a Roman sentry could be considerably smaller than a hundred men in some cases, depending on the type of soldiers within them and the period of history. For instance, a sentry of veteran soldiers might only have 30 men in it.

Whatever we make of this question, the number three is clearly important here, and that should remind us of the story of Gideon, who had 300 men, divided like Saul's troop here, into three companies. Like Saul, Gideon went into the middle of the enemy camp in the morning watch and scattered them. After having won the victory in this manner, Saul shows grace and magnanimity in victory.

He does not desire to destroy those who had originally opposed him. He draws attention to the fact that God had granted the victory. At this point, Samuel summons the Israelites to Gilgal, and there Saul is proclaimed king.

There is an epilogue to this story. When Saul was killed when fighting against the Philistines at the end of the book of 1 Samuel, it is the men of Jabesh-Gilead who went to recover his body. 1 Samuel 31, verses 11-13.

But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Besshan. And they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

The story of Saul's kingship begins in Jabesh-Gilead and it ends in Jabesh-Gilead. A question to consider. What significance might there be to the fact that the Lord delivered Israel in this chapter through Saul acting more in the capacity of a judge before he properly became king? 1 Samuel 12 is a chapter where three parties are placed on trial in a sort of legal scene.

They are in Gilgal to make Saul king and to renew the kingdom. And perhaps we should think of the kingdom here not just as the new kingdom of Saul, but as the kingdom of the Lord. But now with Saul as his vice-gerent.

Gilgal was the place where they were first circumcised when they entered the land for the first time in Joshua chapter 5. It was also where they celebrated the Passover. It was a place of national dedication back then and now it is a place of national dedication again, connected with the deep covenant memory of Israel. Samuel puts himself on trial first.

He wants Israel, witnessed by the Lord and by their king Saul, to confess to the fact that he acted righteously in all of his dealings with them. He didn't wrong or oppress them in any manner. Samuel described the oppressive behaviour a king would adopt in chapter 8 of 1 Samuel.

But here he makes very clear that he has never behaved like such a ruler and the people confess to his innocence of such wrongdoing. The people acknowledge that they have no charge to level against him and Samuel emphasises that the Lord and Saul are their witnesses in this acknowledgement. Saul is still going to be active as a prophet, but he will no longer function as the judge of Israel, as he has been doing to this point.

Samuel will be ministering for many years to come. He will, for instance, anoint David, probably a couple of decades later. Samuel moves on to declare the righteous deeds of the Lord, the ways in which the Lord was faithful in his covenant dealings with Israel, even in Israel's unfaithfulness.

He recounts the history of Israel, from Jacob's descent into Egypt, to the Exodus, to the entry into the land, and then the various deliverances under the judges. At each point

God showed his faithfulness to the covenant, even as his people were unfaithful. He continually delivered them, he brought them back, and he restored them.

After seeing all of these deliverances in the time of the judges, when they saw Nahash the Ammonite starting to get territory in Israel, the Israelites lost their nerve and demanded a king. The suggestion here is that the threat of the Ammonites and Nahash preceded chapter 8 and was the immediate cause of them asking for a king. They wanted a king like the nations to go out in battle before them, because Nahash the Ammonite was causing trouble for them on their eastern border.

Part of the irony, of course, is that the Lord delivered them from the threat of the Ammonites by Saul, but Saul acting more as a judge than as a king. Saul had not yet been anointed. The Lord their king was quite capable of raising up deliverance from the Ammonites for them, even without them having a king to lead them into battle.

Recounting the history of redemption, as Samuel does here, is an important element of covenant renewal events. Israel stands back from the immediacy of time and reflects upon the way that the Lord has brought them to this point. The Lord has given them the king that they requested.

What's more, he hasn't abandoned them on account of their sin in the request, but has graciously incorporated the king into the covenant order, allowing for them to enjoy blessing, even in a situation that originally arose on account of their sin. God's grace can continue to reach people, even in situations that they have brought themselves into through their own sinful failings and disobedience. The Lord gives them the sign of thunder and rain at the time of the wheat harvest.

This is extremely unseasonal weather, like having snow in July, perhaps. Israel was very dependent upon the blessing of the rain in its proper seasons, and this is a sign of God's rule over the land, and the Israelites' dependence upon him, and the sin of rejecting such a king for another. If the Lord can control the elements themselves, why can't they trust him to deal with a threat like the Ammonites and Nahash? Samuel and the Lord, then, have put themselves on trial and been vindicated, but Israel has been proved to be unfaithful.

The people request Samuel's intercession, and Samuel reassures them that, although they have sinned seriously, they can still go on to serve the Lord and be blessed by him. However, they need to learn not to turn aside to empty things, putting their trust in idols and kings. They should look to the Lord.

The Lord and Samuel have both been faithful, and both will continue to be faithful to Israel. The Lord will not forsake his people. He has put his name upon Israel, and he has determined to make them a people for himself.

Samuel, on his part, will never cease from interceding for the people, as Moses interceded for them in the Exodus. He will also teach and guide them. Samuel will continue to act as a father figure to Saul, and then later on he will anoint David.

The people must also move forward in faithfulness. They must bring to mind the works of God on their behalf in the past, and serve him faithfully with all of their hearts. If they don't do so, they will swiftly be destroyed.

A question to consider. What can we learn from the grace that God shows to his people in this chapter? The beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 13 presents us with a knotty textual question. If you compare different English translations, you will notice that the years mentioned in verse 1 vary from one to another.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the version in the ESV, which seems to have the strongest textual case in its favour, is decidedly odd. It employs a formula familiar from the books of the kings and elsewhere. Some was X years old when he became king, and he reigned for Y years.

However, here it says he lived for one year, and then he reigned for two years. What are we to make of this? We should probably start with the second number. In Acts chapter 13 verse 21, the apostle Paul declares that Saul reigned for 40 years, a number that's also given to us in Josephus' Antiquities.

So it is difficult to argue that Saul literally only reigned for two years, even if we were able to imagine the events of his reign described in 1 Samuel occurring within such a brief span of time, which we can't. The second number might arguably refer to the number of years that Saul reigned before the events of chapter 13 occurred. That is how the ESV takes it.

Another possibility is that the years refer to the period of time during which Saul was the divinely sanctioned monarch. Some, such as David Toshio Samora, argue that the expression should be read as an ironic one. Two years should be understood to mean a few years, in a more indefinite sense.

The meaning might be similar to a non-literal use of the term a couple of, which can occasionally be used as an intentional, extreme understatement. For example, if a criminal spoke of having a couple of run-ins with the police, rather than as a literal reference to two years exactly. The purpose here, then, would be to discount the significance of the years of Saul's reign.

They can be passed over lightly. While he may have been on the throne for two decades by this time, to the author it is but a few years. Another possibility is that both of the numbers of the years were intentionally left blank in the original, and have been subsequently filled in by scribal copiers.

Karl Mac Carter is one who suggests this. What difference might any of this make? One difference is the age of Saul when he came to the throne. If Saul reigned for 40 years, and the events of this chapter occurred two years into his reign, then Saul must have been in his late 30s at the least when he became king, as Jonathan must have been at least 20, old enough to lead a thousand men into battle.

Another related difference is our understanding of the age of David relative to that of Jonathan. In 2 Samuel 5, verse 4, we are told that David was 30 years old when he began to reign. This would make Jonathan about 30 years older than David, if 1 Samuel 13 refers to events that occurred two years into a 40-year reign.

This also leaves us with the question of how Saul could be described as being, more literally, a son of one year. That expression is most commonly found in reference to sacrificial animals. Peter Lighthouse suggests that this might refer to the fact that Saul received a sort of adoption by Samuel, and became a new man in chapters 9 and 10.

The suggestion then would be that this occurred one year before Saul became king. If this were the case, some comparisons between Saul and an unblemished sacrificial animal at the time of his installation into the kingly office might be invited. It is not uncommon for numbers to have been altered in biblical texts, and there are a number of places in scripture where we have different numbers preserved in different textual traditions.

There are also places where the numbers seem to be wrong, unless we are missing something about the technical meaning of certain terms. For instance, common sense would seem to exclude the possibility that the Philistines actually had 30,000 chariots, as mentioned in verse 5. Other translations have 3,000 or three thousands, which is more plausible. Perhaps even more so if we read thousand as thousands, referring to a military contingent, which wouldn't necessarily contain literally a thousand chariots.

My position has changed on this question in the last year. I think it is far more plausible to believe that the events of 1 Samuel 13 occurred at least a couple of decades into Saul's reign. It seems less likely that Saul was nearly 40 when he became king, and still fighting in his late 70s at the end of the book.

Also, that Jonathan was over 30 years older than David. The plausibility of a dating much later in Saul's reign is further strengthened by verse 14. It might be a bit strange to speak of the Lord having sought out and commanded a man after his own heart to be king instead of Saul, if David hadn't even been born yet.

For these reasons, mostly considerations of plausibility internal to the narrative itself, I am inclined to believe that the numbers given are incorrect, and have either been changed from those in the original, or added to an original text that had no numbers. Returning to the narrative, Saul here might be establishing a sort of standing army,

divided into two companies, 2,000 with Saul in Michmash, and the remaining 1,000 with Jonathan in Gibeah, Saul's home city. This is the first reference to Jonathan in 1 Samuel.

We aren't yet informed that he is Saul's son. Jonathan successfully defeats the Philistine garrison at Giba, which will later provoke a massive Philistine counter-offensive. Israel hears of Saul's victory, but also of the fact that Israel was now facing the prospect of fierce Philistine vengeance.

We might recall the way that the Israelites opposed Moses when Pharaoh increased their burdens, or the Judahites sought to give Samson to the Philistines due to their fear of reprisals. The prospect of remaining submissive to an oppressive power may be a more welcome one than the prospect of a failed rebellion leading to them being crushed. The people are now summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

Israel is trapped. Jonathan's actions have incited the Philistines' ire, and the Philistines now retaliate with devastating force. The people hide themselves in caves, holes, tombs, and cisterns, much as they had in the time of the Midianites prior to Gideon's deliverance.

Others flee to the Transjordan, leaving the Promised Land. And Saul camps at Gilgal, the site where they first camped in the land when they entered under Joshua. However, the people following him are exceedingly fearful.

They are supposed to be the true recipients of the promise of the land, yet it is the Philistines who are like the sand of the seashore in multitude. Saul had been instructed to wait at Gilgal for seven days until Samuel came. This was the time that Samuel had appointed.

And this recalls the instruction given to Saul in chapter 10, verses 7-8. Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Then go down before me to Gilgal.

And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do. This instruction seemed to refer to the initial installation of Saul as king, which occurred at Gilgal at the end of chapter 11.

However, the instruction to wait for seven days here recalls that earlier instruction and contrasts Saul's unfaithfulness here with his previous faithfulness. Note that there he had become a new man near the Philistine garrison at Gibbia and then been instructed to go to Gilgal. Saul waits for seven days.

It isn't entirely clear whether the seven days have passed or it is on the seventh day at this point, but he loses his nerve when Samuel does not turn up. He then takes matters into his own hand and offers the burnt offering and the peace offerings himself. Why is

this so serious? First, Saul is acting independently of the prophet Samuel, the one who declares God's word to him and represents the Lord's authority over him.

The whole kingdom depended upon the king's submission to the word of the Lord, that the Lord was the true king of Israel and Saul was under him. The king's heeding of the voice of the prophet was of paramount importance. Second, it's possible that Saul here assumes the prerogative to play the part of a priest himself, offering the sacrifices himself.

On the other hand, it's possible that this is just a shorthand for saying that Saul commanded the sacrifices to be made. In the next chapter we discover that Ahijah, the son of Ahitab, the brother of Ichabod, the priest of the Lord, is camped with Saul and presumably he would have performed such sacrifices for Saul. Had Saul performed the sacrifices himself, he would have been claiming authority over the worship of Israel in a way that he did not possess.

I think the most likely issue here is his disobedience to Samuel and the fact that as the king he rejects the word of the prophet. Samuel's confrontation with Saul might remind us of the confrontation with Adam after his sin in the garden, or Moses' confrontation with Aaron after his sin with the golden calf, another instance when someone assumed the right to reorder Israel's worship out of expediency, fear and impatience. Saul's response is like Adam and Aaron's, full of excuses.

Saul has sinned against the Lord and against Samuel. He has jettisoned their fatherly authority over him. Had Saul been faithful, his kingdom would have endured.

However, because of his unfaithfulness, Saul would have no enduring dynasty and his kingdom would end with him. The Lord would seek out a faithful replacement for Saul, a man after his own heart, which proves to be David. It's likely that there was still opportunity for Saul to repent at this point and for the blessing to be restored to him.

On occasions we have these declarations of definite judgment in scripture, but the Lord relents from judgment when the people repent. The city of Nineveh's repentance at the preaching of Jonah is a good example of this. In Saul we find a compelling and deeply observant portrait of how power can change someone, even transforming what were once virtues into vices.

In this chapter we see a hairline fracture in Saul's character start to expand. His characteristic modesty, lack of grand ambition, reluctance to assume power, and his self-doubt express themselves in fear, loss of nerve, and rashness. Later they will develop into a growing insecurity and paranoia about his possible replacement.

Saul will become desperately fixated upon holding on to his power. His whole mindset gets transformed by power. Once he has tasted power and its potential, and what it

means for his identity and legacy, he becomes defined and consumed by it.

Power holds him more than he holds power. Saul's insecurities drive his sinful actions. His men were abandoning him, and rather than trust the Lord, who defeated the Midianites, who had covered the land like a locust horde, through 300 men with Gideon, Saul has 600, he lost his nerve and acted rashly.

Saul's fears start to define him, when what he needed was faith in the Lord. A fearful and insecure person wielding power can be a very dangerous thing. Saul decamps from Gilgal and joins with Jonathan and his company at Giba, the Philistines' camp nearby in Micmash.

We should note the locations of the camps here are directly reversed from the camps at the beginning of the chapter, as are the relative fortunes of the two forces. The Philistines now divide their forces into three raiding parties, much as Gideon had divided his forces in judges. They send out military units in different directions to quell the rebellion, while Saul and his men seemingly are unable to do anything.

Israel's situation is dire. They are without weaponry, as the Philistines have a monopoly on ironworking. Only Saul and Jonathan have weapons.

Israel had first entered the land under Joshua in the Late Bronze Age. One of the major concerns then, which continued to be a concern, was the military technology of the chariot, which enabled certain Canaanite groups to dominate the plains. Now, in the first part of the Iron Age, military dominance depends heavily upon iron smelting and blacksmiths, and the Philistines effectively control access to that technology.

An Israelite who wants even an agricultural tool to be sharpened will have to go to the Philistines and pay them an exorbitant rate for them to do so. This description of the Philistines' dominance, however, sets things up for Jonathan's incredible victory in the chapter that follows. A question to consider, what can we learn from Saul about the relationship between courage and faithfulness? At the beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 14, Saul and his men are in a difficult position.

Most of Saul's forces have left him, many of them dispersed as Saul waited for Samuel to appear, and as they saw the size of the Philistine counteroffensive. We might have expected a battle at the end of the previous chapter, but the Philistine raiding parties had gone out without being stopped. At the end of chapter 13, we learn that the Israelites were largely without weaponry, with only Saul and Jonathan having swords in their possession.

Saul has been denied a dynasty on account of his sin. There was no reason why Saul could not have been a great king. However, he failed badly.

He allowed unaddressed weaknesses in his character to develop into flaws, which in their

turn developed into destructive vices. In this chapter, Jonathan, Saul's son, will come to the foreground. After Saul's failure, Jonathan plays the part of the saviour that Israel so desperately needs.

Jonathan took the initiative in attacking the Philistine garrison at Geba in the previous chapter, and here he takes the initiative again. Jonathan's character prepares us for David, who is to come. Jonathan shares several characteristics in common with David.

Jonathan also contrasts with his father, offering a glimpse of what a faithful Saul could have achieved. In between two accounts of his father's sinful failing, Jonathan's courageous faith stands out like a beacon. The author of Samuel is a very gifted narrator and he tells his story with care.

For instance, we should notice the way that he subtly foregrounds the father-son relationship between Saul and Jonathan from the very outset of this chapter. The father and the son will be juxtaposed throughout the story. To understand the events of this chapter, it helps to have a sense of the topography.

Geba and Mikmash are Benjaminite cities within a mile or so of each other, yet they are separated by a deep wadi canyon with steep cliffs on either side. The Philistines are encamped at Mikmash in the north, and the Israelites are at Geba in the south. There is a strategically important pass between the two sides.

The Philistines and the Israelites can both see each other from where they are situated, but the enemy camp is not easily accessible. Saul has lost most of the 2,000 men that he had at the beginning of chapter 13, along with the extra troops that he mustered at Gilgal. Now he only has 600 people with him.

Saul's beleaguered forces are accompanied by a priest, Ahijah the son of Ahitab, Ichabod's brother, and the son of Phinehas, son of Eli. Perhaps this association between Saul and a descendant of Phinehas should be seen as ominous. Jonathan proposes a daring escapade to his armour-bearer.

In 1 Samuel, the position of armour-bearer seems to have a certain amount of honour attached with it, and isn't merely a menial role. David will later be favoured with the position of armour-bearer for Saul. If we really must, we might not be that far off the mark in thinking about the role as that of a professional weapons caddy.

Jonathan's plan is to go over to the Philistine side of the wadi canyon. It seems that rather than taking the path where the Philistines would have expected an offensive, Jonathan plans to descend into the ravine itself, and then ascend up the other side. This was a daring and a dangerous plan, but Jonathan proposes it, expressing his confidence in the Lord's power.

The Lord is capable of saving, whether by many or by few. Jonathan has learnt the lesson

from Gideon, and we'll see echoes of Gideon in this story. In taking the path that he does, presumably Jonathan is hoping to meet with just an outpost of the garrison, rather than with the main body of the Philistine forces.

Like Gideon, Jonathan proposes a sign. If the Philistines invite them up, they will go up to them, confident that the Lord has delivered them into their hands. However, if the Philistines say that they will come down, no positive sign has been given.

The Philistines however respond by inviting them to come up, not taking seriously the threat posed by just a couple of men. Jonathan and his armour bearer have to climb up, but when they do, they kill about 20 men of the Philistines. This produces a panic in the Philistine camp, reminiscent of what happened at the attack of Gideon upon the Midianites.

This is accompanied by a sign from the Lord, as the earth quakes. The Philistine army is thrown into disarray, and are very fearful. Meanwhile, Saul and his men are looking out from the other side of the ravine, and they see the commotion within the Philistine camp.

Presuming that some of their number have been involved, they muster the men, and it turns out that Jonathan and his armour bearer were not present. Saul then instructs Ahijah the priest to bring the Ark of God to him. The Ark of God mentioned here is referred to as the Ifad in the Septuagint.

It is likely that it was the Ifad that was mentioned here, and that the Ark is still at Kiriath-Jerim. It would make far more sense for Ahijah to consult the Ifad than it would for him to consult the Ark, although there were parallels between the Ifad and the Ark, which may be why it's referred to as the Ark here. However, as the commotion increases within the Philistine camp, Saul instructs Ahijah not to go ahead with consulting the Ifad, presumably the Urim and Thummim.

Saul then gathers his men and goes into battle, but the victory is clearly the Lord's. Israel lacks swords and other weaponry, but the Lord sets the swords of the Philistines against each other. Israelites, who had been holed up and hiding, come out and start to join the fight, and Hebrews, who had joined the Philistines as mercenaries, start to turn against their masters.

However, in the battle, Saul makes a rash oath. He cursed the man who would eat food until it was evening, and he was avenged on his enemies. His failure to consult the Lord, his rash vow, and the fact that he speaks of his enemies rather than the Lord's enemies, all give an unflattering portrayal of Saul, especially compared to his son Jonathan.

Not knowing about his father's vow, Jonathan takes some honey, which is dripping on the ground of the forest. Israel is a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is a very visible portrayal of the Lord's blessing of it. Jonathan's eyes are enlightened as a result.

He is invigorated. However, the rest of Saul's army are faint with hunger as a result of their exertion. When Jonathan is informed of his father's vow, he accuses his father of troubling the land.

He has been revived and his strength renewed by this honey, and if the rest of the people had been able to enjoy it, theirs could have been too. But as a result of Saul's vow, they will not be able to carry through the battle to a satisfactory conclusion. They will be limited in what they can achieve.

They strike down the Philistines from Michmash to Ejilon, and the people are very faint at this point. Ejilon will remind us of the length and day under Joshua, but now it becomes a place where the day of battle has to be cut short because of the weakness of the people. And what's worse, when the people do get food, they eat it immediately without preparing it in the way prescribed by the law.

They fail to drain it of the blood. Saul builds an altar so that they can properly ritually slaughter the animals. However, the damage has been done, and the Lord does not give him an answer when he asks to go down against the Philistines.

Saul's rash vow has also created a breach between him and the people, and when he calls for the Urim and Thummim, he is confident that it will be the people who are found to be at fault. However, it is his own son Jonathan. The casting of lots here might recall the sin of Achan, whereas the people were judged on that occasion as a result of the sin of a person touching the forbidden things, things forbidden by the Lord himself.

Here the problem is caused by Saul's own rash vow. When Jonathan is identified as the culprit, we might be reminded of the story of Jephthah and his vow. He lost his dynasty as a result of his vow, and Saul has taken a vow of his own accord, which has now brought him to the point of being prepared to put his own son to death.

This is a rather ironic fulfilment of the judgement of Samuel in the preceding chapter. Saul is prepared to kill his son Jonathan, but the people intervene and ransom Jonathan, whether it's with an animal or money, or simply by virtue of their insistence that he should not be put to death, it's not entirely clear. However, Saul does not come out of this incident looking good.

He has ended up pitting himself against the people, and then pitting himself against his son, who is the hero of the hour, and as a result of his rash vow, the victory is not followed through. Saul leaves off pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines go away. As a result of his failure, Saul lost the opportunity to deliver a crushing blow.

The chapter concludes with a description of Saul's victories and battles, and then also his children. Saul was a successful military leader. However, the description of the various enemies as his enemies might recall the use of that pronoun in chapter 8. There it

revealed the way that the king would be particularly governed by his own quest for glory, rather than serving the people.

Three sons of Saul are mentioned here. Other sons are mentioned elsewhere, perhaps sons of a different wife. Another possibility is that Ishvi is another name for Ishbatheth.

We will encounter his two daughters later on again in the story. A question to consider. How many ways can you identify in this chapter that the narrator sets the character of Jonathan in direct contrast to that of Saul? Saul has already failed as king in a number of ways.

In chapter 14, his unbelief and ineffectiveness was shown up by the faithfulness of his son Jonathan. And in chapter 15, the Lord finally rejects him as king. Saul is instructed here to carry out harem warfare against Amalek, to block them out from under heaven.

He has to follow the pattern of Deuteronomy 20, verses 16-18. People under the ban must be utterly destroyed. In the case of Amalek, there was more history involved.

In Exodus chapter 17, Amalek fought against Israel when they came out of Egypt, when they were at their very weakest. They were defeated by Joshua, as Moses held up his hands, supported by Aaron and Hur. Exodus chapter 17, verses 13-16 read, And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

Then the Lord said to Moses, write this as a memorial in a book, and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, saying, A hand upon the throne of the Lord. The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

This is referred to also in Deuteronomy chapter 25, verses 17-19. This describes the events of Exodus chapter 17, and speaks of a time when they have rest in the land, that they will have to settle this particular issue, and that time has arrived. The law concerning Amalek in Deuteronomy chapter 25 is given in the context of the law of the Leveret.

There's a contrast between the man who comes to the aid of his brother when he is at his weakest, when he has died and his name is about to be lost, and he comes so that his name will not be blotted out. And then a people who sought to blot out the name of their brother when he was at his weakest. Amalek is Israel's brother of a kind.

Amalek is a descendant of Esau, a descendant of Esau who did not seem to surrender his opposition to Jacob. Amalek's ancestry is given to us in Genesis chapter 36, verse 12. Before attacking the Amalekites, Saul instructs the Kenites to leave.

The Kenites were associated with Midian and with Jethro, and there's a contrast between

the Amalekites and the Kenites. One of these peoples, the Amalekites, are being remembered for judgment for their actions at the time of the Exodus, and the other people, the Kenites, are being remembered for kindness for their actions at the same time. The Amalekites are met in chapter 17 of Exodus, the Kenites in chapter 18.

The Amalekites are to the southwest of the land of Israel, and Saul successfully pursues them to the east of Egypt. However, he does not do what the Lord has instructed. Saul and the people spare the best of the flocks and the animals and the goods for themselves.

They don't destroy them. Saul also saves King Agag. Why save King Agag? Maybe because he thinks that kings should be exempt from these sorts of requirements.

King Agag, as a fellow king, should not come under the ban. Kings are above the law, not under it. This is not pleasing to the Lord, and the Lord rejects Saul on account of his actions.

The word of the Lord comes to Samuel and declares his rejection of Saul from the kingship. Samuel's response is anger. He cries to the Lord all night.

It is important to recognize that this does not please Samuel. Samuel is not Saul's opponent, as many scholars have presented him to be. He is like Saul's adoptive father.

He confronts Saul on a number of occasions and rebukes him harshly. But he does so because he cares about Saul. He wants Saul to succeed.

Saul is like a son to Samuel, and Samuel does not want to see him fail and be rejected. Samuel goes and sees Saul. When Samuel confronts Saul, Saul lies.

He declares that he has performed the commandment of the Lord, and when challenged about the voice of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, he claims that they are going to be given as peace offerings at Gilgal. The suggestion earlier on is that they kept the best for themselves. And here it says it's to sacrifice to the Lord, Samuel's God.

This might be the same thing. It might be referring to peace offerings at Gilgal. But while it is presented as a pious act when it's described to Samuel, earlier on we see it's for the people's own purposes.

They devote to destruction those things that are worthless and despised, while saving those things that look good. Their decision to keep the best as peace offerings may be because they can eat the peace offerings themselves. It's not a whole burnt offering.

It's not completely dedicated to destruction. What they're doing, in essence, is taking what belongs to the Lord. And although there's a pious reason given, there is no pious motive involved.

Saul is like Achan, who took forbidden spoil and hid it. He is also like Haphnah and Phinehas, who took parts of the sacrifice that belonged to the Lord and parts that belonged to the people for themselves. We might also think of the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5. Saul began his prophetic ministry with judgment against Eli's house.

And now he will have to declare judgment against Saul's house. Saul has taken the forbidden fruit. When confronted, his response is to blame the people, much as Aaron blamed the people in Exodus chapter 32, and Adam blamed his wife in Genesis chapter 3. Like Moses and Joshua descending down the mountain, Samuel inquires about a commotion that gives away the rebellion that has occurred.

This is all another fall event. And much as Exodus chapter 32 involved the breaking of the tablets, this will involve the tearing of the kingdom from Saul's hand. Samuel rebukes Saul.

This is an essential truth about worship. Worship needs to be confirmed in practice. Worship that proceeds from disobedience is no worship at all.

Praising God with your lips when your heart is far from Him is an abomination to the Lord. Mercy is greater than sacrifice. Saul has rejected the kingship of the Lord, and so his kingship will be rejected.

Samuel compares this rebellion with witchcraft. Witchcraft involves turning to Satan, much as Eve heeded the voice of the serpent in the garden. Saul will end up turning to a witch in chapter 28.

Saul admits his sin, but he does not repent. Again, he blames the people. He says that he feared them and obeyed their voice, much the same as Aaron blamed the people in Exodus chapter 32.

He is more concerned that Samuel is the prophetic father of the nation, show a united face with him, and not undermine his authority. When Samuel turns from him, Saul seizes the skirt of Samuel's robe, and it tears. And the torn robe represents the torn kingdom.

We see a similar thing in 1 Kings 11, 29-31. And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country.

Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes. Perhaps one of the surprising things here is the reference to the fact that the Lord does not have regret in verse 29, when in verse 11 we're told that the Lord does

have regret, and again in verse 35.

Seeing these seemingly contradictory statements so close to each other should alert us to the fact that we are dealing with an apparent contradiction, not an actual contradiction. If there were an actual contradiction, they would not be in such close proximity. Both statements must be taken as true, but they must be taken as true in particular senses.

The challenge for us is to recognise how both of these things can be true after a particular sense. One of the tasks of theology is to reconcile statements like these. So on the one hand, we recognise that statements about God, such as his regret concerning Saul, are true statements.

They tell us something that is actually the case about God. On the other hand, it can't be the case that the Lord regrets the choice of Saul in the same way as a human being can regret a past action. The Lord does not change his mind.

God's omniscience also means that he can't make a decision or a choice and then later regret the outcome that he had not foreseen. God is not taken by surprise. God is not affected by moods and whims and fancies.

He is not fickle and changeable as a human being may be. Such statements then invite us to reflect, to think deeper, to think about the ways in which things can be held together even when they seem to be pulling apart. We will often find Scripture inviting us into the discovery of insight through the presentation of problems on the surface of the text.

Samuel ends up giving public respect to Saul. He is not going to overturn the monarchy and its authority. The direct overturning of authority is a very dangerous thing.

However, there will be a replacement chosen for Saul and Saul will lose his dynasty. Samuel slays Agag before the Lord and judges him for his cruelty and the cruelty of his nation. Saul and Samuel then go their separate ways, divided from each other and never seeing each other again until the end of Samuel's life.

A question to consider. The story of the Book of Esther has many allusions to the story of Saul and the Amalekites. It continues and completes that story in certain respects.

Can you discover many of these allusions? How do Mordecai and Esther succeed where Saul failed? 1 Samuel chapter 16 begins with the situation after the rejection of Saul. After Saul fails to judge the Amalekites, the kingdom is taken from him and will be given to one who is better than him. Samuel, however, is mourning Saul.

Saul had been like Samuel's adoptive son, the replacement for his unfaithful sons, just as he was the replacement for Hophni and Phinehas. The Lord sends him to anoint a

replacement, to Jesse the Bethlehemite. This is the first time that we hear of Bethlehem in the Book of 1 Samuel.

We last heard of it in the Book of Ruth. Samuel is worried, though, if Saul catches wind of the fact that he is going to Bethlehem and wonders what he is about, and discovers that he is anointing a successor, he will be in serious trouble. Unsurprisingly, Saul would seek his life if he anointed a replacement, who Saul would perceive as a rival.

The Lord gives Samuel a cover story. He is going to make a peace offering. In Leviticus chapter 3 verse 1, the peace offering can involve a male or a female.

Saul was marked out as the king in part through a sacrifice in chapter 9, and now his successor will be marked out in a similar manner. Samuel follows the Lord's instructions and goes to Bethlehem. In preparation for the feast, he consecrates Jesse and his sons, and invites them to the sacrifice.

As he is consecrating the sons, he sees the oldest son of Jesse first, Eliab, and judging by his appearance, presumes that he must be the chosen one. Yet the Lord says that he has rejected him. Nor has the Lord chosen Abinadab or Shammah, or any of the other seven sons that have passed before Samuel.

Previously we saw that Saul was set apart from others by his appearance. He was handsome. He was head and shoulders above everyone else.

Here the Lord makes clear that one cannot judge simply by the outward appearance. The Lord sees the heart. While the outward appearance is by no means unimportant for the king, it is not the be-all and end-all.

And perhaps Israel should have learnt some lessons from their experience with Saul, in a way that is perhaps reminiscent of the setting apart of Saul as king. The candidate cannot be found. Samuel has to inquire of Jesse whether he has another son who has not been presented.

And indeed there is one more, the youngest, and he is keeping the sheep. This is perhaps the first of several allusions to the stories of Joseph and Jacob. Joseph was introduced to us in Genesis 37, verse 2, as the one who kept the sheep with his brothers.

Now there is another shepherd on the scene. Like Joseph, David is another very handsome young man. And like Joseph, he naturally rises to authority as the spirit of God comes upon him.

David is described as ruddy with beautiful eyes. Only one other character in scripture is described as ruddy, and that is Esau. David is a character who brings together traits associated with Esau and Jacob.

He is primarily associated with Jacob, but he takes on some of the more manly traits of Esau. Although we will see that he resembles Esau in some not so good ways as well. Appropriately, David will also bring the land of Edom into union with Israel for a period of time.

He brings together the twins. Like Saul, David is described as one who is a suitable bridegroom of Israel. He is physically attractive.

David's name means beloved. And as the story proceeds, we will see that he gains dominance and influence and power, in large part through the fact that everyone falls in love with him. The first being Saul himself.

As the spirit of the Lord comes upon David, however, the spirit of the Lord leaves Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord torments him. Much as when Pharaoh was troubled with dreams, the cupbearer, his servant, told him of a gifted young man who would be able to help him. So here, one of Saul's servants tells him that there is a young man who will be able to help him with his problem.

David, the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, is already developing a reputation for himself. He is skillful in playing. He is a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence.

And the Lord is with him. Saul sends messengers to Jesse to summon David. David is sent by Jesse with a donkey laden with bread, and a skin of wine, and a young goat.

We've seen these things before. These are items associated with the signs of the kingdom given to Saul in chapter 10. There, he was told, first of all, that the donkeys of his father had been found.

And then in the second encounter, he met men carrying goats, bread, and wine. And they gave him some of the bread. Finally, he met prophets and musicians coming down from the high place.

And the spirit of God came upon him, and he became a new man. Now, these same signs are being sent to him by the hand of David. David is now the one who has the spirit of God upon him.

He will play the musical instrument. He's the one by whom Saul will be relieved of his harmful spirit. Already, David and Saul's identities and destinies are tied up together.

And Saul loves David greatly. And David becomes his armor bearer. He requests that David remain with him, that he become one of his household, as one of his full-time servants.

A question to consider, paying attention to the characterization of David within this

chapter, what are some ways in which he can already be contrasted with the character of Saul? 1 Samuel chapter 17 is one of the most famous narratives in the whole Bible, one with which we are all probably familiar from childhood. It has become synonymous in the wider culture with an extreme underdog story. Perhaps on account of this familiarity, and how accustomed we are to hearing it divorced from its context, there is much that we might miss within it.

With closer study, especially in the light of what has preceded it, we may discover that there remains a great deal of insight to emerge from it yet. The account of David's defeat of Goliath is a vivid and scenic account, to a degree that is unusual for a biblical narrative. The battle is set in the territory of Judah, in David's tribal region.

David begins his work in his own region, where the Philistines are encroaching. We need to read this in light of what has gone beforehand. From the earlier chapters of 1 Samuel, we know that Saul is the giant of Israel.

He stands head and shoulders taller than anyone else. He was also, with Jonathan, the only man with iron weapons in his possession. If any Israelite would be expected to fight the Philistine giant with iron weaponry, it would be Saul.

However, the spirit of the Lord has abandoned Saul in the previous chapter, and he was now afflicted with a harmful spirit from God. It is quite possible that the Philistines had gotten wind of the fact that all was not well in the court of Israel's king. King Saul was apparently losing his sanity, and the Lord was no longer with him as he had once been.

In fact, reports were that the prophet Samuel had not seen him for years now. These are all signs of a promising time to attack. The two armies gather in battle lines against each other, one standing on one mountain, and the other standing on another mountain opposite.

A champion, Goliath of Gath, comes out from the Philistine camp. As the champion, he represents the entire Philistine force. He is spoken of as THE Philistine on several occasions in this chapter.

He stands for all of the Philistines. His proposal is a duel between two representative champions, one of Israel and one of the Philistines, with the losers abiding by an agreement to become the slaves of the winners. This single combat was an alternative to a bloody battle between the two sides, a battle that the Philistines would most likely win.

There seemed to be no one suited to fighting against Goliath though, which led the people to despair. Goliath is an imposing warrior. He's over 9 feet tall.

He has an array of armour and weaponry that make him stand out from the regular Philistine soldier, and of course even more so from the Israelites who were not well

equipped with weapons. Some of Goliath's armour was probably obtained from other nations. Verses 4-7 are entirely devoted to describing Goliath and his armour and weaponry.

We might here remember the story of Nahash the Ammonite. That story involved a deadly threat to Jabesh-Gilead and a requirement that they surrender entirely unless someone came to their aid. There Saul, coming in from the field with the oxen, comes to Jabesh-Gilead's aid against the Ammonites.

Nahash's name means serpent and he was defeated by Saul. Now there is another serpent, a giant in scale armour, a leviathan, who will end up getting his head crushed by the champion of Israel, David, who has just come from the field with the sheep. Just as David was sent with the signs of kingship in chapter 16 verse 20, his battle here reminds us of Saul's earlier rised kingship.

David will replace and surpass Saul. Goliath the giant should also remind us of the earlier story of spying out and conquering the land. There it was the giants who held Israel back in fear.

The defeat of Og, the giant king of Bashan, the first great victory over a giant in Israel's story, and Caleb and Artheniel's victory over the giants of Hebron in Joshua 15 were examples to which Israel should have looked. We also discover that there were some lingering giants in the land, in this chapter, in 2 Samuel chapter 21 and in 1 Chronicles 20. It is the fear of the Israelites in drawing back from the giants in the land that we are first reminded of here.

In Numbers chapter 13 and 14 Israel spied out the land for 40 days and the people shrunk back from entering into the land due to their fear of the giants, even though the Judahite Caleb appealed to them not to fear. Here Goliath the giant stands against Israel for 40 days until David the Judahite courageously stands against him. When everyone else is shrinking back in fear, David, like Caleb, is the one who is confident in the Lord's promise and wants to attack the giants.

Later, of course, Caleb was the one who received the most giant infested territory as his possession. David is sent on a mission to see how his brothers are doing on the front line and he is expected to bring back a report. This should remind us of another character, of Joseph, who was sent by his father to check on his brothers in Genesis chapter 37.

David is the youngest son, favoured over his elder brothers. He is also the eighth brother, perhaps something that we should associate with new creation. David is going to act as a new Adam, clearing out the giants and allowing Israel to enjoy possession of the land.

David is sent with food, bread from Bethlehem, the house of bread, and cheeses. In the

previous chapter he was also sent with food to Saul. And perhaps we are to see something in the fact that David is the one who brings the riches of food and the bounty of the land.

David is seemingly reintroduced to us in this chapter, leading many to wonder about its consistency, connection and continuity with the previous chapter. Shimon bar Ephrat, however, observes that in the Hebrew, the reintroduction of David in verse 12 gestures back to the fact that we are already aware of the character in question. Also verse 14 provides some continuity with the preceding chapter by telling us that David went to and fro between Saul and his father's house.

Meanwhile, his three oldest brothers are members of Saul's army. He was already serving with Saul at this point then. However, we should not be surprised if there are temporal details out of sequence.

It's quite a possibility. We encounter such dischronology on a number of occasions in scripture, where the concern is more to tell the story in a way that brings out the meaning than it is to relate events in the strictest of possible sequence. Some have suggested that we encounter such dischronology at the end of this chapter, with David bringing the head of Goliath to Jerusalem.

The narrator gives a lot of attention to the account of David's conversation with his brothers and the men concerning Goliath and the reward offered for his defeat. Eliab's opposition to David may recall the opposition to Joseph from his older brothers. David's older brothers are also destined to bow to him in the future.

Eliab believes that David has ideas above his station. Just as Joseph was favoured over his brothers by their father and given the firstborn status and the coat of many colours, so David was chosen over his brothers, and Eliab most particularly in the preceding chapter, as the appointed successor for Saul. David speaks of taking the reproach from Israel.

This might recall the reproach of the Egyptians that was removed at Gilgal in Joshua chapter 5. The Egyptians had claimed that the Lord had brought Israel out into the wilderness to destroy them. As they were brought into the promised land and circumcised, they were marked out as the Lord's own people and as those who would receive the land. This nullified the Egyptians' taunt.

Goliath had ridiculed Saul and the Israelites, suggesting that their God was powerless to save them, or perhaps that he had rejected them. However, he is an uncircumcised pagan, and David is confident that the Lord can still deliver Israel. Just as Israel had been left outside of the land for 40 years on account of the 40 days of spying out the land and their fear of the giants, so Israel had now shrunk back from the giant Goliath for 40 days.

We might think here of another Davidic champion, who after being anointed by the spirits stood against a monster after 40 days. Saul had promised that the man to defeat Goliath would receive his daughter in marriage and that his household would be made free in Israel, not having to pay any taxes. The successful Israelite champion would be made son-in-law to Saul, adopted into the royal household, and would enjoy the privileges of royalty, being a recipient of taxes, rather than one having to pay them.

Saul's promises might remind us of the promises made by Caleb to Othniel for going against the city of Kiriath-sephar in Joshua chapter 15, or perhaps also of the promise of Laban to give his daughter Rachel to Jacob if Jacob served him for seven years. Like Laban, however, Saul will renege on his promise. David's response might also remind us of Saul's son Jonathan, who expressed the same confidence in going down alone to face the uncircumcised Philistines on the previous occasion when the Philistines and the Israelites stood on opposite hilltops, back in chapter 14.

David's words reach Saul. To this point, David has not said that he will fight the Philistine. Indeed, when challenged by his brother, he seems to deny that he was doing anything more than asking questions.

It seems strange that David is summoned to Saul, until we remember that David was already known to Saul and those around him, and that he was particularly favoured by Saul. David isn't just a random Israelite kid asking about Goliath, but he is Saul's musician and armour-bearer, his beloved servant, and the one seemingly fearless and faithful man in the camp. Saul knows that the Lord is with David from his experience, and that David isn't just a reckless young loudmouth.

Without the background of chapter 16, though, it might be difficult to make sense of why Saul acts in the way that he does. When he sees Saul, David expresses his willingness to fight Goliath himself. Saul questions David, but doesn't simply laugh him off, nor does he directly reject him.

David responds with a declaration of his faith in the Lord, and his experience as a shepherd. Like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, David is a shepherd, and he can bring the skills of a shepherd to his task of fighting and leading. He has, like Samson, killed a lion, and like Samson, the powerful champion of Israel, he is confident that, in the Lord's strength, he can defeat the Philistine too.

The key fact is that Goliath has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord's honour is at stake here. Considering how much is riding upon this, Saul accepts David's offer surprisingly readily.

Again, it is very hard to believe that this is how the exchange would have gone had Saul not already been well acquainted with David. David had been Saul's armour-bearer. However, now Saul acts as armour-bearer to David.

He clothes David in his armour. Like the signs of the kingdom that were sent with David in the previous chapter, this is some powerful foreshadowing of the fact that David will replace Saul. However, David rejects the armour of Saul.

He will not approach Goliath as a warrior in the mould of Saul, but as the young shepherd taken from the flock. Likewise, when he takes the place as king, he will not rule just as one of the kings of the nations, as Saul had attempted to do. Saul's giving his armour to David also anticipates Jonathan, his son, giving his armour to David in the next chapter.

In both cases, they are powerful symbols of the place that David will occupy as the replacement to both of them. David takes his staff. He goes down into the valley.

He chooses five smooth stones from the brook, puts them in his shepherd's pouch, has his sling in his hand and approaches the Philistine. There are a lot of details here, and we should rightly wonder why they have been included. David is like a shepherd.

He has a staff, a shepherd's pouch and a shepherd's sling. He chooses five stones. Perhaps we are to think of the association between the Philistines and the number five.

The Philistines had five chief cities and five lords. When they sent the golden tumours and golden mice back with the ark in chapter 6, they sent five of each for this reason. Perhaps David chose a stone for each of the Philistine cities then.

Goliath is of Gath, but there is a stone remaining for Ekron, Ashdod, Ashgalon and Gaza. Later, in 2 Samuel chapter 21, we discover that there were giants and relatives of Goliath associated with others of these cities. Perhaps there is a further allusion to the story of Jacob here.

Jacob was the shepherd who was associated with the staff, with the setting up of stones, five of them in his story, and with smoothness. He also had one-on-one combat with the angel. David is a Jacob-like character and his Jacob-like traits will become more pronounced as the story progresses.

However, they may be emerging already here. David also has a number of the characteristics of Esau, both of them being described as ruddy, much as Jacob matured into some of the traits of his brother. So David has these traits at this point in his story.

David is a man of action, he's a man of the field, he's a man of competence. He's a man whose hands are skilled with sling, with sword or with lyre. He's a valiant man, a hunter, a person who can kill wild beasts.

There is a completeness and roundedness to David's character that brings together traits of both Jacob and Esau and we'll see more of these as the story progresses. The Philistine champion curses David by his gods, while David declares that he comes in the

name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom Goliath has defied. Behind the two champions then is conflict between the Lord and the false gods of the Philistines.

David expresses his confidence that the Lord saves, not by human strength, much as Jonathan did in chapter 14. David slung a stone at the Philistine, which hit him in the forehead. The serpent's head was crushed and Goliath fell flat on his face.

David chopped off Goliath's head with his own sword. Here we should recall the story of Dagon from chapter 5. Dagon fell flat on his face before the ark and then later fell again and was decapitated. The Israelites then pursue the Philistines and plunder their camp.

David takes the head of the Philistine and brings it to Jerusalem. This may be a reference to a later time, or perhaps he brings it to somewhere in the region of Jerusalem, beyond the part currently controlled by the Jebusites. Saul now asks about David's identity.

This is a detail that has led many to believe that this story is in conflict with the story that precedes it. In that story David is already clearly known to Saul. Why then would he ask about his identity here? We've already seen earlier in the story some hints of continuity with what proceeds, and some parts that make sense most when they are read against the background of what has gone beforehand.

What then should we do with this? I think the most obvious explanation is that although Saul knew David well, he did not know David's family well, as David had been employed by Saul to this point, it didn't really matter that much. Some of his servants had alerted him to David's existence and to his skills, and then he had been sent for from Jesse. It isn't entirely clear that Saul had first-hand acquaintance with Jesse.

However, now David's family matters. It matters because David is going to be brought into the king's house in a new way, not just as his servant, but as his son-in-law. Also David's family is going to be freed from the burden of taxation, and so Saul needs to discover which family is going to receive the reward.

David's family background then is relevant information at this point in a way that it was not before. This also forms the climax of the story, as David declares himself as the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, and as the future king declares his identity, the stage is set for the rest of the story. A question to consider.

What are some of the ways in which the events of this chapter set up David as the worthy and fitting replacement for Saul as king? At the start of 1 Samuel 18, David is taken into the house of Saul, where he prospers. There is a sort of adoption taking place here. Saul takes him into his own household completely, and doesn't allow him to return to his father's house anymore.

Jonathan also makes a sort of covenant of brotherhood with David. When later David

receives the kingdom, he receives it to someone who was a member of Saul's own household. We should also consider the grace that God is showing to Saul here, and the way that Saul is his own worst enemy.

Saul was prepared to kill his own son Jonathan in chapter 14, cutting off the crown prince until the people stopped him. The Lord brought Saul's fate upon him, largely by his own hand. God gives Saul his successor as a member of his own house.

Had Saul been righteous, he would have recognized God's remarkable grace in this. If Saul had supported David, he would have had his divinely blessed successor as his adopted son and later son-in-law, and would experience blessing on account of him. David was well inclined towards Saul and his household, so Saul would have fared very well had he repented and discovered the grace in the Lord's judgment.

David, whose name means beloved, was a man after God's own heart, and a man who won over the hearts of almost everyone who met him, soon causing Saul to fear his power to alienate the affections of his people, and even his own household. While it might appear that David was just a member of Saul's household, matters soon start to take a surprising turn. Because of the love that he had for the young man, Jonathan made a covenant with David.

He took off his robe and armour and gave them to David. The significance of this act really needs to be noted. Jonathan was the crown prince and the heir to the throne.

His robes and armour were marks of his office, and by taking these off and giving these to David, he is symbolically, even if not intentionally and explicitly, abdicating his position and giving it to David. David's later rise to rule was not a rebellious or revolutionary act, but was just and righteous. Jonathan progressively relinquished his own position to him.

Why did Jonathan so love David? If we look back through the story, the answer shouldn't be hard to discover. David is just like Jonathan. If two men were ever kindred spirits, these two were.

Both of them single-handedly fought the Philistines in daring feats of bravery when everyone else was fearful. They trusted in the Lord to enable them, over numbers or weapons. Jonathan was the son of Saul.

David was Saul's son-in-law. Both led Israel to victory. The exhilarating courage and faith of Jonathan stands out against the bleak background of Saul's fear in chapters 13 and 14.

When David comes on his horizon, Jonathan finally finds a man after his own heart. I imagine that it was fairly discouraging for him, being surrounded by the fear, paranoia and unbelief of Saul's court. David brought a remarkable shift in the spirit of the place.

David prospered in Saul's service. However, as Saul heard the women praising David for killing his tens of thousands, but only praising him for killing thousands, he became very angry and jealous, and cast a spear at David while he was playing music for him. The women's song is reminiscent of the song of Miriam and the women after the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

The thousands, tens of thousands pairing is unlikely to be an actual suggestion that David has killed more than Saul. It's simply using the standard parallelism of Hebrew poetry for an intensifying effect. The lines are synonymous but intensifying.

We see a similar paralleling of ten thousand and a thousand in Psalm 91 verse 7. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. Saul chooses then to take the song of the women in the worst of possible ways. The actual purpose of the song was to celebrate the power of the Lord to deliver his people, through Saul and David, not to pit Israel's champions against each other.

The spirit had now departed from Saul, the giant of Israel, and it was apparent to Saul that the spirit was now with his servant David. Saul was possessed by a distressing spirit, and David's music brought him relief. However, twice Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, in verses 10-12.

In the previous chapter, David encountered a giant with a spear, Goliath, and from chapter 18 onwards, David is threatened by the spear-wielding giant of Saul. Saul takes on characteristics of Goliath, and the spear of Saul becomes his identifying instrument in the following chapters. David is raised up and prospers in all that he does.

He acts wisely. He is a new Joseph. He has made a commander of a thousand, and David is probably not even twenty yet, so this might be an honorific role for a member of the king's household at this point, rather than an actual assignment.

However, honorific or not, he soon proves skilled in the role. Israel and Judah, the two halves of the nation, both love David. Israel is united in and by their love for this young man.

Saul had promised David his daughter Merab in marriage, but he ended up giving Merab to another man instead. As Peter Lighthouse points out, David's experience in Saul's house echoes that of Jacob in the house of Laban. David experienced hostility from his brothers.

He left his father's house. He prospers. He starts to be feared or resented.

A daughter is offered to him as a wife and then withdrawn, and then he becomes a son-in-law. Saul's daughter Michal loved David, and so Saul offered her as a wife to David, hoping that she would be a snare to him, taking his side against David. But Michal loved David, the only woman in the Old Testament narratives who is described as loving a

man.

David has little money for a bride price. The bride price was the customary sum that would be paid for a woman like Michael, and Saul would be unlikely to want to give his daughter as a lower-class concubine. She would be expected to have the honour of independent money provided by her prospective bridegroom.

And Saul suggests an alternative. In lieu of a bride price, he will accept 100 Philistine foreskins, hoping that David would be killed by his enemies. David doubles the sum and gives him 200.

Like Jacob did for Rachel, he pays double the bride price to marry the younger daughter. Lighthart suggests here that there might be an allusion back to the events of Gilgal. Israel had been circumcised en masse in Joshua 5 at Gilgal in order to remove the reproach of Egypt after crossing the Jordan.

Saul had twice failed and been rejected by the Lord in Gilgal, once in chapter 13 and again in chapter 15. In chapter 17, David spoke of the Philistines as uncircumcised and spoke also of the need to remove the reproach from Israel. In the mass circumcision of Philistines, David might be doing this in some way.

Michael is given to him, and rather than serving Saul against her husband, she aligns with him, causing her father to fear David all the more. In verse 23, David spoke of himself as a poor man of no reputation, as lightly esteemed. However, in verse 30, after his remarkable success, he is described again, but now as highly esteemed.

Saul by now is very fearful of David. He recognises that all the signs are there, that the Lord is with David, and that he is his successor. The power of David throughout this chapter is in large part the power of being the beloved.

He is the one who is loved by Israel and Judah. He is the one who is loved by Jonathan. He is the one who is loved by Michael.

He is the one who is loved by the women who sing the praises of the returning victors. As the king is the bridegroom of the people, Saul is right to recognise the power of David as the one who is loved. A question to consider.

Part of the tragedy of the story of Saul is how his way of seeing situations is so consistently jaundiced by fear, envy and paranoia, even when potential blessings are staring him right in the face. If you were to describe the way that Saul's character soured from when he was first called, how would you do so? What lessons can we learn from Saul's character development? In 1 Samuel chapter 19, Saul's violent hostility to David rises to a level that forces David to flee from him and his house. He is assisted by Saul's son Jonathan and Saul's daughter Michael.

The chapter begins with Saul either telling Jonathan and his servants to kill David or, according to other commentators, informing them of his personal intention to do so. Saul is gradually descending into the most violent folly, while David is growing in strength and wisdom. Jonathan tells David that Saul seeks to kill him and instructs him to hide in a place where he could witness Jonathan talking with his father concerning him.

Jonathan wants to assure David that he need fear no betrayal from his quarter, so he wants to give him the opportunity to witness the conversation. Jonathan emphasises the blood guilt that Saul would incur by killing David. Not only was David innocent, he was also someone through whom God had brought about a great deliverance for his people.

Jonathan's life had previously been saved from Saul under different circumstances by just such an appeal when Saul was going to kill him, even though he had been part of a great deliverance for God's people. Saul swears that he won't proceed with his intentions and then David returns. However, after David wins another great victory over the Philistines, Saul tries to pin David to the wall with his spear for a third time.

Saul's military skill seems to be forsaking him, is one thing we can notice here. The other important thing to observe is what occasions Saul's assaults upon David. It is David's heroic deeds and deliverances of Israel that occasion Saul's violence.

Saul is angry with David for his saving of Israel. It is envy and fear that drives him. As James Jordan observes, the contrast between David and Saul at this point is also striking.

There is no evidence that Saul goes out to fight. However, while sitting in his house, where he should be at rest, he is clutching his spear. Saul's relationship with his weapon reveals truths about his character.

It associates him with Goliath, as we have already seen. Also, his seeming inability to let go of his spear is probably a sign of his increasingly perverse relationship with power. Saul gradually ceases to wield his spear and becomes defined by it, as if it were glued to his hand.

By contrast, David is a man who is remarkably versatile and able to be at rest. One moment he is carrying food, the next he is using a slingshot, the next he is wielding a sword, the next he is playing a liar. He defends people, provides food for them, shepherds.

He brings delight, glory and joy. He is very clearly royal material. After David escapes, Saul sends men to David's house to watch him, so that he might be killed in the morning.

However, Michael, David's wife and Saul's daughter, lets David down through a window and uses cunning to cover up the fact. She delays the pursuit of David by telling the messenger sent to take him that David was sick. By the time her deception was discovered, it was too late and David had made his getaway.

David speaks of this particular event in Psalm 59. Laban comparisons continue here. Like Jacob escaped from Laban, David escaped from Saul.

Like Jacob, he is pursued by his father-in-law. Rachel lied to her father Laban about the teraphim in Genesis chapter 31 verses 33-35. Michael lied to her father using the teraphim in this chapter.

Both of the fathers-in-law ask why they were deceived. If we have been paying attention to this particular story, it should remind us of a number of other stories from elsewhere in the scripture. Saul is like Isaac.

Even though God has made clear that he wants the kingdom to be established through David, rather than Jonathan, Saul is determined to resist this. Much as Isaac resisted God's word that his oldest son Esau would serve his youngest son Jacob. Like Rebecca, Michael is a righteous and shrewd woman who uses goat's hair to create a disguise, so that Saul would be deceived about identities and God's will might be established.

Saul is like Laban. Saul takes a new son into his house. As Laban treated Jacob unjustly by giving him Leah rather than Rachel, Saul gave David Michael instead of Merab.

Like Laban, Saul finds himself steadily dispossessed as God gives his household into the hands of his son-in-law. Like Laban, Saul responds with hostility and his son-in-law has to flee from him. Like Rachel who sat on Laban's household guards during her period when escaping, Michael deceives her father, exposing his idolatry and humiliating the household guard by treating it in an inappropriate way.

Saul is also like Pharaoh. He tries to kill the promised seed. Michael is like Pharaoh's daughter who resists the evil will of her father, protects and delivers the one who will deliver the people and establish the nation.

Saul is also like the king of Jericho who sent men to the house of Rahab to capture the spies. Michael is like Rahab who deceived the wicked men of her people, hid the spies, let them down through a window and aided and abetted their escape. Saul is clearly in bad company then.

His court has become like the house of Laban, Egypt and Jericho. And there are Passover themes here as well. There is a threat to the sun at the doorway and a night time escape from a pursuing king.

As he flees from Saul's house we have the beginning of David's wilderness wanderings which only come to an end after the death of Saul. Behind all of these figures, once again, we see the shadowy agency of the serpent. King Saul is a new Goliath-like figure, someone who acts as the seed of the serpent.

The tyrant is outwitted by the woman, his daughter, as once again Eve gets poetic

justice against the one who first deceived her. David fled to Samuel at Ramah and informed him of what Saul had done. Saul sent three successive groups to capture David but the Spirit of God came upon each group in succession and they ended up prophesying with the prophets rather than fulfilling their missions.

Eventually Saul himself goes to do for himself what all of his messengers had failed to do. Back in chapter 10 verses 10-13 we read, The people said to one another, We don't have any personal audience with Samuel here as we were told at the end of chapter 15 that he didn't see Samuel again until the day of Samuel's death. In this incident Saul replays the story of his call but in a very tragic way.

He goes to Ramah searching for the prophet. He is directed by people at a well. The Spirit of God comes upon him and he prophesies.

And the saying concerning his relationship to the prophets is related. However at the end of the chapter Saul is left naked, symbolically stripped of his office by the Spirit of God. Meanwhile David is with the prophet Samuel.

He is counted among the prophets now. A question to consider, what cautionary lessons about the ways of sin might we learn from the occasions of Saul's anger towards David? What might Saul's relationship with his spear reveal about the effects of sin in people's lives? In 1 Samuel chapter 20 David inquires of Jonathan asking what he has done wrong that Saul keeps seeking his life. Jonathan, unaware of most of the recent events, believes that Saul is still keeping his oath.

However knowing how firm the friendship between David and Jonathan is and remembering how Jonathan talked him out of killing David the last time, Saul has kept it from him. David arranges a plan with Jonathan. It will smoke out Saul's intentions into the open.

At the start of the month was a new moon feast, a religious event and sacrificial meal, and David wouldn't turn up. He would leave his seat empty. When Saul inquired about his absence Jonathan would tell his father that David had been called home to his family's yearly sacrifice.

Depending on Saul's reaction David would either be told to return to the court or to flee for his life. David already knew that Saul had broken his oath and was trying to kill him. However by getting Jonathan to discover the fact for himself, Jonathan would also be alerted to the true nature of the situation and to the character of his father.

Jonathan was still believing the best of Saul and prepared to countenance the possibility that Saul could take an oath in the name of the Lord and then go back on it. Jonathan speaks to David very plainly, making clear that he knows that David is the true heir of the kingdom and the one that the Lord will establish in Saul's place. He asks to form a

covenant with David again.

This time the covenant is not merely with David as an individual but with David's house after him. The relationship between David and Jonathan has changed significantly in these chapters. Where the focus was once on David being taken into the favour of Jonathan's house, now the focus is on Jonathan being taken into the favour of David's.

David had begun by asking for covenant mercy and faithfulness from Jonathan and now Jonathan asks the same of David. Jonathan devises a plan by which he can alert David of his father's intentions. David was to stay three days in the field.

The fact that all of these events occurred in a field is worth noticing perhaps. Two brothers in a field might remind us of Cain and Abel. However unlike Cain, the older Jonathan wants to save the life of his younger brother, not to take it.

On the third day, Jonathan would shoot three arrows and depending on where he shot them, David would know whether it was safe for him to return or whether he had to flee. When Saul discovered that David had left the court and realised that Jonathan knew, he was furious with Jonathan. He refers to David as the son of Jesse, even though David is an adopted son and son-in-law in his house.

Recognising that Jonathan's loyalties lie with David, he speaks in a way that seems to disown Jonathan too, calling him the son of a whore and saying that he has shamed his mother, suggesting that he isn't prepared to own Jonathan as his son. By this point, it is clear that Jonathan has openly been playing second fiddle to David and his father has noticed. A few chapters ago, David was spoken of as if he was a wife being taken into the household of Saul, the husband and king of Israel.

Now David is being spoken of as the new husband and king of Israel and Jonathan is seeking his protection and support. Jonathan recognises himself as dependent upon a new dynasty. Even though David was a fugitive whose life was sought by the king, Jonathan recognises that the Lord is with David and that no force will ultimately prevail against him.

Saul then casts a spear at Jonathan, just as he had done with David, and once again he misses. The once great warrior Saul has missed his target on three separate occasions, while Jonathan will hit his target three times in a row later in the chapter. On the morning of the third day, Jonathan went out into the field and gave David the signal to flee from Saul.

After the boy who was gathering Jonathan's arrows had departed, David came out of his hiding place and bade an emotional farewell to Jonathan. They would only meet once more before Jonathan's death. This moment is the start of a new phase in the life of David.

He has been tested in the house of his father-in-law and will now become the leader of his own men, a group that will become the seed of a new Israel. The story of 1 Samuel is, among other things, a story of adopted sons taking over from natural sons. The wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas are replaced by Samuel, the righteous son of Hannah.

The unfaithful sons of Samuel are replaced by Saul, whom Saul adopts as his own child. The son of Saul, Jonathan, is replaced by Saul's adopted son and son-in-law David. We see a similar theme in other parts of the Bible, most notably in Genesis, where the older son is often replaced by the younger.

Abel is favoured over Cain. Isaac is favoured over Ishmael. Jacob is favoured over Esau.

Joseph is favoured over his brothers. In most of these cases we see the favoured son being hated, resisted and resented by the ones that he replaces. In such situations two sacrifices are called for and most do not want to make them.

First, fathers have to be prepared to give up their beloved sons and their ambitions for them for the sake of other sons. Isaac, for instance, wasn't prepared to make this sacrifice and insisted on blessing Esau rather than Jacob, even though God had made clear that Jacob was the true heir of the covenant. Abraham showed his willingness in first sacrificing Ishmael, sending him away, even though he dearly wanted to see the covenant established in him.

He then showed it again in being prepared to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. Sons also have to be prepared to sacrifice their position and prerogative and give it to one that they might think is less worthy. Esau wasn't prepared to surrender his position to Jacob.

Joseph's brothers hated him for his dreams that he would rise above them. The character of Jonathan, then, burns upon the pages of 1 Samuel as a most remarkable example of humility, spiritual insight, heroism and devotion. The nobility of Jonathan stands in the most marked contrast to his father's character.

Saul was unwilling to give up power and ambition to God's will. He was the stubborn father who would not sacrifice his son and his ambitions for Jonathan to God's will. However, when Jonathan saw that God had raised up righteous David, Jonathan acted in a way that is so far beyond the typical mode of human behaviour that it commands our attention.

When David came on the scene, he was the natural rival to Jonathan by his nature. He performed the same sort of brave acts, he received the love and the praise of the people and was successful in everything that he did. It seemed increasingly clear that God was with David and that David was going to usurp the place of Jonathan.

The natural thing for Jonathan to have done would have been to seek to kill David, just

as his father was doing. However, unlike his father who resisted God's purpose, Jonathan acted against all supposed self-interest to serve it. He took David under his protection.

He freely gave up his position as crown prince to David. He risked and resisted the wrath of his father for David. He allowed himself to be dishonoured for David.

He put his life on the line for David. His greeting of David in this chapter is like the greeting Esau gave to Jacob upon his return in Genesis chapter 33 verse 4. But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. There are two Esaus in this story.

Saul is the Esau who seeks to take David's life and is envious of his blessing. But Jonathan is the Esau who is at peace with his brother. Jonathan is a powerful example for us in several respects.

We may find ourselves in a position like Jonathan's on occasions. Jonathan was the son of a wicked man but with an immense privilege of position. He was willing to give all of this position up and to put his life at risk in order to align himself with the suffering and persecuted servant of God.

Jonathan was a man who at immense personal cost changed sides. He is a man who stepped back from a position that was going to be given to him when someone more suitable appeared. He was the crown prince who resisted and deceived his father the king for the sake of a poor fugitive.

He is the man who willingly gave up his power and title into the hands of God's servant. He was the man who broke the bonds of family for the sake of the kingdom of God. This is the sacrifice that Christ calls us to make.

He calls us to love him, the son of David, over father and mother. We are called to be like Jonathan, surrendering worldly wealth, position and inheritance in order to align ourselves with the weak and persecuted people of God, believing that God's will prevails over all human power. Such a sacrifice requires the same humility that Jonathan showed.

The humility that makes us willing to be shamed and vilified, to be hated and attacked, to be robbed of status, reputation and ambition, to lose the spotlight and adulation of society and even to put our own lives on the line. And to do all of this without self-pity or pride, but joyfully and confidently in the light of God's good purpose. In Jonathan we also see a shadow of a greater Jonathan to come, of one who made himself of no reputation, took on the form of a servant and humbled himself, of one who gave up his wife so that adopted sons might be saved and raised up, of one who considers shame, dishonor and persecution as light when weighed against the delight of doing God's will, of one who gave up family bonds and ambitions for the sake of the weak.

As we have already seen, the book of 1 Samuel described Jonathan as being bound up

with the life of David. For this reason we should not be surprised to find that the greater Jonathan is also David's greater son, this time sent by a loving father who unlike Saul did not seek to spare his own son, but out of love gave him up for us all. Much as his faith was earlier in the story, the love of Jonathan is a shining beacon in the darkness of the unfaithfulness and lovelessness of Saul's court.

It is one of the strongest examples of love and devotion in the entire Old Testament. Yet we are the recipients of a love that utterly eclipses that of Jonathan for David, a love that is more ardent, more costly and more committed. David was a one-time shepherd boy loved by the son of a king.

We are sinners loved by the son of God. David was a gifted young warrior loved by a military hero. We are frail creatures of dust loved by the one who is above all earthly powers.

David was a servant of the king for whom the king's son risked his life. We were the enemies of God for whom the son of God gave his life. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which the relationship between David and Jonathan supports David's claim to the throne? In 1st Samuel chapter 21, David is on the run from King Saul.

He is driven out from Saul's court by Saul's murderous anger against him and he must escape. David is driven out into the wilderness as it were and he is tested before he enters into his kingdom. Various of the Psalms come from this period of David's life.

As in the story of Joseph, for instance, David has to learn through suffering. The story here begins with a visit to the priests at Nob. The tabernacle is now at Nob, presumably moved there from Shiloh, perhaps after the capture of the Ark at the Battle of Aphek.

Much of the activity of the tabernacle continues but the Ark is no longer there. An Ahimelech, when David comes to him, is fearful. He rightly fears that the fact that David is alone and in a hurry means that he is a fugitive from King Saul and that he is in danger if he complies with or supports him.

David deceives him in a way that gives him plausible deniability if he were challenged on the matter later. We should note the various forms of deception in this and surrounding narratives. Michael's lie to her father and his men and her disguising of the terror theme.

The story that David instructs Jonathan to give to Saul concerning his sacrifice in his hometown. The story that David gives to Ahimelech. The cover story that the Lord gives Samuel when he goes to anoint David.

And later in this chapter, David's feigning of madness before Achish. The story presents a number of these lies and deceptions in a very positive way which raises problems for us in squaring them with the teaching of the 9th commandment. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour which many take to be a blanket condemnation of lying.

I don't believe that scripture teaches a rigorous or simplistic approach on lying. Rather the biblical teaching on the matter is governed by communicative intent and justice. For instance, when I tell a joke, I am telling a story as if it were true.

But my intent is clearly not to deceive and the person to whom I am telling the joke recognises that it is a joke and is not deceived. In such a situation I am engaging in good faith communication even while telling something that in the strictest manner of speaking isn't true. One important thing to remember here is that lying is less a matter of statements considered in the abstract by themselves but about relational aspects of communication.

Communication is also governed by considerations of justice. A narrow definition of lying may miss the sins involved, for instance, in statements that are technically true yet designed to mislead or keep in the dark someone who has the right to the truth. Telling the truth is not just about technically avoiding lies but about candour and clarity.

On the other hand, some people do not have the right to the truth and to give it to them may be a sin. Indeed we might need to lie to them in order to fulfil our duties to someone. The classic example of the SS at the door searching for the Jews in your attic can be given here.

Like just war, there are occasions when justice may not merely permit the telling of lies but even require them of us. Such stories do challenge us to think more carefully about such matters. One of the things that it might do is highlight the importance of the phrasing of the 9th commandment.

Bearing false witness against your neighbour. The aspect of being against your neighbour is an important part of it. The commandment highlights the breakdown of communicative justice and the intent to do something against someone.

As we pay more attention to the relational character of communication and the fact that communication is an action we will be better positioned to have a more nuanced and sophisticated account of what constitutes a lie and what is telling the truth. Saul had been handed two loaves of bread designed for God's service back in chapter 10 verse 3 and 4 and here David requests five loaves of bread. He earlier picked up five stones.

Perhaps we should see some connection. Now the stones have turned to bread. Jesus refers to this story in Matthew chapter 12 verses 1 to 8. At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath.

His disciples were hungry and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and ate the

bread of the presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

And if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. One could perhaps legitimately argue that Ahimelech the priest recognised that the law of the showbread existed for the good of God's people, not merely as an end in itself.

And in those circumstances the hunger of David and his men took precedence. However, there seems to be more going on here. Jesus' argument depends upon the legitimacy of overriding the law under certain circumstances.

And in the case of David, this does not seem to have been merely the hunger of David and his men. Rather, it's the fact that David and his men are acting as the servants of God. And as the servants of God on a mission of God, they have particular privileges and prerogatives.

They are like the priests who have to do the work of the Lord on the Sabbath. Even though this work involves labour that would be prohibited under other circumstances, when they are doing it for the Lord, it is not illegitimate. By giving the bread to David and his men then, Ahimelech was recognising that they were performing some sort of divine ministry.

Lighthart remarks upon the focus on the hand in the Hebrew of this passage. He suggests that we might relate it to the filling of the hand or ordination. The priest gives David bread and a sword.

And this is a sort of implicit ordination ceremony. In Leviticus 8, verses 25-28, we read of the ordination of the priest and the filling of the hand in that. Then he took the fat and the fat tail and all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat and the right thigh, and out of the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one unleavened loaf and one loaf of bread with oil and one wafer, and placed them on the pieces of fat and on the right thigh.

And he put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons and weighed them as a wave offering before the Lord. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord.

The reception of bread then is a sign that the kingdom is being handed over to David. As Saul had received bread earlier on in chapter 10, David receives bread now. David speaks of his men not merely as clean but as holy.

They may be under some kind of temporary Nazarite vow so that they can enjoy priestly privileges for that period. Here we also read of Doeg the Edomite, who has a shameful role to play in the next chapter. David has just received the sword of Goliath of Gath, and then he flees to Gath, right into the den of the dragon that he had earlier slain.

One could imagine that this would be the last place that Saul would expect to find him. David's reputation has preceded him, however, and he is brought to Achish, the king of Gath. A few chapters later he would become a vassal and mercenary for Achish.

Interestingly, the Philistines of Gath misrecognise David as the king of the land. While they are misrecognising him, they may also be perceiving that, whoever the official king is, David is the actual leader of the people. David successfully employs deception to save his life.

He displays his cunning and his resourcefulness. He outwits the serpent. Psalm 34 comes from this occasion and gives us some window into David's thinking at this time.

A question to consider. What are some other events that David's feigning of madness might remind us of in scripture? David begins 1 Samuel chapter 22 by departing from Gath and King Achish. It was not a safe place for him to remain, given his history with the Philistines.

He escapes to the cave of Bedolom, where he spends some time. His brothers and his family join him there, knowing that their lives would be in danger on account of their association with him. A great many others also rally to him.

People who are in distress, people who are in debt, and people who are bitter and disaffected in various ways. This is reminiscent of Jephthah in Judges chapter 11 verses 1-3. Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute.

Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.

Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. And worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him. David, like Jephthah, is surrounded by disaffected persons, and this is a very dangerous position to be in.

No doubt many of these men would be spoiling for a revolution. David isn't an outright rebellion against Saul. However, he is with outlaws and will function as a sort of regional warlord in some ways.

He is surrounded by 400 men. James Jordan suggests that this represents people from the four corners of the land coming to David. It should be observed that this is a relatively substantial force.

Saul himself only had 600 men with him back in chapter 13 verse 15, when he had the standoff against the Philistines at the Pass of Micmash. We might also think of the 400 men that were with Esau in Genesis chapter 32 and 33. Later, David's association with 400 men will be in a decisively Esau-like action.

And so the presence of 400 men around David here should probably make us think back to the story of Esau and Jacob. This is another way in which David has some Esau characteristics. David is described as ruddy in chapter 16 and 17, the only other character apart from Esau in scripture to be described in that way.

Such associations with Esau are not proof that David is a bad guy, but they do represent some ambivalent characteristics, some characteristics of David that can go either direction, that can be very good under certain circumstances, or might be turned to evil. David goes up then to Moab. He brings his father and mother to the king of Moab and puts them in his care.

The fact that David is dealing with other kings at this point of the region is once again a sign that he is assuming something of a royal status. He was described as the king of the land by the Philistines in the previous chapter, and now he's dealing with the king of Moab. We should recall that Jesse's grandmother was a Moabite, so perhaps there is some enduring connection between David's family and the Moabites, a connection established through Ruth.

David is instructed by the prophet Gad to go to Judah. David has a prophet of the Lord in his party, as Peter Lighthouse observes. This is David again starting to act like a king, with a prophet as a royal advisor.

Judah becomes David's base. Judah is David's tribal region, where he would have the greatest base of loyalty. At times like this, the fault lines in Israel start to present themselves.

We've seen some of these before, the northern tribes led by the house of Joseph, and the southern tribes led by the houses of Benjamin and later Judah, the Transjordanian tribes, and the tribes in the land. If the Israelite project is to fail, one has a pretty good sense of the fracture lines upon which it would fall apart. Saul is now described sitting under the Tamarisk tree.

Trees are often associated with rule, and he has his spear in his hand. Such a recurring detail of characterization is not incidental or unimportant. Saul's relationship to his spear associates him with Goliath, but it also illustrates his paranoid relationship with power.

He grips tightly onto his spear and can't let it go. Saul is surrounded by his servants, and he speaks to them as people of Benjamin. Saul's court clearly isn't a place of equal opportunity for Israelites.

Rather, it is filled with his relatives and fellow Benjaminites. This is fairly typical of monarchies and governments in very tribal societies. The king is seldom merely an individual impartially ruling the whole people, but he represents a royal house and a tribe that is particularly enriched by his reign.

His family, friends, relatives, and tribespeople will receive cushy sinecures and be privileged in many ways. Saul appeals to this base self-interest of those surrounding him, making clear that they have been greatly advantaged by his favoritism and nepotism, but they wouldn't enjoy such privileges under a Davidic monarchy. Saul's question to his followers, Will he make you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? should recall one of Samuel's warnings concerning the king in chapter 8, verses 14-15.

He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. Once again, 1 Samuel is revealing dynamics of the operations of power that we should all recognize how government can so often rest upon cynical self-interest over the concerns of justice.

One can also well imagine how such a dynamic among rulers would excite grievances in the wider population who saw their property heavily taxed or taken in order to enrich Benjaminites. Saul is paranoid and he's self-pitying. He thinks that everyone is conspiring against him, everyone is out to get him.

Rather than exercising charisma and natural authority, he sullenly berates those around him, wondering aloud why no one feels sorry for him. His lack of a healthy form of authority means that he has to appeal to his servants' lower self-serving instincts. It also relates to his mistrustful and paranoid tendencies, which means that he depends very heavily upon people of his own tribe, whose self-serving interests most naturally align with his own.

We should also notice the ways that Saul has increasingly become fixated on the kingdom as his personal power. His speech to the Benjaminites reveals just how narrowly self-focused Saul has become. Leaders may be subject to all sorts of unreasonable treatment, but leaders who are so self-focused, self-pitying, and take everything personally are very dangerous.

Saul has lost sight of the bigger picture. He now sees the nation as there to serve him, rather than of himself as a minister of God to the nation. We should again remember the significance of the shifting pronouns in Samuel's warning about the king.

The people want a king to fight their battles, but they fail to appreciate that they would end up fighting his personal battles. Being the servants of the bloated ego of the king. The servants of Saul seem to have failed him.

They've not informed him about the situation. However, there is one who assists him. Doeg, the Edomite.

The fact that Saul is assisted by an Edomite perhaps highlights the fact that Saul is taking on the character of the original Edom, Esau, who sought to kill his brother Jacob. As we read on in the story, David's Jacob character will become quite pronounced. However, David is also, as we have already seen in this chapter, someone with subtle associations with Esau.

Ahimelech, when challenged about the assistance that he gave to David, rightly defended David as a faithful and loyal servant of the king. Ahimelech speaks of David in a way that brings to light some of the irrationality of Saul's hatred of him. David is not someone who has sought to rebel against Saul.

He is Saul's own son-in-law and loyal servant. He is honoured among Saul's servants for his exceptional service. Saul himself has raised him up to high office.

It is Saul's fear, paranoia, envy and anger that has made David appear to be his enemy. Yet even now, David is still not returning the animosity. Ahimelech has been given a misleading story by David so that he might have plausible deniability.

Ahimelech could justifiably have protested that he believed that David was on a mission from Saul, as David had told him. However, this did not protect him. Saul commands his servants to strike down the priests.

And once again, the servants of Saul don't fulfil his command, don't come to his side. Yet, once again, Doeg the Edomite does. Doeg, presumably with his band of men, not unlikely a group of Edomites themselves, killed the priests.

And not just the priests, but all of their families and animals. As James Jordan remarks, he is enacting the ban upon the priests. The utter judgement that applied to the Canaanites.

Saul, who was judged for his failure to perform the ban upon the Amalekites, now performs the ban upon the servants of the Lord. This is a sort of exact inversion of the holy warfare of the conquest. And the fact that Saul enacts this on the basis of mere suspicion of disloyalty to himself, reveals the idolatrous character that his kingdom has assumed.

He is claiming the people for himself, rather than acting as their guardian for the sake of the Lord. As Jordan observes again, on a number of occasions the Edomites or the Amalekites are the ones who prey upon the Israelites when they are at their weakest. The Edomites are the scavengers that accompany the Babylonians when they destroy Jerusalem.

They are condemned for this in Psalm 137 and in the prophecy of Obadiah. The Idumeans, another name for the Edomites, do a similar thing when the Romans destroy Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. They massacre the priests when the Zealots let them into the city.

Saul failed to judge the Amalekites, descendants of Edom, and now the Edomites slaughters the servants of the Lord. Saul is not just fighting against David here, but he has taken up arms against the Lord himself. In Doeg, he has also chosen the sort of servant that he wants around him.

Saul has lost the ability to rule by godly authority. His servants no longer obey his commands on the basis of their natural justice, or on the basis of his appropriate command. Rather, he needs to initiate a reign of terror, enacting the ban upon his enemies because he can't reign by other means.

He is a man of fear and can only rule by fear. When Abiathar flees to David, David recognizes that he inadvertently brought death upon Abiathar's household. This massacre of the priests, we should consider, is a fulfillment in part of the judgment upon Eli and his household in chapter 2, verses 30-33.

Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares, I promise that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever. But now the Lord declares, Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out, to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of man. Abiathar himself will be cut off from the altar in chapter 2 of 1 Kings.

However, although this is a fulfillment of God's judgment upon Eli, Saul has also driven the priesthood into the hands of David. It is David in this chapter who is consulting a prophet, who is accompanied by a priest, who is a magnet for followers, who is dealing with the surrounding kings. Saul is hemorrhaging support.

He is unable to command the obedience of his servants. He is driven to a reign of terror, and he cuts himself off from priest and prophet, initiating a holy war against the Lord. In 2 Samuel chapter 21, we discover that Saul has struck down the Gibeonites.

As the Gibeonites were servants of the house of God, chopping wood and carrying water, Lighthart suggests that it is likely that that happened at this point too. A question to consider. The main characters in this chapter, David, Saul, and Doeg, all have subtle or

not so subtle associations with Esau.

How might these associations highlight features of the contradictory character of Esau, and help us to think more deeply about the comparisons and contrasts between the characters in Esau, and between each of them and the others? In 1 Samuel chapter 23, we see David playing the part of a judge, similar to the judges in the book of Judges, in a number of respects. He begins by delivering the city of Keala. Keala is a city in Judah, in David's own tribal region.

The Philistines are fighting against it and robbing the threshing floors. We saw a similar situation in the book of Judges in the story of Gideon, where he had to thresh in secret in order to avoid the Midianites. David inquires of the Lord whether he should go down or not, and the Lord instructs him to go down to attack the Philistines and to save Keala.

David here is taking on something of the mantle of the king. Saul's not coming to the aid of the city, and so he's going to do the job. He's going to act on behalf of his own region.

In delivering the city, and in seeking the counsel of the Lord from the prophet, David is very much behaving as the king would behave, in ways that show up the absence of Saul. Abiathar had brought an ephod to David. The ephod that we have described in the book of Exodus is a garment with a pouch, which contains the Urim and Thummim.

There's a parallel between this garment and the Ark of the Covenant, and it's used for inquiring of the Lord. Why is it in Abiathar's hand? That isn't entirely clear. Gideon, we may remember, after he's asked to become a king, refuses, but also constructs an ephod for himself, and causes Israel to sin with it.

Perhaps there were different forms that the ephod could take. The ephod was related to the Ark of the Covenant in certain ways, and taking the ephod into battle, and seeking counsel with it, was perhaps akin to taking the Ark of the Covenant into battle, or at least seeking the advice of the Lord within it. The Ark of the Covenant contained the two tablets of stone.

The ephod contained the two stones of the Urim and the Thummim. It seems that the Urim and Thummim gave yes and no answers, and sometimes maybe answers. There has been much speculation about what was exactly involved here.

Maybe there were two stones that were rolled, and they had one colour on one side, another colour on another, and if they both came up with one colour, it was a yes answer, while if they both came up with another colour, it was a no answer, and if they both came up with different colours, it was a refusal of God to give counsel on that matter. What exactly it was, we can only speculate. However, the important thing to notice here is that this story depends a lot upon different sources.

Saul has his sources, but David is directly informed by the Lord, as he seeks the Lord's

counsel. Saul never seems to do that. Saul relies upon traitors as his informants, perhaps people who are acting out of fear, whereas David is guided by the Lord.

Saul discovers that David has come to Keilah, and believes that he can trap him there. This might remind us of the story of Samson in the city of Gaza. Lightheart remarks upon the repeated use of the word hand in these chapters.

The hand stands for power. David has things given into his hand, but things slip out of Saul's hand. Saul grips the spear in his hand, while David has the lyre in his hand, and later has his hand filled with bread and with Goliath's sword.

Similar to the Judahites, who tried to bind Samson in chapter 15 of the book of Judges, the men of Keilah, given the chance, would have bound the man who had saved them, their own tribesman David, and would have delivered him into the hands of his enemy, a man who wanted to kill him. David had defended Keilah from the Philistines, but now Saul is going to attack Keilah on account of David. The willingness of the Judahites to give up David, as they were willing to give up Samson, should be noted.

Saul had 600 men back in Gibeah in chapter 13, and now David appears as a new Saul, as he has 600 people with him. This should probably be connected to the end of Judges again, when there are only 600 left of Benjamin. We might also think of Gideon's 300.

At this point, Jonathan comes out to meet David. Jonathan is able to find David, unlike his father, and Jonathan makes a covenant with David, declaring that he will inherit the throne, and that Jonathan will be second to him. Jonathan willingly gives up his birthright to David, and we should think here again of the story of Esau and Jacob.

There have been numerous themes of the story of Esau and Jacob in the background of these stories to this point, and there will be many more to come. And in Jonathan, we should recognise a positive version of Esau, someone who willingly surrenders his birthright to the son who should have it, standing in the very sharpest of contrasts with his father. The Ziphites now proactively try to betray David.

Once again, David's own countrymen turn against him and seek to hand him over to his enemy. And this is a much closer call. The Lord ultimately saves David only by bringing in an attack of the Philistines, so that Saul has to call off his pursuit just as he is about to capture David.

A question to consider. What are some of the parallels that we have seen between David and specific judges to this point in the narrative? In 1 Samuel chapter 24, David is on the run from Saul, and he has the first of three occasions when he has the opportunity to get revenge, but resists. On this, the first of three occasions, David is in a cave with his men, and Saul goes into the cave to relieve himself, or literally to cover up his feet.

In the darkness of the cave, David has the opportunity to assassinate Saul, and he

resists it. This again might recall the story from the judges. Ehud, a Benjaminite judge, assassinates Eglon, the king of the Moabites, while Eglon's servants believe that he is covering his feet.

The expression covering feet is also found in the story of Ruth, although the other way round. Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet. In that story, she lifts up the wing of his garment to uncover his feet, and then she requests that Boaz take her under the wing of his garment.

David here has the opportunity to strike out at Saul, to play the role of the assassin like Ehud, and he resists. However, he does cut off the wing of his robe. The wing of the garment is seen in Numbers chapter 15, verses 37-41.

The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel and tell them to make tassels on the corners, or the wings, of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to where after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am the Lord your God. The wings then are a sign of holiness, and wings are also a sign of authority.

I've already mentioned the story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth coming under the wing of Boaz is Ruth coming under Boaz's care. Cutting off the corner of the garment would be a symbolic attack upon Saul's authority, much as in chapter 15 the garment of Samuel represented the kingdom that would be torn from Saul, so here the garment that Saul is wearing represents his authority.

Garments are symbolic. For instance, the garments of the high priest are symbolically associated with the tabernacle. The tabernacle is a clothed building, and the high priest's garments are like a wearable tent.

David's cutting off of the corner of the garment then is a symbolic assault upon Saul. David immediately repents of this, however, and he restrains his men from attacking Saul. He speaks directly to Saul outside of the cave.

The corner of the robe is proof that he could have killed him, but didn't do so. David here seeks movement towards reconciliation. He wants the hostilities between Saul and him to end.

He addresses Saul as a subordinate. He bows to Saul, and he also speaks to Saul more intimately, as his father. David's speech to Saul suggests at points that Saul is only pursuing him on false counsel, rather than because of Saul's own violence.

This provides a way for Saul perhaps to save face, and at the very least is an extremely charitable construction placed upon things by David. Charitable, and probably to David's own knowledge, quite inaccurate. David insists that he is not worth pursuing, and he has no desire to kill Saul.

He's a loyal subject. He's a servant of Saul, and a family member. He's not an enemy.

One of the most important features of this passage is the way that it shows that David does not take judgment into his own hands. He does appeal, however, to God to judge between him and his pursuer Saul. We can learn a lot from reading some of David's Psalms alongside the story of 1 Samuel.

David will not seek vengeance himself by his own hand, but he does seek the Lord to act on his behalf. For instance, Psalm 54 was written around this time. O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might.

O God, hear my prayer, give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me, ruthless men seek my life, they do not set God before themselves. Behold, God is my helper, the Lord is the upholder of my life.

He will return the evil to my enemies. In your faithfulness put an end to them. With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you.

I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies. David here prays for God in his faithfulness to put an end to his enemies.

However, he is not going to take vengeance into his own hands. He entrusts the Lord with judgment against his enemy. Our ability to forgive and not seek vengeance has a lot to do with our trust in God to judge righteously on our behalf.

When we put things in God's hands, we don't have to take them up in our own hands. Saul recognises that David has been righteous to him, and merciful as well, not taking action when he could have done. In 1 Samuel chapter 24 I also think we see many of the themes of the story of Esau and Jacob, perhaps especially themes from Genesis chapter 27 and the deception of Isaac.

Saul is a wicked father figure, and David, in the darkness of the cave, approaches him. Saul is blind in the darkness. David cuts off a corner of Saul's robe, something that, as we have seen, represents the kingdom.

However, immediately afterwards David is troubled by his conscience, recognising that despite Saul's wickedness he has acted wrongfully. In the conversation that follows, where David's righteous restraint in seeking to take the inheritance for himself is revealed, Saul's words, Is this your voice, David my son? recall the interaction between

Jacob and his blind father Isaac. Genesis chapter 27 verse 22 So Jacob went near to Isaac his father who felt him and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Saul's weeping as he realises his sin, and the devastating realisation that he has lost the blessing of God and the birthright of the kingdom, recalls Esau's response in that chapter. Esau said to his father, Have you but one blessing, my father. Bless me, even me also, O my father.

And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. In verse 38 The chapter ends with Saul declaring that David is more righteous than he is, that the kingdom will be established in his hands, and blessing David. In different ways Saul is playing both the role of Isaac, the one who ends up blessing the son, and the role of Esau, the one who loses the blessing and the birthright.

David, as Jacob, has the opportunity to seize the blessing for himself, to kill the king, and to snatch the kingdom. However, by refraining from doing so, he ends up receiving it nonetheless, and he also ends up receiving a blessing from Saul, quite unexpectedly. God will vindicate David for his righteousness in the matter, and he will judge Saul.

There may also be an echo of the story of David's own ancestors, Judah and Tamar, here. Saul admits that David was more righteous than he. We might see a sort of reversal of Judah's self-condemnation, when he declares that Tamar was more righteous than he.

Saul now explicitly acknowledges that David is going to become the king. He requests that David not cut off his offspring, as David had cut off the corner of his garment. As the Lord preserves David from taking vengeance, in this and the following chapters, we see that the Lord will bring about justice in situations nonetheless.

Like David, rather than taking matters into our own hand, we should seek the Lord's face, call for him to act in our situations, and give up our attempts to set things right ourselves. A question to consider. What are some of the lessons that the story of David and Saul can teach us about the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice? 1 Samuel chapter 25 opens with the death of Samuel.

The father figure has now died, but the rivalry of the two sons has not ended. It's very easy to read this chapter as if it were merely the latest standalone episode in the continuing adventures of David, not considering how it ties in with the larger picture. The first thing to notice on that front is that this is the middle of three stories in succession of David drawing back from vengeance.

Two times with Saul, and this time with Nabal, David comes the closest to executing vengeance for himself in this chapter. He is on his way to destroy Nabal and his men, when the wise Abigail intercepts him. Why of all the events that occurred during David's

time in the wilderness has this one been recorded for us? Perhaps it's because there is an association between Nabal and Saul.

The characterization of Nabal is important. He is described as exceptionally rich. He feasts like a king in verse 36.

He has three thousand sheep. Saul in the preceding and the following chapter comes with three thousand chosen men. In verse 36 he feasts like a king.

However, he's characterized as a fool. His name means fool, and he is also described as such by his servants and his wife. David acts faithfully on behalf of Nabal, as he did for Saul, but is thanklessly mistreated by him.

Both men return evil for David's good. There are further things we should notice as we look more closely at this passage. David cares for Nabal's flocks, much as Jacob cared for Laban's flocks.

Much like Laban, however, Nabal is an ungracious man. He treats David unjustly, even though he has helped him to build up his house. The association between Laban and Nabal can also be seen in their names.

Nabal, in Hebrew as in English, is Laban backwards. The events occur at the time of sheep shearing, and Nabal speaks of servants who break away from their masters. Jacob's flight from Laban was at the time of sheep shearing.

In David and Nabal we see a pairing that reminds us of Jacob and Laban. However, we've also seen another character in the story who reminds us of Laban, and that is Saul. Saul is like Laban in the way that he tricks his son-in-law concerning his daughters.

Saul, like Laban, is deceived by his daughter with terrorphine. Saul takes on the characteristics of Laban, the wicked father-in-law. All of this invites us to read the story of David and Nabal as a commentary on the story of David and Saul, and a commentary on that story in terms of the parallels between David and Jacob, and Saul and Laban.

But there is a twist in this particular story. If we remember the story of Jacob fleeing from Laban, after he finally settles matters with Laban and moves on, he faces another threat coming towards him, Esau with his 400 men. Esau is there seeking vengeance.

He has lost the birthright and the blessing to his brother Jacob, and now it seems that he is finally going to get his own back. However, Jacob sends on a wave of gifts ahead of him to Esau to pacify him. Returning to 1 Samuel chapter 25, in the light of this background, we notice something surprising.

David, who seemed like Jacob at the beginning of the story, Jacob who was thanklessly treated by the Laban character, Jacob who broke away from his master at the time of

sheep-shearing, David, as Jacob, now turns into David as Esau. David, like Esau, comes with 400 men to get vengeance for himself. In reading the story of David in the books of Samuel, we need to notice this background in the story of Genesis, the story of Jacob, Esau and Laban, and the way that the characters play off each other.

There is no simple this equals that association between the characters of Genesis and the characters of Samuel. Rather, we see the characters in the book of Samuel taking on features and traits of various characters from the story of Genesis. So at certain points, Saul is like Isaac.

He's the father who will not give the blessing to the right son. He's the father figure in the darkness. He's also like Laban, as we have seen.

Saul is perhaps most powerfully associated with the character of Esau. Esau, he's the one who despises the blessing and the birthright. He's the one who tries to kill his brother.

In certain episodes, we also see more specific associations, such as his lifting up his voice and weeping, as Esau did when he lost the blessing. Jonathan, for his part, is also like Esau, but Esau who reconciled with his brother and made peace with him. David throughout is most typically Jacob, but yet at other points we see him take on the characteristics of Esau, both positive and negative.

Like Esau, he is described as ruddy. He's a man of the field, a man who's gifted in battle, a man who's integrated many of the traits and gifts of Esau, the brother of Jacob, bringing together those two characters in a positive way. However, there is an ambivalence to that character, the character of Esau, and here in this chapter we see some of that.

The vengeance of Esau is expressed in David's attempt to execute vengeance for himself against Nabal. And what happens? There's an interception, and the interception is provided by Abigail. Abigail is this wise woman, her wisdom contrasting with the folly of her husband, whose name means foolish.

In this story, she plays the part of Jacob. She is the one who sends the waves of gifts ahead and restores David to his Jacobness. There are other things going on in this story.

It's an artfully told narrative. There are several occasions in the story of Jacob and of Judah, his son, and his ancestors that involve the time of sheep shearing and that involve some dimension of the verb *paratz*. The first occurs in Genesis chapter 30, where Jacob's property increases greatly during his time with Laban.

Jacob then leaves Laban at the time of sheep shearing. A few chapters later, the story of Judah and Tamar involves sheep shearing again. It's at the time of sheep shearing that Judah has his relations with Tamar.

And then later on in the story, the verb *paratz* occurs in the context of the breaking through of Perez, who receives his name on account of that verb. Beyond the story in 1 Samuel 25, the story of 2 Samuel chapter 13, with Absalom and Tamar, involves Absalom pressing David to attend a festival at the time of sheep shearing, once again using the verb *paratz*. This particular set of associations is something pointed out by Jeffrey Gagin.

It suggests that in this story, associated with the other stories, we're seeing something of the destiny of Jacob and Judah, his son, playing itself out. The characterisation of Nabal is important in other ways. He is a fool.

He's also described in a way that associates him with dogs. He is a Calebite. Caleb means dog.

David talks about killing all of those who piss against the wall, like a dog does. It's translated in most translations as male, but the euphemism is not accidentally or arbitrarily chosen. As Peter Lightheart has noted in an article, Nabal and his wine, Abigail relays the news to Nabal as the wine is going out of him, suggesting that he is in the process of urinating.

In the preceding chapter, David cut off a corner of Saul's robe while he was covering his feet, another euphemism for defecating. We should be alert to such parallels. In seeking to destroy the foolish Nabal, the man like Laban, the man like Saul, David becomes at risk of losing himself, of giving in to some dark shadow side of his personality, the Esau side that would reduce him to a vengeful warlord.

From Genesis 35-6 onwards, subtle associations between Benjamin and Esau have been explored at many points, and we see these come to their head in the character of Saul, who takes, as we have noticed, Esau-like characteristics on many occasions. David, however, is not immune to these things. He could also become like his enemy.

In opposing Saul, Esau, he could become like both Esau and Saul. This is, of course, one of the great dangers of vengeance. In vengeance, we can easily become the twin of the person we are seeking vengeance against.

We mirror them. We become like them. Just as David almost becomes a Saul or Esau-like character here, it requires a Jacob-like character, Abigail, the wise woman, to bring David back to his Jacob-ness, back to his senses, back to his true destiny and calling and identity.

And had it not been for Abigail, David would have had blood guilt upon his hands. His attempt to seek vengeance against Nabal is, in the context, associated with the temptation to take vengeance upon Saul, and in the process to become like Saul himself. Had David obtained his throne through violence and vengeance against his predecessor

Saul, his kingdom would have been compromised at the very foundation.

Abigail's actions here, in drawing David back from the brink, need then to be read in terms of the larger story, in terms of what is happening between David and Saul. David must not try to work salvation for himself. The Lord will do so for him.

And in the destruction of the fearful fool Nabal, we have a foreshadowing of what will happen with Saul. And the symbolism could be extended. After the death of Nabal, the wife of Nabal becomes the wife of David.

When Saul, the bridegroom of Israel, dies, it will be David who becomes the husband of the nation. Of course, there is another level on which we should read this story. We should observe that David is falling into the trap of polygamy, something that will cause him and his son great trouble in the future.

A question to consider. Reflecting upon the counsel of Abigail to David, how would the character of David's kingdom have changed had he taken vengeance upon Nabal and Saul? 1 Samuel chapter 26 very closely parallels the content of chapter 24. There is a feeling of *déjà vu*.

Indeed, the first verse almost repeats word for word what was given to us back in chapter 23 verse 19. The Ziphites go to Gibeah and inform Saul about David's being in pretty much exactly the same location. The parallels with chapter 24 are quite striking.

First, Saul is informed about David's location. Then he takes 3,000 chosen men. David has the opportunity to kill Saul.

Saul is in a state of blindness, the blindness of darkness in the first occasion in the cave, and then the blindness of sleep on this occasion. David's men encourage him to take Saul's life, and he resists. Unbeknownst to Saul, David takes something of Saul's that symbolises his royal authority.

From a distance, David declares that he has saved Saul, not taking his life into his hands, and gives proof. Saul uses the expression, Is that your voice, David my son? David compares Saul's pursuit of him to pursuing a flea. Saul confesses his sin and declares that David will be blessed, and then they both go their own way.

Things are playing out almost exactly the same way as they did previously. However, when stories largely repeat in scripture, they never exactly repeat. We need to be alert to the differences that we can observe.

David now goes out to Saul's camp, rather than Saul unwittingly coming into his camp in the cave. Perhaps the greatest difference here involves the role played by Abner, the son of Ner. This time Saul is not alone.

He is surrounded by Abner and his army. He is not just covering his feet in the cave. Abner is, in many respects, David's replacement.

He is Saul's right hand man, the commander of his army. That's the position that David should have occupied. And so David's challenge to Abner is a challenge to someone who is some sort of counterpart.

All of the people are asleep, and David and Abishai go over to the camp. This might remind us of Gideon and his servant going to the camp of the Midianites at night, or Jonathan and his armor-bearer going over to the camp of the Philistines. We are here introduced to Abishai as well, one of the famous sons of Zeruah.

He is a brother of Asahel, and even more famously, of Joab. James Jordan has remarked upon the way that the camp of Saul is described, and he suggests that there might be an allusion to the Garden of Eden. The spear stuck in the ground at the head of Saul is like a tree.

As we've seen, it is the stick that represents Saul, like Aaron or Moses' rods represented them. There's also a jar of water connected with the spring or the well that you would find in the garden. Saul is with the tree in the very centre of the garden.

Abishai wants to pin Saul to the ground, as Saul had tried to pin David to the wall, but David prevents him. David recognises the appropriateness of judgement against Saul, but it isn't something to take into his own hand. It's to be left to God.

God will judge in Saul's case. The Garden of Eden themes are important here. Saul is like the forbidden fruit, and the temptation to David is to stretch forth his hand and to take the office of Saul.

Parallels to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil might be worth exploring here. The tree was a tree associated with judgement and rule. The promise was that you would be like gods, knowing good and evil, having authority within the world, the authority of judgement, being like one of the powers in the divine council.

However, that is forbidden fruit. It belongs to God to give in the appropriate time. This wouldn't be the first time that we've seen themes of Adam in this story, and it won't be the last.

Saul was a sort of Adam when he fought against Nahash, the serpent. David was a sort of Adam when he fought against Goliath, another serpent figure. Saul is like Esau, but also like Adam.

He rebels against his heavenly father, and he takes the forbidden fruit. David, however, is faithful where Adam and Saul were not. The reference to deep sleep here might also recall the story of Eden.

There are only three occasions in the narrative parts of scripture where deep sleep is mentioned. It's mentioned in the story of Abraham, as he's placed in a deep sleep, and the Lord appears to him in a vision. And then it's mentioned, of course, back in chapter 2 of Genesis, where the woman is created from the side of the man.

When David reveals his identity to Saul and his men, he speaks particularly to Abner. Abner is judged for his failure to guard his master. The judgement is given concerning him, you deserve to die.

This is similar to the judgement upon Adam. Adam failed to guard the garden. Abner failed to guard his master.

Of course, who should be guarding Saul? David! We learnt back in chapter 22 that Saul had set David as the captain over his bodyguard. And now, without David, his life was put in danger. While, as we have noticed, there are a lot of similarities between this story and that of chapter 24, David's address to Abner suggests that the focus has slightly shifted.

Saul, once again, acknowledges his fault. However, as we've seen from Saul, there is lots of remorse for what he has done, and certainly for the consequences, but very little repentance and true change of life. David has shown his power to take the spear, but he returns it to Saul.

And Saul invites David to return, to become his servant once again, but David does not do so. David has learnt by now that Saul is fickle. He will seem to repent, but it won't stick.

Once again here, there are also elements that might remind us of the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. Saul, once again, is like Isaac. He asks whether the voice is the voice of David.

He is deceived in his blindness, in the darkness and then in sleep, and something is taken from him, and then he ends by giving a blessing. A question to consider, what might we learn from looking at the three stories of David's resistance of temptation that occur in succession from chapter 24 to 26? What are some key common themes? What are some contrasts between them? And what is their overall effect? In 1 Samuel chapter 27, David, despairing of the situation with Saul, goes into exile in Philistia. David will have to wait in Philistia until Saul has been removed from the throne.

This descent into Philistia is similar to the descent into Egypt, and a connection between the Philistines and Egypt is found way back in chapter 10 of Genesis. In chapters 5 and 6 of this book, the Philistines brought the Ark into Philistia and suffered many plagues as a result, before they returned the Ark to the land with many gifts. The parallels with the story of the Exodus were not hard to see there.

Here, once again, we have a story with many elements of the Exodus narrative pattern.

As David goes to Philistia, he is given a part of the land of Philistia to live in, Ziklag, just as Israel was given Goshen in the time of Joseph. There is later an attack upon the bride, just as there is a threat to Sarah in chapters 12 and 20 of Genesis, and then Rebekah in chapter 26.

As in other stories of Exodus, deception is an important and prominent theme. David deceives Achish, the king of Gath. Achish is led to believe that David is attacking his own land, and utterly cutting himself off from his people as a result.

However, throughout, David is deceiving Achish, just as he deceived him earlier, when he pretended to be mad before him. The Philistines will end up sending David away from their land, and as he leaves, he has to fight against the Amalekites. This is yet another detail that reminds us of the original Exodus narrative, as Israel has to fight the Amalekites in chapter 17 of Exodus.

What might the significance of an Exodus pattern be here? Perhaps we should see David as playing out the destiny and the identity of the people in himself. Another possibility is that David is being set up as a comparison to a character like Moses. David begins this chapter by giving up trying to find peace in the land while Saul is there.

As long as he remains in the land, Saul will try and kill him, and so he decides he must leave the land with his men, and he leads 600 men with him to Achish, king of Gath. 600 men was a very sizable fighting force. Saul was accompanied by 600 men at various points in the preceding chapters, as it isn't just the 600 men who go with David, but their families, their wives and their children.

It would not be surprising if he had over a few thousand with him. This would be quite a significant group of people leaving the land. Achish presumes that David is a rebel warlord, at war with his master king Saul, and he gives him the land of Ziklag.

This freed David from being directly under Achish's gaze. In 2 Samuel 15, verse 18, we discover that 600 Gittites follow David from Gath. During this time then, it seems that David was significantly increasing his forces, gathering a large number of Gentiles around him, in addition to the Israelites who were following him at this point.

While among the Philistines, David took his opportunity to attack various groups of peoples within the territory that had been allotted to Israel, but which had not yet been conquered by it. However, concerned that word might not get out to Achish, the king of Gath, David made sure that there was no one left to tell tales against him. While he's attacking the Negev of various parts, he is secretly fighting for Israel.

The theme of deception that has been prominent throughout the book of 1 Samuel continues to be a very important element of this chapter. David's cunning resourcefulness allows him to live in perhaps one of the most dangerous places of all.

He's living in the city of the great Philistine champion that he once killed himself, Goliath of Gath.

A question to consider, what are some of the similarities that we can see with this story and David's situation in the land of the Philistines, and the stories of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah, in chapters 12, 20 and 26 of the book of Genesis? In 1 Samuel chapter 28, the Philistines are on the offensive again. They're going to cut Israel in half through the Jezreel Valley, through the territory of Issachar. If they were successful in cutting the nation in two, they would be able to dominate and defeat Israel much easier.

We should note the presence of fear throughout the passage. Saul, even though he is the king, has become characterized by fear since his earlier rebellion. He fears Goliath.

He fears David. He is afraid of the Philistines. And then he is afraid of his own death.

As Peter Lighthouse observes, in this chapter there is a movement in Saul, from being afraid, to very afraid, to terrified. Saul's fear is a very important trait to understand what drives him. And most especially as we see that trait in contrast to the courageous faith of Jonathan and David.

It is Saul's fear that drives much of his violence. Faced with the threat of the Philistines, Saul looks for guidance. However, Samuel has died, and the Lord isn't answering him in any way.

The Lord isn't answering Saul by dreams, he's not answering him by prophets, and he's not answering him by Urim and Thummim. These are the three main forms of counsel from the Lord. Dreams are especially associated with the king, prophecies with the prophet, and the Urim and Thummim are associated with the priest and the ephod.

The story of Samuel's life began in a period of lack of revelation, and with a man lacking in spiritual perception, Eli. And it ends that way too. 1 Samuel 3, verses 1-3 tells of a threefold darkness, the lack of the light of the word of the Lord, the dimness of the high priest's eyes, and, by implication, his spiritual perception, and the lamp of the Lord that was about to go out.

Something of this theme resurfaces in verse 6 of this chapter. Saul's robes are an important part of the story too. Saul's robes, along with his spear, are weapons or garments that symbolise his status and his office.

Saul, having given up seeking guidance from the Lord, turns to a medium, and he takes off his robes to disguise himself. Earlier, in chapter 19, there was another story of Saul taking off his robes, as he lay naked before the Lord, and prophesying. Both of these events foreshadow Saul's loss of his kingly authority, his divestiture.

The fact that everything happens at night is also significant. The night is a time of doom

and foreboding, a time when judgement falls and fates are sealed. In various other parts of scripture we see darkness and night, and the coming of light used as significant pointers to the character of particular periods.

The sun goes down upon Jacob at Bethel, and doesn't truly rise on him again until he limps away from the encounter with the angel at the Jabbok. Similar patterns occur at the Exodus. The sun rises as Israel finds itself on the other side of the Red Sea, and the waters come down upon the Egyptians.

The woman as a medium was supposed to be expelled from the land. She was under the ban, and this should help to clue us in on some important themes that are being introduced. Saul comes to the woman with two men in disguise.

The woman declares the rapport of what Saul had done in cutting off the mediums and the spiritists from the land, much as Rahab declared the news of the victories of Israel, and the fear that they occasioned to the two spies who came to her in disguise. Like the spies who came to Rahab, Saul declares that no harm will come to the woman. However, the Joshua story is inverted.

The disguised visitors side with the person under the ban, rather than the person under the ban siding with the faithful people of God. Saul has been associated with the King of Jericho already in the narrative, as his daughter Michal delivers David from his hands in much the same way as Rahab delivered the spies from the King of Jericho. However, now he seals his union with the doomed Canaanites in the eating of the medium's meal.

Just as the Rahab story has various Passover themes, so the story of the woman of Endor brings such themes to the fore. There is a meal of unleavened bread at night, which will be followed by the death of the firstborn of Israel, Saul, the king. This is a table of demons, and there is ominous foreshadowing of Saul's death, not merely in Samuel's announcement.

It is also important to notice that David's story is being purposefully juxtaposed with that of Saul. Saul suffers a great defeat and will die, whereas David, after initially suffering a great loss, wins a great victory. The dialogue between Saul and the woman replays the story of Genesis chapter 3 in the Fall in a number of ways.

In a crafty disguise, Saul challenges the divine command that he had been entrusted with as the husband of Israel. The woman repeats the command, but then Saul, like the serpent, flatly denies it. You will not surely die.

Samuel then appears to Saul, literally a god ascending out of the earth, and questions him. Why have you done this thing, Saul? You will surely die as a result, returning to the dust from which you came. You will be driven forth from the garden of the kingdom, and someone else will take your place.

The woman then has a significant interaction with Saul. Saul, who started off as an Adam figure attacking the serpent Nahash, now ends up as a serpent-like figure, aligning himself with a rebellious woman and tempting her to further sin. This is pretty much the exact opposite of what we see in the story of David and Abigail, where Abigail is the faithful woman who delivers David from sin and temptation.

The woman obeys the voice of the serpentine Saul, but now calls on him to eat of her food. He initially refuses, but finally listens to the voice of the woman and takes of the food that she gives to him. The repeated references to heeding and obeying voices in this context are charged ones.

Samuel had said to Saul in chapter 15 verses 22-23, Has 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 listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.

In Saul's Nadir, in chapter 28, we hark back to the earlier events of his life. In chapter 13, Saul's impatience for Samuel led him to disobey God's commandment. In chapter 15, he failed to destroy Amalek, but kept the fatted animals and spared Agag.

In chapter 28, Saul resorts to the sin of divination, to which his rebellion was earlier compared. The heeding and the obeying here is the woman's obeying of Saul's wicked request, and the rebellious Saul's heeding of the woman's voice, which seems to echo Adam's sin, in chapter 3 verse 17 of Genesis. The woman of Endor is a fallen Eve alongside the Adamic and Serpentine Saul.

The fact that the medium is simply the woman throughout allows for the accentuation of her archetypal significance. Saul is then finally served the fatted animal, much as the gifts sent by Jesse to Saul were David, and David's music in chapter 16 verses 19 to 23 ironically recall the signs of the kingdom given to Saul in chapter 10. Perhaps the fatted animal also recalls Saul's great sin.

A question to consider. In the subtle allusions to the story of the garden and of the fall in the stories of 1 Samuel, what might we learn about the calling of Israel's kings? The story of 1 Samuel chapter 29 occurred a few days before the story of the woman of Endor. In chapter 28, the Philistines have encamped at Shunem.

However, in chapter 29, they are still mustering at Aphek, 30 miles north of Gath, before moving on to Shunem, 40 miles further, to fight against the Israelites. Saul was told by Samuel that he would die the next day when he visited the woman of Endor, which further supports the idea that chapter 29 records events from a few days beforehand. The presence of Aphek in the narrative recalls the loss of Israel in battle there, near the beginning of 1 Samuel, when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines,

just as Samuel's first prophecy confirmed the earlier prophecy that Eli's two sons would die on the same day, so Samuel's last prophecy was much the same, concerning the death of Saul and his sons.

This was a prophecy delivered after his death. I believe that we should regard the appearance of Samuel in the preceding chapter as a genuine appearance, albeit not one summoned by the woman of Endor, who was greatly surprised by it. Near the beginning of 1 Samuel there is a battle with the Philistines, associated with Aphek, where the leader of Israel and his sons perish.

Eli dies when he hears the news of the capture of the Ark and he falls off his chair. There is another such battle at the end of the book, with Saul and his sons perishing on this occasion. The ordering of the material probably heightens the literary contrast between David and Saul at this juncture.

Peter Lightheart raises the possibility that David's defeat of the Amalekites in chapter 30 may actually have been simultaneous with Saul's defeat by the Philistines in chapter 31. Achish trusts David. David is gifted at deception.

David has to this point been playing a very dangerous game in pretending to Achish that he was fighting against Israel, when he was really fighting against other enemies. He was cunning, but he seemed to require divine intervention at this juncture if he wasn't to blow his cover. His language here is probably intentionally ambiguous.

For instance, he speaks of fighting against the enemies of my lord the king. Which lord the king? He had, we should remember, already deceived Achish and his men back in chapter 21, when he feigned madness before Achish. We might also here remember the way that the patriarchs engaged in deception to disguise the fact that their wives were really their wives, and to save their lives from godless kings, who might kill them and take their wives if they thought they were their husbands, rather than their brothers.

In Genesis chapter 12 and 20, God had to intervene to deliver Abraham and Sarah from situations that exceeded their capacity for cunning escape. Here David finds himself in a very tight spot, where the lord needs to provide him with a way of escape, lest he either find himself having to go into battle against Israel, or is distrusted and destroyed by Achish. We should also consider the possibility that Achish has some trust in the lord, and is a god-fearer.

The Philistines had experienced the power of the lord in a number of situations in the preceding chapters of this book, and perhaps some of them were open to belief in him. Achish has had close interactions with David and has been very impressed by him. Achish swears in the name of the lord in verse 6, and describes David as like an angel of God later on.

Perhaps God is also protecting David from having to fight against a God-fearing Philistine. The Philistine commanders rightly feared what would happen if David turned on them in the battle. David had already enjoyed a reputation as a heroic Israelite warrior.

The best way to rehabilitate his tarnished image would be to turn on the Philistines in the midst of the battle as a fifth column. Mercenaries could always be very dangerous to have around, their loyalties were shallow, and they could betray their masters if the tide of battle turned against them. We see an example of this back in 1 Samuel 14, verse 21.

Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time, and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. As Peter Lighthouse observes, there is an interesting contrast between Achish and Saul in their relationship to David. David is loyal to Saul throughout, yet Saul treats him as a traitor.

Whereas he betrays the Philistines, yet Achish defends him in the very strongest of terms. Saul once made David his bodyguard before trying to destroy him. Now Achish has made David his bodyguard for life in chapter 28, even while David's loyalties are not with him.

The protest of the Philistine commanders gives David a welcome reprieve from having to fight the Israelites without raising Achish's suspicions. It also saves David from a situation where he would be forced to betray Achish more directly. There are a number of occasions when David needs to be saved by the Lord, from situations beyond his control, from rash judgements or from traps.

For instance, had David actually joined the Philistines in attacking Israel here, his hope of being king of Israel in the future would have been over. On occasions like this, it is very important to consider the Psalms as part of the story. David is, during these times, constantly praying to the Lord to deliver him from his enemies, to protect him from evil, and to guard his way.

Sometimes God acts to deliver David from a sin that he is giving in to, as when he stirs up Abigail to intercept David before he attacks Nabal. Sometimes God acts to deliver David from an enemy he can't easily escape, such as when he raises up a Philistine attack, just as Saul is about to capture David. Sometimes he provides David with a way of escape from a situation where David seems cornered, as he does here.

These sorts of deliverances can seem just a bit too convenient if we don't pay enough attention to the hand of the Lord within events, and the way that David constantly seeks God's protection and deliverance. David isn't just being lucky. David is also able to put judgement into the hand of the Lord.

The Lord is raising up Achish and the Philistines against Saul. David doesn't have to fight for vengeance, and to get what he believes is due to him, as the Lord will ultimately achieve the victory for him. In the last couple of verses, there are three references to David leaving early in the morning.

Jordan suggests the possibility that there is some allusion to the Passover here. Saul has had a false Passover in the preceding chapter, with the midnight meal of unleavened bread, in association with the declaration of the death of the firstborn, the king of Israel, Saul himself, while David here experiences a deliverance that is sealed in a departure in the early morning. A question to consider.

What lessons can we learn about the relationship between prayerful dependence on the Lord, and living faithfully and wisely in the story of David? In 1 Samuel chapter 30, David and his men, having been sent back from the battle against Israel by the Philistines, who don't trust them, arrive in Ziklag to find that their wives and children have been taken. As we've already noted, in this book, there is a developing contrast between David and Saul. Saul is on the brink of a battle against the Philistines, and now David is going to fight against the Amalekites, and the two will be contrasted.

Back in chapter 15, Saul was rejected for his failure to deal with the Amalekites, and now David is attacked by them, and we will see that he does considerably better. The Amalekites taking the women and children while the men are away, is in keeping with their form of behaviour described in Deuteronomy chapter 25, in verses 17 and 19 of that chapter. You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven, you shall not forget.

In the context of Deuteronomy chapter 25, the blotting out of the memory of Amalek is contrasted with the way that the one who performs the leper at marriage seeks to avoid his brother's name being blotted out. The contrast is between those who come to the aid of the weakest, and those who seek to prey upon the weakest. The Amalekites were characterised by the latter.

Later on in the history of Israel, in the story of Esther, Haman the Agagite, another Amalekite, will seek to wipe out the entire people. Peter Lighthouse observes the contrast between David and the Amalekites. The Amalekites abandon the weak straggler, the Egyptian servant whom they leave behind, much as they had preyed upon the weak stragglers after the Exodus.

It is David's kindness to the weak straggler, the Egyptian servant that no one else would pay regard to, that enables him to discover the Amalekites' destination. It's on account of his compassion for the weak, the trait that sets David apart from the Amalekites, that will enable him to defeat them. Had he not had compassion upon this Egyptian servant, it's quite possible he never would have discovered the Amalekites, and overtaken them and recovered the captives.

As we've already seen in the reference from Deuteronomy chapter 25, the paradigmatic encounter with the Amalekites occurred after the Exodus, in chapter 17 of the Book of Exodus. After an Exodus event, the Amalekites seek to attack. This should probably be related to the larger Exodus themes that are playing out here.

David's Exodus from the land of the Philistines and return to the land of Israel as king, and the contrasting anti-Exodus of Saul, who is going to go down to the grave. In the story of the Exodus, and also some of the prefiguring narratives, there is an assault upon the woman. We can think of the attack upon the newborn babies, and the emphasis upon the women who are delivering the children, in chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Exodus.

We might also think of Sarah, who's taken by pagan kings, and Rebecca, who almost is. The serpent attacks the bride, and the true Adam has to deliver the bride from the dragon. David here is playing that part.

There is a new Exodus pattern playing out, and David's metal will be shown. Lighthouse notes the repeated emphasis upon three-day periods in the story at this point. They arrive in Ziklag on the third day, in verse 1. The Egyptian revived after three days and three nights without food and drink, in verse 12.

News of Saul's death arrives on the third day after he returned to Ziklag, in 2 Samuel 1, verse 2. The third day is a day of transition. This isn't a motif exclusive to 1 Samuel, but is something that we find on several occasions in the Old Testament. The third day is a day of revived and reversed fortunes, and this third day is associated with a greater reversal.

David's great opponent, Saul, will be defeated, making it possible for David to be raised up to rule in his place. In the fight against the Amalekites, David's prominence is emphasised. It's as if David were the only man fighting, and David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except 400 young men who mounted camels and fled.

David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all.

David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him and said, This is David's spoil. Then David came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the Brook Besor. And they went out to meet David, and to meet the people who were with him.

And when David came near to the people, he greeted them. David wins a great victory with a relatively small force. He has only 400 men with him, but the Amalekites are

described as spread abroad over all the land.

Only 400 men of the Amalekites escape, accentuating the contrast between David's number of men and the number of the Amalekites. David's entire force is the same size as the small remnant of the Amalekite band. Here we might think about the parallels between David and Gideon.

There's a focus at the end of the chapter upon the gifts that David gives. He shares the spoil with the men left behind, reminding us perhaps of the principles for sharing spoil in Numbers chapter 31, verses 25-31. He gives gifts to the elders of Judah.

This generosity will provide a basis for his rule. David is a generous man and increasingly behaving like a king, who wins loyalty through such gifts. As Peter Lighthouse observes, rather than being the king who takes, as described in chapter 8, David is a king who gives.

A question to consider. Why do you think that the text gives such attention to David's making the principle for sharing the spoil a statute and a rule for Israel? In 1 Samuel chapter 31, the final chapter of the book, Saul dies with three of his sons. Saul started off like Gideon in his early faith, but he died like Abimelech, Gideon's wicked son.

In Judges chapter 9, verses 53-54, Saul's death is also like that of Eli. Saul falls on his sword, while Eli fell from his seat. He fulfills the last prophecy of Samuel here.

The death of Eli and his sons in the battle of Aphek, in chapter 4, fulfilled the first prophecy of Samuel. In these events taken together, we see the fulfillment of Hannah's prayer of praise, where she recognizes the hand of God in bringing low the wicked and raising up the righteous. Saul, who has been wickedly pursuing David to this point, has now been destroyed and David will be raised up.

1 Chronicles chapter 10, verses 8-14, gives us a fuller portrayal of what happened. 2 Saul's suicide was an ignominious death, and his body was dishonored in death too. There was no one to take it from the battlefield.

An Amalekite took items from the body and then brought them to David in the next chapter. His body was later stripped also by the Philistines, and then his corpse was decapitated, like Dagon and Goliath were decapitated before him. His body was fastened to the wall of Beshan and his head in the temple of Dagon.

When his body was finally recovered, the body was burned and the bones were buried, presumably so that it could not be further desecrated. This again was not an honorable burial. It is the men of Jabesh-Gilead who come to rescue Saul's body.

Saul had once rescued them from Nahash the Ammonite in chapter 11. It's a reminder of what Saul once was. He once seemed a modest and a good leader, a leader who was

really going to serve the people.

And now, at his death, he seems something very different. Israel's rejection of the Lord as their king and their pursuit of a king like the nations has now brought them to the point of catastrophe. The Philistines have captured a strategic region of the land, the fertile Jezreel valley, and the king is dead.

They've split the land in two. When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, tries to establish his kingdom as Saul's successor, he will be based in the Transjordan, while David will be based down in Judah. Israel's possession of the land has been greatly compromised.

Their loss in this battle has seemingly left them worse off than they were after the battle of Aphek. And now, in this fractured and frayed nation, there is a great power vacuum after the death of Saul and his three sons. The chapters that follow in 2 Samuel will describe the struggle to fill it.

A question to consider. Both this passage and 1 Chronicles 10 give attention to the carrying of the good news of Israel's defeat and Saul's death to the idols of the Philistines. What part might the idols be playing in the larger story?