1 Samuel

1

Summary: *A barren woman named Hannah, tormented by her husband's other wife, pours out her anguish before God at the sanctuary in Shiloh. She vows that if God gives her a son, she will dedicate him to the LORD for life. God remembers her, she conceives and bears Samuel, and she fulfills her vow by bringing the child to Shiloh.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is built on a single Hebrew wordplay that most English readers never see. The verb sha'al ('to ask') threads through the entire narrative — Hannah asks God for a son, Eli asks what is wrong with her, and when the boy is born she names him Samuel because 'I asked him from the LORD.' The name Shemu'el is popularly linked to 'heard by God' (shama + El), but the text itself connects it to sha'al — the very root that gives us the name Sha'ul (Saul). Hannah's prayer for a son produces the prophet who will anoint Israel's first king, and the wordplay binds both figures to the same act of asking. The chapter also introduces a pattern that will dominate 1 Samuel: the reversal of human expectations. The favored wife has children but no narrative importance; the barren wife reshapes Israel's history. God's power works through emptiness, not fullness.*

Translation Friction: *The name etymology in verse 20 is the chapter's hardest translation problem. Hannah says ki me-YHWH she'iltiv ('because from the LORD I asked him') — but the verb sha'al ('to ask') fits the name Sha'ul (Saul), not Shemu'el (Samuel). Some scholars argue this passage originally told Saul's birth story and was later reassigned to Samuel. Others see a deliberate double meaning: the name evokes both shama ('heard') and sha'al ('asked'), fusing the two ideas. We render the name connection transparently and note the tension rather than resolving it. In verse 13, Hannah prays 'in her heart' with her lips moving but no voice — the Hebrew al libbah ('upon her heart') describes internal speech that is visible but inaudible. Eli's mistaking this for drunkenness reflects the fact that silent prayer was apparently unusual enough at Shiloh to be unrecognizable. We chose 'speaking within herself' to capture the visible-but-silent quality.*

Connections: *Hannah's barrenness places her in a line of matriarchs whose closed wombs become turning points: Sarah (Genesis 11:30), Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31), and the wife of Manoah (Judges 13:2). In each case, God opens the womb at the moment that shapes covenant history. Hannah's vow that no razor will touch her son's head (verse 11) uses language identical to the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:5, connecting Samuel to Samson — but where Samson's Nazirite status ended in ruin, Samuel's will produce faithful service. Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in chapter 2 will become the structural model for Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), and the phrase 'the LORD remembered her' (verse 19) uses the same verb (zakar) applied to God's remembering Noah (Genesis 8:1), Rachel (Genesis 30:22), and the covenant itself (Exodus 2:24).*

1There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim, in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph — an Ephraimite. 2He had two wives; the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other was Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. 3This man would go up from his town year by year to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of Armies at Shiloh. The two sons of Eli — Hophni and Phinehas — were serving there as priests of the LORD. 4On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5But to Hannah he would give a double portion, because he loved Hannah — though the LORD had closed her womb. 6Her rival would provoke her bitterly to torment her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7This happened year after year. Whenever she went up to the house of the LORD, Peninnah would provoke her until she wept and would not eat. 8Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why won't you eat? Why is your heart so troubled? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" 9Hannah rose after eating and drinking at Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair beside the doorpost of the LORD's temple. 10She was deeply bitter in spirit, and she prayed to the LORD, weeping uncontrollably. 11She made a vow and said, "LORD of Armies, if you will truly look on the suffering of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but give your servant a son — then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will touch his head." 12As she continued praying at length before the LORD, Eli was watching her mouth. 13Hannah was speaking within herself — only her lips were moving, but her voice could not be heard — so Eli assumed she was drunk. 14Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you!" 15Hannah answered, "No, my lord. I am a woman crushed in spirit. I have not drunk wine or strong drink — I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16Do not take your servant for a worthless woman, for it is out of the depth of my anguish and frustration that I have been speaking all this time." 17Eli answered, "Go in peace. May the God of Israel grant your request — what you have asked from him." 18She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went on her way. She ate, and her face was no longer downcast. 19They rose early in the morning, worshiped before the LORD, and returned home to Ramah. Elkanah was intimate with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20In the turning of the year, Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked him from the LORD." 21The man Elkanah went up with his whole household to offer to the LORD the annual sacrifice and to fulfill his vow. 22But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Not until the boy is weaned. Then I will bring him to appear before the face of the LORD, and he will remain there permanently." 23Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Stay until you have weaned him. May the LORD fulfill his word." So the woman stayed and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24Wh en she had weaned him, she brought him up with her, along with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh, while the boy was still young. 25They slaughtered the bull and brought the boy to Eli. 26She said, "Please, my lord — as surely as you live, my lord — I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27It was for this boy that I prayed, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. 28So I, in turn, have dedicated him to the LORD. For all the days that he lives, he is given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The place name Ramathaim-zophim means 'the double height of the watchers' — ramathaim is a dual form of ramah ('height') and tsofim ('watchers, lookouts'). The genealogy traces four generations, rooting Elkanah in the tribe of Ephraim. The term Efrati here means 'Ephraimite' (a tribal designation), not 'Ephrathite' as in Ruth 1:2, where it refers to a clan in Judah. The distinction matters: this family belongs to the northern hill country, not to Bethlehem.

1. The fourfold genealogy (ben Yerocham ben Elihu ben Tochu ben Tsuf) is unusually detailed for a narrative opening, signaling that this family's lineage matters. Chronicles will later identify this line as Levitical (1 Chronicles 6:19-23), which would explain why Samuel can serve in the sanctuary despite being an Ephraimite by residence.

2. The name Channah derives from chanan ('to be gracious, to show favor') — she is 'Grace' or 'Favored One,' though her situation at the story's opening is anything but gracious. Peninnah may derive from peninim ('corals, pearls') or from panah ('to turn'). The Hebrew states the contrast with stark simplicity: vayyehi li-Feninnah yeladim u-le-Channah ein yeladim ('and Peninnah had children and Hannah — no children'). The word ein ('there is not') is absolute negation.

2. The two-wife household echoes the pattern of Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29-30): one wife is fertile but less loved, the other is loved but barren. The narrative formula signals that the barren wife's story will be the one that matters.

3. The phrase mi-yamim yamimah ('from days to days') is an idiom for 'year by year' or 'annually,' referring to the pilgrimage festivals. The title YHWH Tseva'ot ('LORD of Armies') appears here for the first time in the Hebrew Bible — this is its inaugural occurrence. The title designates God as commander of heavenly and earthly forces. Its first appearance in a story about a barren woman's prayer, rather than in a battle narrative, is striking: the God of cosmic armies attends to domestic grief.

3. The mention of Hophni and Phinehas is ominous foreshadowing. The narrator names them as 'priests of the LORD' but will shortly reveal them as corrupt (2:12-17). Their presence at Shiloh sets the stage for the crisis of the priesthood that Samuel will eventually address.

4. The sacrificial meal was a communal feast following the offering — the family consumed their share of the peace offering (shelamim) together. The word manot ('portions') refers to the allocated shares of the sacrificial meat. Each family member received a designated portion. The detail that Peninnah's sons and daughters each received their own portion emphasizes the size of her family, making the contrast with Hannah more painful.

5. The phrase manah achat appayim is notoriously difficult. It could mean 'one portion of the face/presence' (a choice portion), 'one portion double' (a double share), or even 'one portion — though with a sad face.' Most interpreters read it as a special or double portion expressing Elkanah's favor. We chose 'double portion' as the most natural reading — Elkanah compensates with generosity for what he cannot give her.

5. The clause va-YHWH sagar rachmah ('and the LORD had closed her womb') uses the divine name as the subject of the closing. This is not presented as punishment but as divine sovereignty — the narrator makes God the direct agent of Hannah's barrenness without explaining why. The word rechem ('womb') shares its root with rachamim ('compassion, mercy'), creating an irony: the organ associated with divine compassion has been shut by God.

6. Peninnah is called tsaratah ('her rival wife') — the term tsarah specifically denotes a co-wife in a polygamous household and literally means 'her distress' or 'her adversary.' The very word for 'co-wife' in Hebrew contains the word for suffering. The verb ki'asattah ('she provoked her') paired with the intensifier gam ka'as ('also with provocation') and the purpose clause ba'avur har'imah ('in order to make her thunder/agitate') reveals Peninnah's cruelty as deliberate and sustained, not casual friction.

6. The narrator repeats ki sagar YHWH be'ad rachmah ('because the LORD had closed her womb') — the same theological claim from verse 5. The repetition frames Hannah's suffering between two causes: divine agency (God closed) and human cruelty (Peninnah provoked). The text refuses to choose between them.

7. The phrase shanah be-shanah ('year by year') emphasizes that this was not a single incident but an annual humiliation timed to the pilgrimage festival — the very occasion meant for worship and communal joy becomes Hannah's recurring season of grief. The verb tivkeh ('she wept') and the clause lo tokhal ('she would not eat') describe Hannah's response in terms of mourning: weeping and refusing food are the classic signs of deep grief in Hebrew narrative (2 Samuel 12:16-17). Hannah mourns at the feast.

8. Elkanah's three questions (why do you weep, why don't you eat, why is your heart bad) show genuine concern, but his final rhetorical question — halo anokhi tov lakh me-asarah vanim ('am I not better to you than ten sons?') — reveals that he does not fully understand her grief. He measures his love against the lack she feels, assuming that spousal devotion can substitute for the child she desperately wants. The number 'ten' (asarah) represents completeness and abundance. Elkanah is offering everything he has, but it is not the thing she needs.

8. The phrase yera levavekh ('your heart is bad/evil') uses the verb ra'a ('to be bad, evil, displeased') applied to the heart (levav). This is not moral judgment but emotional diagnosis — her inner self is in distress. The same phrase describes deep emotional pain elsewhere (Nehemiah 2:10, Jonah 4:1).

9. The phrase acharei akhlah be-Shiloh ve-acharei shatoh ('after eating in Shiloh and after drinking') is ambiguous — the suffixes could refer to Hannah eating and drinking, or to the family eating and drinking. If Hannah, then she has recovered enough to eat before approaching God; if the family, then she goes to pray while others feast. Given verse 7's report that she would not eat, some interpreters read this as the broader family's meal.

9. Eli sits al ha-kisse al mezuzat hekhal YHWH ('on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD'). The word hekhal ('temple, palace') applied to the Shiloh sanctuary is significant — this is the central worship site before Jerusalem. The mezuzah ('doorpost') places Eli at the threshold, the liminal space between the sacred interior and the public courtyard. He occupies the position of gatekeeper.

10. The phrase marat nefesh ('bitter of soul') uses the same root (marar) that Naomi invokes in Ruth 1:20 when she renames herself Mara. The nefesh is not merely 'soul' in the Greek philosophical sense but the entire living self — appetite, desire, identity. Hannah's bitterness has consumed her whole being.

10. The construction uvakho tivkeh ('weeping, she wept') is the infinitive absolute paired with the finite verb — Hebrew's strongest intensifier. It conveys not quiet tears but convulsive, uncontrollable weeping. The same construction appears in Genesis 2:17 (mot tamut, 'dying you will die') and here carries the same force of totality.

11. Hannah calls herself amatekha ('your female servant') three times in a single sentence — the repetition is emphatic and deliberate. The word amah denotes a female servant who has legal standing in the household, not a hired laborer. By calling herself God's amah, Hannah claims a position that entitles her to God's attention and care.

11. The phrase im ra'oh tir'eh ('if you will indeed look') uses the infinitive absolute construction — the same intensifying form as Hannah's weeping in verse 10. She asks God to look with the same totality with which she wept. The verb ra'ah ('to see') when applied to God carries the sense of attentive, compassionate recognition — not passive observation but active engagement with suffering.

11. The clause morah lo ya'aleh al rosho ('a razor will not go up upon his head') is nearly identical to the Nazirite language of Numbers 6:5 and to the angel's instructions regarding Samson (Judges 13:5). Hannah is dedicating her son as a lifelong Nazirite — consecrated to God from birth to death, not for a limited period. This is the most radical form of the vow.

12. The phrase hirbetah lehitpallel ('she multiplied in praying') indicates prolonged, extended prayer — not a brief petition but sustained, persistent communion. The verb shomer ('watching, guarding, observing') applied to Eli watching her mouth (piha) creates a surveillance image: the priest is scrutinizing her lips. The irony will emerge in the next verse — Eli watches intently but completely misreads what he sees.

13. The phrase medabberet al libbah ('speaking upon her heart') describes a mode of prayer that is internal but physically visible — her lips move (sefateiha na'ot) but her voice does not carry (qolah lo yishame'a). This is the Hebrew Bible's most detailed description of silent prayer, and rabbinic tradition (Talmud Berakhot 31a) derives the laws of the Amidah (standing prayer) from Hannah's posture here: prayer should be spoken with the lips but not shouted.

13. Eli's judgment — vayyachsheveha le-shikorah ('he considered her a drunkard') — is the priest's first act in the narrative, and it is a failure of discernment. The man whose job is to mediate between God and Israel cannot distinguish between drunkenness and devotion. This small detail previews the larger failure of the Eli priesthood that will drive much of 1 Samuel's plot.

14. Eli's rebuke — ad matai tishtakkarin ('how long will you be drunk?') — uses the hitpael of shakar ('to be drunk'), implying ongoing or habitual drunkenness. He does not ask if she is drunk; he assumes it and demands she stop. The imperative hasiri et yeinekh me-alayikh ('remove your wine from upon you') treats her as if wine were a garment she is wearing. The priest's harsh judgment of a grieving woman at prayer is the narrative's first indication that the Shiloh priesthood has lost its spiritual sensitivity.

15. Hannah's self-description — ishah qeshat ruach ('a woman hard/harsh of spirit') — uses qasheh ('hard, difficult, harsh') to describe her inner state. This is not gentle sadness but a spirit that has been compressed, hardened, and crushed under weight. The phrase va-eshpokh et nafshi ('I poured out my soul') uses the verb shafakh, which elsewhere describes pouring out blood (Genesis 9:6), pouring out water as a libation (2 Samuel 23:16), and pouring out divine wrath (Hosea 5:10). Hannah's prayer is a liquid metaphor — she has emptied her entire self before God.

15. The distinction between yayin ('wine') and shekhar ('strong drink') covers all intoxicants: yayin is fermented grape juice, shekhar is any other intoxicating beverage (possibly from dates, barley, or pomegranates). Hannah's denial is comprehensive — she has consumed nothing that could cause what Eli observed.

16. The phrase bat beliyya'al ('daughter of Belial/worthlessness') is significant because the same term — benei beliyya'al ('sons of worthlessness') — will be applied to Eli's own sons in 2:12. Hannah begs not to be classed as what Eli's sons actually are. The word beliyya'al may derive from beli ('without') + ya'al ('worth, profit') — 'without worth' — or may be an older term for the underworld or chaos. It denotes someone beyond moral recovery.

16. Hannah's explanation — me-rov sichi ve-kha'si ('from the abundance of my complaint and my provocation/grief') — uses siach ('complaint, meditation, talk') and ka'as ('vexation, grief, provocation'). The word ka'as is the same root used for Peninnah's provocation in verses 6-7: Hannah's grief-prayer is fueled by the very torment her rival inflicts.

17. Eli's response — lekhi le-shalom ('go to peace') — is both a blessing and a dismissal. The preposition le ('to, toward') rather than be ('in') suggests movement toward peace rather than a static condition: 'go toward wholeness.' The word she'latekh ('your request') derives from sha'al ('to ask'), and Eli unknowingly activates the chapter's central wordplay: asher sha'alt me-immo ('what you asked from him'). The verb sha'al will echo through the naming of Samuel and connect forward to the naming of Saul. Eli, who could not discern her prayer, nevertheless speaks a prophetic blessing over it.

18. Hannah now calls herself shifchatekha ('your maidservant') — a term of even deeper humility than amah used in verse 11. A shifchah is the lowest rank of female servant. The transformation is immediate: vattelekh ha-ishah le-darkkah vattokhal ('the woman went her way and ate'). After refusing food in verse 7, she now eats. The phrase u-faneiha lo hayu lah od ('and her face was not to her anymore') is literally 'her faces were no longer hers' — meaning her expression of grief had departed. Something shifted in the act of praying and receiving Eli's blessing. The text does not say she received an answer — only that she prayed, was blessed, and her countenance changed.

19. The verb vayyeda ('he knew') is the standard Hebrew euphemism for sexual intimacy — the same verb used in Genesis 4:1 ('Adam knew Eve'). The sequence is deliberate: worship, return, intimacy, divine remembering. The sacred and the domestic are woven together without embarrassment.

19. The clause vayyizkerehah YHWH ('and the LORD remembered her') is the theological climax of the chapter's first movement. The verb zakar ('to remember') when God is the subject does not imply prior forgetfulness — it signals that God is now acting on what He has always known. The same divine remembering opens wombs (Rachel, Genesis 30:22), ends floods (Noah, Genesis 8:1), and initiates deliverance (Israel in Egypt, Exodus 2:24).

20. The phrase li-tequfot ha-yamim ('at the turning of the days') refers to the completion of a pregnancy cycle — approximately nine months from conception. The word tequfah ('turning, circuit, revolution') emphasizes the cyclical nature of time and the fulfillment of a natural period.

20. The name etymology is the chapter's most discussed translation problem. Hannah says ki me-YHWH she'iltiv ('because from the LORD I asked him') — but the verb sha'al ('to ask') produces the name Sha'ul, not Shemu'el. The name Shemu'el most naturally means 'his name is God' (shemu + El) or 'heard by God' (shama + El). Some scholars see this as evidence that the birth narrative originally belonged to Saul and was later transferred

to Samuel. Others argue that Hebrew name etymologies are often folk explanations based on sound association rather than strict derivation — Hannah hears sha'al in Shemu'el. We render the text as given and note the tension.

21. The phrase zevach ha-yamim ('the sacrifice of the days') refers to the annual pilgrimage sacrifice — the same journey described in verse 3. The addition of ve-et nidro ('and his vow') reveals that Elkanah had also made a vow, though the text never records it. This is one of several narrative gaps in the chapter: we learn of Elkanah's vow only at its fulfillment. Some commentators suggest his vow was connected to Hannah's — perhaps confirming or endorsing her dedication of their son.

22. The verb yiggamel ('is weaned') indicates that Hannah keeps the child until weaning, which in the ancient Near East typically occurred around age three (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:27). These are the only years Hannah will have with her son. The phrase ve-yashav sham ad olam ('and he will dwell there forever') transforms a mother's personal sacrifice into a permanent consecration. The word olam ('forever, perpetuity') makes the dedication irrevocable — this is not a loan but a permanent transfer.

22. The phrase ve-nir'ah et penei YHWH ('and he will appear before the face of the LORD') uses the niphal of ra'ah — literally 'he will be seen before the LORD's face.' Appearing before God's face is pilgrimage language, but for Samuel it will become a permanent state: he will live in God's presence at Shiloh.

23. Elkanah's response — asi ha-tov be-einayikh ('do what is good in your eyes') — grants Hannah full authority over the timing. His blessing akh yaqem YHWH et devaro ('only may the LORD establish his word') raises a textual question: whose word? The Masoretic text reads devaro ('his word'), suggesting God's word — perhaps Eli's prophetic blessing in verse 17. The Septuagint and a Qumran manuscript (4QSam-a) read 'that which comes from your mouth,' suggesting Hannah's vow. We follow the MT but note the variant.

23. The verb vatteineq ('she nursed') followed by ad gomlah oto ('until she weaned him') compresses months or years of intimacy into a single clause. Every day of nursing is a day closer to giving the boy away. The narrative's restraint is quietly devastating — it does not describe Hannah's emotions during this period, leaving the reader to feel what the text will not say.

24. The offerings are substantial: three bulls (parim sheloshah), one ephah of flour (approximately 22 liters or half a bushel), and a skin of wine (nevel yayin). The Septuagint and 4QSam-a read 'a three-year-old bull' (par meshulash) rather than 'three bulls' — which would match the boy's approximate age and provide a single animal for the dedication. The MT's 'three bulls' is the more difficult reading and thus often preferred by text critics.

24. The final phrase ve-ha-na'ar na'ar ('and the boy was a boy') seems redundant but serves a narrative purpose — it emphasizes just how young Samuel was. Some render this as 'the boy was still a child' or 'the boy was very young.' The repetition underscores the cost of Hannah's vow: she is handing over a toddler to serve in the sanctuary.

25. The singular ha-par ('the bull') here supports the Septuagint reading of 'a three-year-old bull' in verse 24, since only one animal is slaughtered. If the MT's 'three bulls' is correct, two may have been offered as additional sacrifices while one was the primary offering. The juxtaposition is stark: vayyishchatu et ha-par vayyavi'u et ha-na'ar ('they slaughtered the bull and brought the boy') — the sacrifice and the dedication are described in the same breath, with the same narrative pace. Hannah offers both an animal and a child, though only the animal dies.

26. Hannah's oath formula — chei nafshekha adoni ('as your soul lives, my lord') — is a solemn assertion of truth, invoking Eli's own life as guarantee. She identifies herself as ha-ishah ha-nitsevet immekha ba-zeh ('the woman who was standing with you in this place'). The participle nitsevet ('standing') recalls her posture of prayer — she stood to pray, a detail the rabbinic tradition notes as establishing the norm for the Amidah. The word ba-zeh ('in this [place]') anchors the identification to this specific location in the sanctuary.

27. The sha'al wordplay reaches its climax: vayyitten YHWH li et she'elati asher sha'alti me-immo ('the LORD gave me my request which I asked from him'). The noun she'elah ('request, petition') and the verb sha'al ('to ask') appear together, driving home the point: this child is the physical answer to an act of asking. The boy standing before Eli is living proof that God responds to desperate prayer. Hannah's statement also functions as a legal transfer — by identifying the boy as the answer to her vow, she establishes the basis for his dedication.

28. The verb hish'iltihu is the hiphil (causative) of sha'al — literally 'I have caused him to be asked' or 'I have lent/dedicated him.' The play is untranslatable: sha'al means both 'to ask for' and 'to lend,' so Hannah has 'asked' her son from God and now 'lends' him back using the same verb. The word sha'ul ('asked, lent, dedicated') in the clause hu sha'ul la-YHWH is identical to the name Sha'ul (Saul). This final verse welds Samuel's identity to Saul's name through a shared verbal root.

28. The final clause vayyishtachu sham la-YHWH ('and he worshiped the LORD there') is ambiguous in subject — the Hebrew could refer to Elkanah, to Samuel, or even to Eli. The Septuagint reads the plural ('they worshiped'). If Samuel is the subject, the boy's first recorded act in the sanctuary is worship — fitting for one who will spend his life in God's service.

2

Summary: *Hannah sings a victory song after dedicating Samuel to the LORD at Shiloh — a poem that moves from personal vindication to cosmic theology, culminating in the first mention of a coming 'anointed one' (mashiach) in the books of Samuel. The narrative then contrasts Samuel's faithful ministry as a child with the predatory corruption of Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas, who steal from the sacrifices and sleep with women at the tabernacle entrance. A man of God delivers a devastating oracle against Eli's house: the priesthood will be stripped from his family and given to a faithful priest.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Hannah's song in verses 1-10 is one of the great theological poems in the Hebrew Bible and the direct literary ancestor of Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). What makes it remarkable is its scope: a woman who was barren and mocked by a rival does not simply thank God for a son — she composes a poem about the total reversal of human power structures. The hungry are fed, the barren bear seven, the mighty are shattered, the poor are raised from the dust to sit with princes. Most striking is verse 10: Hannah, who asked for a single child, ends her prayer with a vision of God's anointed king — a figure who does not yet exist in Israel. She sees past her own story to the monarchy her son will inaugurate.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew of Hannah's song is dense, archaic poetry with several textual difficulties. In verse 1, qeren ('horn') is a metaphor for strength that has no single English equivalent — we rendered it literally and noted the symbolism. Verse 3 uses the rare form nit'qu ('are weighed / measured') for God's assessment of human actions, which some traditions render 'are weighed' and others 'are measured' — we chose 'measured' and noted the ambiguity. In verse 5, the barren woman bearing seven is a literary number for completeness, not a biographical fact about Hannah (she bore six total per verse 21). The description of Eli's sons as benei beliyya'al ('sons of worthlessness') in verse 12 uses a term whose etymology is debated — we rendered it 'worthless men' and discussed the range in key_terms. The man of God's prophecy in verses 27-36 contains some of the most difficult Hebrew in the chapter, with several phrases whose referents are disputed.*

Connections: *Hannah's song establishes the theological framework for the entire Samuel-Kings narrative: God reverses human power structures, pulling down the mighty and lifting the lowly. The 'anointed one' (mashiach) of verse 10 is the first use of this term for a royal figure in the Former Prophets — it will become the defining title for Saul, David, and their successors. The contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons anticipates the contrast between David and Saul. The man of God's prophecy against Eli's house (vv. 27-36) will be fulfilled in stages: the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 4:11), the removal of Eli's line from the high priesthood under Solomon (1 Kings 2:27), and the rise of Zadok as the faithful priest. The 'linen ephod' Samuel wears as a boy (v. 18) is priestly garb, signaling that this child given by prayer will serve as priest, prophet, and kingmaker.*

1 Hannah prayed and said:
"My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn is raised high by the LORD.
My mouth opens wide against my enemies,
for I rejoice in Your salvation.

2 There is no one holy like the LORD —
there is no one besides You —
and there is no rock like our God.

3 Do not keep speaking so proudly;
let no arrogance come from your mouth,
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by Him actions are measured.

4The bows of the mighty are shattered,
but those who stumble are armed with strength.

5Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,
but the hungry hunger no more.
The barren woman bears seven,
while the mother of many withers away.

6The LORD kills and gives life;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

7The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts high.

8He raises the poor from the dust;
He lifts the needy from the ash heap
to seat them with princes
and grant them a throne of honor.
For the pillars of the earth belong to the LORD,
and He has set the world upon them.

9He guards the steps of His faithful ones,
but the wicked will be silenced in darkness —
for no one prevails by their own strength.

10The LORD — His adversaries will be shattered!
Against them He thunders from heaven.
The LORD judges the ends of the earth.
He will give strength to His king
and raise high the horn of His anointed."

11Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy remained, serving the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest. 12Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. 13Now this was the practice of the priests with the people: whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, 14and would thrust it into the basin, or kettle, or caldron, or pot. Whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take for himself. This is what they did to all the Israelites who came there to Shiloh. 15Even before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast. He will not accept boiled meat from you — only raw." 16If the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would say, "No — give it now. If you do not, I will take it by force." 17The sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for they treated the LORD's offering with contempt. 18But Samuel was serving in the presence of the LORD — a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19His mother would make him a small robe and bring it up to him each year when she came with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, "May the LORD give you children by this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD." Then they would go home. 21The LORD attended to Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD. 22Now Eli was very old. He heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 23He said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear about your wicked deeds from all these people. 24No, my sons — the report I hear is not good. You are causing the LORD's people to sin. 25If one person sins against another, God can mediate. But if a person sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?"

But they would not listen to their father's voice, because the LORD intended to put them to death. 26The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor, both with the LORD and with people. 27A man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: Did I not clearly reveal Myself to your ancestor's house when they were in Egypt, in the house of Pharaoh? 28I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest — to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to wear the ephod before Me. And I gave to your ancestor's house all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel. 29Why do you trample on My sacrifice and My offering that I commanded for My dwelling? You honor your sons above Me, fattening yourselves on the best of every offering from Israel, My people." 30Therefore — this is the declaration of the LORD, the God of Israel — I did indeed say that your house and your ancestor's house would walk before Me forever. But now — this is the LORD's declaration — far be it from Me! For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be disgraced. 31The days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your ancestor's house, so that no one in your family will reach old age. 32You will see distress in My dwelling, even though God will do good for Israel. And there will never be an old man in your house. 33Any man of yours I do not cut off from My altar will be spared only to consume your eyes with tears and to grieve your soul. All the offspring of your house will die as young men. 34And this will be the sign for you — what will happen to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: both of them will die on the same day. 35I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build for him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed one always. 36Everyone left in your house will come and bow down to him for a small coin and a loaf of bread, saying, 'Please assign me to one of the priestly duties so I can eat a piece of bread.'"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb vatitpallel ('she prayed') introduces what follows as prayer, though its form is a victory song. Hebrew prayer encompasses praise, lament, and proclamation — not just petition.

1. The three-line opening structure uses synonymous parallelism: heart exults / horn is raised / mouth opens wide. Each line intensifies the same theme of vindication. The shift from 'my heart' to 'my horn' to 'my mouth' moves from internal emotion to public display.

1. 'My horn is raised high' (ramah qarni) — the horn (qeren) is the primary symbol of strength throughout the poem. It appears here in verse 1 and returns in verse 10 for the anointed king, framing the entire song.

2. The three-line structure moves from God's holiness (qadosh) to His uniqueness ('none besides You') to His reliability (tsur, 'rock'). The middle line — ki ein biltekha ('for there is none besides You') — is the strongest claim: not merely that God is the greatest, but that He stands alone. The rock metaphor (tsur) connotes immovable stability and protection, a fortress image used throughout the Psalms and the Song of Moses (Deut 32:4).

3. The doubled gevohah gevohah ('proudly proudly' or 'high high') is emphatic — Hannah is addressing the kind of boastful speech she endured from Peninnah. The word 'ataq ('arrogance, insolence') describes speech that is brazen and presumptuous.

3. The phrase El de'ot ('God of knowledge') may mean God who possesses all knowledge or God to whom all knowledge belongs — the plural de'ot could be intensive. The verb nitkenu ('are measured / are weighed') is debated: from takan, it can mean 'to weigh, to measure, to assess.' We chose 'measured' because the image is of God evaluating human deeds against a standard. The proud speaker will be assessed by a God who knows everything.

4. The reversal pattern that defines the song begins here. Chattim ('shattered') describes the breaking of weapons, not merely bending them — the mighty are completely disarmed. Meanwhile, the nikashalim ('those who stumble') — the weak, the faltering — are 'girded with strength' (azeru chayil). The verb azar ('to gird') is military: it means to strap on armor or weapons. The weak become warriors by God's doing.

5. The reversals accelerate: the well-fed must now work for food, while the hungry are satisfied. The climactic line — 'the barren woman bears seven' — uses the number of completeness, not biography. Hannah bore six children total (v. 21), but her song speaks in the language of divine fullness. Seven means God has given more than enough.

5. The verb umlelah ('withers, languishes') describes a slow fading — the mother of many does not lose her children violently but simply declines. The contrast is between divine vitality (the barren made fruitful) and human self-sufficiency that cannot sustain itself.

6. The poem moves from social reversals to cosmic sovereignty. God's power extends over life and death itself. Sheol is the underworld, the realm of the dead — not a place of punishment but of shadowy non-existence. The claim that God 'raises up' from Sheol is striking: in early Israelite thought, Sheol was generally considered final. Hannah's song pushes beyond that expectation, asserting that even death is not beyond God's reach.

7. The four verbs come in two pairs, each a reversal: morish/ma'ashir (impoverishes/enriches), mashpil/meromem (brings low/exalts). The structure is deliberately symmetrical, reflecting the balanced sovereignty of God over all human conditions. Neither wealth nor poverty is permanent or self-caused — both are within God's governance.

8. The movement from 'dust' (afar) to 'ash heap' (ashpot) to 'princes' (nedivim) to 'throne of honor' (kisse kavod) is the most dramatic vertical reversal in the song. The ashpot is literally the refuse dump outside a village — where the destitute sit to beg. From there, God lifts them to royal thrones.

8. The phrase metzuqei eretz ('pillars of the earth') reflects ancient cosmology where the earth rests on foundations or pillars. The theological point transcends the cosmology: God's right to reverse human power structures rests on His role as Creator. He set the world on its foundations; human hierarchies are His to rearrange.

8. This verse is echoed directly in Psalm 113:7-8 and in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:52): 'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.'

9. The chasidav ('His faithful ones,' from chesed) are those bound to God in covenant loyalty. The verb yishmar ('He guards') echoes the creation mandate and the priestly blessing (Num 6:24). By contrast, the wicked are yiddamu ('silenced') — the verb damam means to be still, to cease, to be cut off. Darkness and silence together suggest Sheol.

9. The final line — ki lo vekoach yigbar ish ('for not by strength does a man prevail') — is the thesis statement of the entire Samuel narrative. Saul, the tall warrior-king, will fail; David, the youngest shepherd boy, will triumph. Human power does not determine outcomes. God does.

10. This verse is the theological climax of the song. The word meshicho ('His anointed one') is the first occurrence of mashiach in the books of Samuel in a royal context. Hannah, praying before any king exists in Israel, uses the term that will define Saul and David and ultimately the messianic expectation of later Judaism and Christianity.

10. The verb yarim qeren meshicho ('He will raise the horn of His anointed') closes the inclusio begun in verse 1 (ramah qarni, 'my horn is raised'). Hannah's personal horn of strength becomes the horn of the coming king. Her story is subsumed into God's larger purpose.

10. The thunder theophany (ba-shamayim yar'em, 'from heaven He thunders') connects to the storm theophany tradition in Psalm 18:13 and to the thunder that accompanied the Israelite victory in 1 Samuel 7:10. God's voice in the storm is a weapon against His enemies.

11. The transition is abrupt and poignant: Elkanah 'went home' but the child stayed. The verb mesharet ('serving, ministering') indicates formal religious service — even as a small child, Samuel has a recognized role at the sanctuary. The phrase et penei Eli ('before Eli' or 'in the presence of Eli') establishes the mentoring relationship while also setting up the contrast that follows: Samuel serves faithfully; Eli's own sons do not.

12. The phrase benei beliyya'al ('sons of worthlessness' or 'sons of wickedness') is one of the harshest designations in Hebrew. It describes people who are fundamentally destructive to the community — those from whom no good can come. Applied to priests, it is shocking.

12. The statement lo yade'u et YHWH ('they did not know the LORD') uses yada ('to know') in its fullest sense — not ignorance of God's existence but absence of relationship, reverence, and covenant faithfulness. Knowing God in Hebrew means intimate, personal, covenantal engagement. Eli's sons had none of it.

13. The narrator uses mishpat ('practice, custom, judgment') with deliberate irony — what should mean 'the proper procedure' here describes corruption. The three-pronged fork (mazleg shelosh ha-shinayim) was a real cultic utensil, but its use here is perverted: instead of serving the sacrifice properly, it becomes a tool for priestly theft.

14. The four cooking vessels — kiyyor (basin), dud (kettle), qallachat (caldron), parur (pot) — are listed exhaustively to show that no offering escaped the priests' grab. The randomness of the fork thrust adds insult: the priest does not even choose specific portions but takes whatever comes up, treating the sacred offering as a grab bag. The phrase 'to all the Israelites' (lekhol Yisra'el) underlines that this was systematic, not occasional.

15. This escalates the offense. The fat (chelev) belonged exclusively to the LORD — burning it on the altar was non-negotiable (Leviticus 3:16: 'all the fat belongs to the LORD'). By demanding raw meat before the fat was burned, Eli's sons were not merely taking more than their share — they were claiming priority over God Himself. The demand for raw rather than boiled meat suggests they wanted choice cuts to prepare as they pleased, not the boiled remnants the normal priestly portion allowed.

16. The worshiper's request is modest and pious: just let God's portion be burned first, then take what you want. The servant's response — lo, ki attah titten ('No, you will give it now') — is a direct assertion of priestly power over divine right. The final threat, laqachti bechozqah ('I will take it by force'), turns the sanctuary into a scene of coercion. The place of worship becomes a place of robbery.

17. The verb ni'atzu ('they treated with contempt, they spurned') is the narrator's verdict. The Hebrew ni'ets means to show utter disrespect, to treat as worthless. The irony is layered: Eli's sons, the benei beliyya'al ('sons of worthlessness'), treat God's offering as worthless. The result is that the people themselves begin to 'abhor' the sacrificial system — priestly corruption makes worship repulsive to the worshipers.

18. The contrast with the preceding verses is sharp and deliberate. Against the backdrop of priestly corruption, the narrator presents a child faithfully serving God. The linen ephod (efod bad) is priestly garment — the same kind worn by the high priest (Exodus 28:6-14) and by David when he danced before the ark (2 Samuel 6:14). That a boy wears it signals his priestly consecration and foreshadows his role as the faithful servant Eli's sons refused to be.

19. The me'il qaton ('small robe') is a tender detail: Hannah makes a priestly robe sized for a growing boy. The word me'il is the same used for the high priest's robe (Exodus 28:31) and for the robe of the ghostly Samuel that the witch of Endor sees (1 Sam 28:14). Each year Hannah measures her absent son's growth by the size of the robe she sews. The phrase miyamim yamimah ('from days to days,' i.e., year to year) marks the rhythm of faithful, quiet devotion.

20. Eli's blessing uses a wordplay on sha'al ('to ask, to request') — the same root behind Samuel's name. The phrase ha-she'elah asher sha'al ('the petition that was asked') echoes Hannah's original request in 1:27. Eli prays that God will repay Hannah's gift with more children. The word tachat ('in place of, in exchange for') frames Samuel's dedication as a transaction of faith: Hannah gave her firstborn to God, and God will give back abundantly.

21. The verb paqad ('attended to, visited, remembered') is a theologically loaded term indicating God's active intervention — the same verb used when God 'remembered' Sarah (Genesis 21:1) and 'attended to' Israel in Egypt (Exodus 4:31). Five more children confirm that Hannah's barrenness was not biological fate but divine timing.

21. The phrase vayyigdal hanna'ar Shemu'el im YHWH ('the boy Samuel grew up with the LORD') is striking: 'with the LORD' (im YHWH) suggests companionship, not merely location. Samuel grows up in God's presence as other children grow up in their parents' home.

22. The sin escalates from theft to sexual exploitation. The women 'who served' (ha-tzove'ot) at the tent entrance had a recognized role in tabernacle service (cf. Exodus 38:8). Eli's sons used their priestly position to prey on women in religious service — an abuse of sacred trust. The note that Eli 'heard' (shama) but did not act becomes the basis of his judgment: knowledge without correction is complicity.

23. Eli's rebuke begins with a question rather than a command: 'Why do you do such things?' The phrasing reveals a father who reasons with corrupt sons rather than exercising his authority as high priest to remove them. The phrase divreichem ra'im ('your evil words/deeds' — davar can mean both) coming 'from all the people' (me'et kol ha'am) shows that the corruption is public knowledge. Everyone knows; only Eli hesitates to act decisively.

24. Eli's correction is remarkably mild: 'the report is not good' is an understatement for sacrilege and sexual predation. The verb ma'avirim ('causing to cross over, causing to transgress') reveals the deeper damage: the priests' corruption does not merely offend God — it leads the people themselves into sin. When those responsible for holiness become corrupt, the entire community's relationship with God is poisoned.

25. Eli's theological reasoning is sound — sin against God has no higher court of appeal — but it comes too late and too gently. The verb pilelo ('mediate, judge, arbitrate') suggests God as arbiter in human disputes, but when the offense is directly against God, the mediating structure collapses.

25. The narrator's explanation — ki chafetz YHWH lahamitam ('because the LORD intended to put them to death') — is one of the most theologically difficult statements in Samuel. It does not mean God caused their corruption; rather, their corruption had reached a point where God's purpose was now their judgment. The verb chafetz ('desired, intended, was pleased to') indicates divine resolve, not arbitrary cruelty. Their refusal to repent sealed their fate.

26. This verse echoes the description of the young Moses (Exodus 2:10) and anticipates the description of Jesus in Luke 2:52 ('And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and people'). The phrase holekh vegadel vatov ('going and growing and good') uses three participles in sequence to describe steady, continuous development. The double 'with' (im YHWH ve-gam im anashim) places Samuel in right relationship in both directions — toward God and toward the community — in direct contrast to Eli's sons, who had right relationship with neither.

27. The 'man of God' (ish Elohim) is unnamed — a prophetic figure who delivers God's oracle and disappears from the narrative. The phrase hanigloh nigleti ('did I not clearly reveal Myself') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute construction: the revelation to Aaron's house in Egypt was unmistakable and deliberate. God's point is that Eli's priestly line exists because of divine initiative, not human merit.

28. Three priestly functions are listed: ascending the altar for sacrifice, burning incense, and wearing the ephod. These represent the full scope of priestly service — sacrificial, intercessory, and oracular (the ephod was associated with divine inquiry). God gave all of this to Aaron's line. The phrase kol ishei benei Yisra'el ('all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel') reminds Eli that priestly provisions were God's gift, not something to be seized by force — which is exactly what his sons have been doing.

29. The verb tiv'atu ('you trample, you kick') is the language of an animal kicking against its master — the same verb used in Deuteronomy 32:15 where Israel, grown fat, 'kicked' against God. The accusation vatekhabbed et banekha mimmenni ('you honor your sons above Me') is devastating: Eli's failure to restrain his sons is not passive weakness but active idolatry — he prioritizes his sons' comfort over God's honor. The verb lehavri'akhem ('to fatten yourselves') makes the corruption physical and visceral.

30. The phrase chalilah li ('far be it from Me') expresses God's moral revulsion at the idea of rewarding contempt with continued blessing. The principle mekhabdai akhabbed uvozai yeqallu ('those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be disgraced') becomes a governing principle for the entire Deuteronomistic History. The verb yeqallu ('will be made light, will be disgraced') is the opposite of kaved ('to be heavy, to honor') — a wordplay: those who treat God lightly will themselves become lightweights, stripped of dignity and standing.

31. The 'arm' (zero'a) is literally the forearm but metaphorically represents strength and power. 'Cutting off the arm' means destroying the family's capacity to function and thrive. The curse of premature death — 'no old man in your house' — is the opposite of the biblical blessing of long life. The punishment fits the crime: a priestly house that consumed what belonged to God will itself be consumed.

32. This is one of the most difficult verses in the chapter textually. The phrase tsar ma'on is variously translated as 'distress in the dwelling,' 'an adversary in the dwelling,' or 'a rival in the habitation.' The ma'on likely refers to the sanctuary. The painful irony: Israel will prosper, but Eli's house will watch that prosperity from outside, without sharing in it. The repetition of 'no old man in your house' from verse 31 drives the curse home with doubled force.

33. The cruelty of the judgment is that it is not total annihilation but lingering suffering. Some descendants will survive — but only to serve as living reminders of what was lost. The phrase lekhalot et einekha ('to consume your eyes') means to watch helplessly as the family declines. The phrase la'adiv et nafshekha ('to grieve your soul') describes deep, persistent sorrow. The surviving members of Eli's line will live in perpetual mourning.

34. The sign (ot) is a confirming event that validates the larger prophecy. The deaths of Hophni and Phinehas on a single day will prove that the entire oracle is from God. This is fulfilled in 1 Samuel 4:11 when both sons die in the battle where the ark is captured. The naming of both sons — Chofni u-Finchas — makes the prophecy unmistakably specific. There is no ambiguity and no escape.

35. The kohen ne'eman ('faithful priest') stands in direct contrast to the benei beliyya'al of verse 12. The word ne'eman ('faithful, reliable, trustworthy') shares a root with 'amen' — this priest will be an 'amen' to God's will. The phrase ka'asher bilvavi uvenafshi ('according to what is in My heart and in My mind') means the priest's actions will perfectly mirror God's intentions.

35. The term meshichi ('My anointed one') appears again, connecting back to Hannah's prophecy in verse 10. The faithful priest will walk 'before' (lifnei) the anointed king — a relationship of service and proximity. Historically, this is understood as pointing to Zadok, who replaced Abiathar (the last of Eli's line) under Solomon (1 Kings 2:35).

36. The final image is one of complete reversal: the descendants of the high priest, who once seized the best portions of every sacrifice in Israel, will beg for crumbs. The agorat kesef ('a small coin of silver') and kikkar lechem ('a loaf of bread') represent the smallest possible payment. The plea sefacheni na ('please attach me, assign me') uses a verb that means to join oneself to something as an appendage — not as a leader but as the lowest servant. The priests who fattened themselves on God's offerings will produce descendants who starve without them. The prophecy's arc is complete: from contemptuous plenty to humiliated poverty.

3

Summary: *God calls the boy Samuel by name in the night — three times — while Samuel serves under the aging priest Eli at the Shiloh sanctuary. When Samuel finally recognizes the voice as the LORD's, he receives a devastating oracle: judgment is coming against Eli's house for the corruption of his sons, and no sacrifice will ever atone for it. By morning, Samuel must deliver this word to the man who raised him. The chapter closes with Samuel established throughout Israel as a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the pivotal hinge between the era of the judges and the age of the prophets. The chapter opens with a theological crisis stated in a single devastating line: 'The word of the LORD was rare in those days; prophetic vision was not widespread.' God had, in effect, gone quiet. Into that silence steps a child who does not yet know the LORD — and that is precisely the point. Samuel's three failed recognitions are not comic misunderstanding; they are the portrait of an entire generation that has lost the ability to recognize God's voice. Eli, the priest whose eyes 'had begun to grow dim,' embodies the condition spiritually: the man responsible for mediating God's presence can no longer see clearly, physically or otherwise. The literary architecture is extraordinary — the word chazon ('vision') appears in verse 1 to describe what Israel lacks, and by verse 21 the LORD is again 'revealing Himself' (niglah) at Shiloh. The chapter is the story of how prophetic speech returned to Israel.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase davar YHWH hayah yaqar ('the word of the LORD was rare') uses yaqar, which normally means 'precious, costly, valuable.' We rendered it 'rare' because in context the sense is clearly one of scarcity — prophetic revelation was infrequent — but the Hebrew carries an undertone that what is scarce becomes precious. No single English word captures both meanings. In verse 7, the statement that Samuel 'did not yet know the LORD' (terem yeda et YHWH) is theologically startling — this boy serving in the sanctuary did not have personal experiential knowledge of God. We preserved the directness rather than softening it. The verb niglah ('revealed himself') in verse 21 is the niphal of galah ('to uncover, to expose'), the same root used for exile and nakedness elsewhere — God's self-revelation involves a divine uncovering, a vulnerability in the act of communication, that English 'revealed' only partially captures.*

Connections: *The opening formula — 'the word of the LORD was rare' — creates a deliberate contrast with the book's ending, where Samuel functions as the established channel of divine communication to all Israel. The call narrative follows the pattern of Moses (Exodus 3) and later prophets: divine initiative, human resistance or confusion, commissioning with a specific message. Eli's response in verse 18, 'He is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him,' echoes the resignation theology that appears again in David's mouth during Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 15:26). The judgment against Eli's house for sins 'that he knew about' (yodea) plays on the chapter's knowledge theme — Samuel did not yet 'know' the LORD (v7), but Eli 'knew' about his sons' wickedness and*

failed to act. The verb qara ('to call') appears eleven times in this chapter, structuring the entire narrative around the act of calling — divine calling that requires human response.

1The boy Samuel was serving the LORD under Eli's supervision. The word of the LORD was rare in those days — prophetic vision was not widespread. 2On that particular day, Eli was lying in his usual place. His eyes had begun to grow weak — he could no longer see well. 3The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4The LORD called out to Samuel, and Samuel said, "Here I am." 5He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am — you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you. Go back and lie down." So he went back and lay down. 6The LORD called again: "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am — you called me." Eli replied, "I did not call you, my son. Go back and lie down." 7Samuel did not yet know the LORD — the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8The LORD called Samuel a third time. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am — you called me." Then Eli understood that it was the LORD calling the boy. 9Eli told Samuel, "Go lie down, and if He calls you, say: 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10The LORD came and stood there, and called as before: "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 11The LORD said to Samuel, "I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears ring for everyone who hears of it. 12On that day I will carry out against Eli everything I have spoken against his house — from beginning to end. 13I have declared to him that I am judging his house permanently, because of the guilt that he knew about — his sons were bringing a curse on themselves, and he did not restrain them. 14Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli: the guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or grain offering." 15Samuel lay there until morning, then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the revelation. 16Eli called to Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He answered, "Here I am." 17Eli said, "What did He say to you? Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you severely — and worse — if you conceal anything from me of all that He spoke to you." 18Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Eli said, "He is the LORD. Let Him do what is good in His eyes." 19Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him. He did not let any of Samuel's words fall to the ground. 20 All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, recognized that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. 21The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh through the word of the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb mesharet ('serving, ministering') is a piel participle indicating ongoing, habitual service — Samuel's role was not a one-time event but an established pattern of temple service under Eli's authority. This is the same verb used of Joshua's service to Moses (Exodus 24:13), establishing a master-apprentice relationship.

1. The adjective yaqar applied to davar YHWH ('the word of the LORD') normally means 'precious, costly, rare.' In this context it signals scarcity rather than value — prophetic revelation was infrequent. However, the Hebrew carries both senses simultaneously: what is scarce becomes precious. We chose 'rare' as the primary sense, noting the double meaning here.

1. The phrase ein chazon nifrats ('there was no vision breaking through') uses the niphal of parats ('to break out, to spread, to burst forth'). The image is of prophetic vision as something that should break through like water or light but was being contained or withheld. 'Not widespread' captures the sense that revelation existed but was not flowing freely through Israel's prophetic channels.

2. The detail about Eli's failing eyesight (einav hechelu kehot, 'his eyes had begun to grow dim') operates on two levels. Physically, Eli's advancing age has impaired his vision. But in a chapter about prophetic seeing and the return of chazon ('vision'), the narrator signals that Eli — the man responsible for the sanctuary — can no longer see, literally or figuratively. The verb kehah ('to grow dim, to be faint') is used of failing eyes again in Genesis 27:1 (Isaac) and Deuteronomy 34:7 (where Moses's eyes notably did not grow dim).

2. The phrase bimqomo ('in his place') indicates Eli's customary sleeping location within or adjacent to the sanctuary complex. The narrative carefully establishes where each character is positioned before the night begins.

3. The ner Elohim ('lamp of God') refers to the sanctuary lampstand that burned through the night and was replenished each morning (Exodus 27:20-21, Leviticus 24:2-3). The detail that it 'had not yet gone out' (terem yikhbeh) establishes the time as the pre-dawn hours — the deepest part of night, but with morning approaching. The lamp also functions symbolically: God's light in Israel has not yet been extinguished, though it is burning low.

3. Samuel is sleeping beheikhal YHWH ('in the temple of the LORD'), near the ark of God. This is extraordinary — a boy sleeping in the sacred precinct where the ark rested. His proximity to the ark underscores his special role: he is physically closest to God's dwelling even before he knows the LORD personally. The term heikhal can mean 'temple' or 'palace' and here refers to the tabernacle structure at Shiloh.

4. The verb qara ('to call') appears here for the first of eleven occurrences in this chapter. The LORD calls Samuel by name — not with a title, not through a mediator, but with the personal, direct address that characterizes prophetic commissioning throughout the Hebrew Bible.

4. Samuel's response hinneni ('here I am') is the classic response of availability in the Hebrew Bible — the same word Abraham uses at the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:1), Moses uses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:4), and Isaiah uses at his commissioning (Isaiah 6:8). Samuel uses it correctly, but to the wrong person — he assumes it is Eli calling. The response is right; the direction is wrong.

5. Samuel's immediate physical response — vayyarats ('and he ran') — shows both the urgency of a servant responding to his master and the boy's assumption that a voice in the night must be Eli. The verb ruts ('to run') conveys eagerness, not panic.

5. Eli's denial lo qarati ('I did not call') is straightforward, and his instruction shuv shekhav ('return, lie down') carries no suspicion or irritation at this point. The brevity of the exchange establishes the pattern that will repeat two more times before recognition comes.

6. The phrase vayyosef YHWH qero od ('the LORD continued to call again') uses the construction yasaf + infinitive, indicating repeated action — God persists. The repetition is not divine frustration but patient pursuit of a boy who does not yet have the framework to understand what is happening.

6. Eli's addition of beni ('my son') introduces warmth into the second denial. The term is both conventional address from an elder to a youth and an expression of Eli's genuine paternal relationship with Samuel — this is the boy Hannah entrusted to him.

7. This parenthetical explanation is one of the most theologically loaded sentences in the chapter. The verb yada ('to know') here does not mean Samuel was ignorant of God's existence — he served in the sanctuary. Rather, yada denotes experiential, personal knowledge: Samuel had not yet encountered God directly. The same verb describes intimate knowledge between persons (Genesis 4:1) and covenantal knowledge between God and Israel (Amos 3:2).

7. The niphal verb yiggaleh ('was revealed') — from galah ('to uncover') — describes divine self-disclosure as an act of uncovering. God must remove a barrier for the human to perceive. The word of the LORD does not arrive by human effort; it is revealed by divine initiative. This verse explains Samuel's confusion: he could not recognize God's voice because he had never heard it before.

8. The phrase bashshelishit ('the third time') marks the pattern's climax. Three-fold repetition in Hebrew narrative signals completeness and decisiveness — after the third occurrence, something must change. Compare Balaam's three attempts to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24) and Elijah's three-fold pouring of water (1 Kings 18:34).

8. The verb vayaven ('and he understood, and he discerned') from the root bin indicates perceptive insight — Eli grasps what is happening not through information but through discernment. Despite his physical and spiritual decline, Eli retains enough prophetic awareness to recognize that God is speaking to Samuel. This moment is both Eli's last act of priestly wisdom and his acknowledgment that the prophetic mantle is passing to the boy.

9. Eli's instruction — dabber YHWH ki shomea avdekha ('Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening') — gives Samuel the words to respond to divine address. The imperative dabber ('speak') directed at God is remarkable: a human commanding the Almighty to speak. Yet it is framed by submission — avdekha ('your servant') — making it a request wrapped in obedience. Eli teaches Samuel the posture of a prophet: receptive, available, subordinate.

9. The verb shomea ('listening, hearing') is a participle indicating continuous readiness — not 'your servant heard' (past) or 'will hear' (future) but 'is hearing, is in the act of listening.' The prophetic posture is one of ongoing attentiveness.

9. The poignancy of this moment is layered: Eli, who will receive the judgment Samuel is about to hear, is the one who teaches Samuel how to hear from God. He enables the very communication that will announce his own family's destruction.

10. The verbs vayyavo YHWH vayyityatstsav ('the LORD came and stood') describe a physical, localized divine presence — God does not merely project a voice but arrives and takes a position. The hitpael of yatsav ('to station oneself, to take a stand') implies deliberate positioning. This is a theophany — a divine appearance — not merely an auditory experience.

10. The doubled name Shemuel Shemuel ('Samuel! Samuel!') is the form of urgent, personal divine address used at critical moments: Avraham Avraham (Genesis 22:11), Moshe Moshe (Exodus 3:4), and later Shaul Shaul (Acts 9:4 in the Greek tradition). The doubling signals both intimacy and gravity — God knows this boy by name and is about to entrust him with a terrible message.

10. Samuel follows Eli's script almost exactly but omits the divine name — dabber ki shomea avdekha ('Speak, for your servant is listening') rather than dabber YHWH. Whether this is reverence, nervousness, or the narrator's editorial choice is debated. Some manuscripts and versions include the name; the Masoretic text omits it.

11. The phrase tetsillenah shetei oznav ('both his ears will ring') uses the verb tsalal ('to ring, to tingle, to quiver'). The image is of news so shocking that it produces a physical sensation — a ringing in the ears. This exact phrase recurs only twice more in the Hebrew Bible: in 2 Kings 21:12 (judgment on Jerusalem through Manasseh) and Jeremiah 19:3 (the Babylonian destruction). Each instance announces catastrophic, irreversible divine judgment. By using this formula, God signals to Samuel that what follows is not correction but devastation.

11. The pronoun anokhi ('I myself') rather than the shorter ani ('I') adds weight and formality to the divine announcement. God emphasizes personal agency: this is something I am doing, not something that will merely happen.

12. The phrase hachel vekhalleh ('beginning and finishing') uses two infinitive absolutes to express totality and irreversibility. God will not partially execute the judgment or leave it incomplete. The construction emphasizes that once the process begins, it will reach its full conclusion. This is not a warning that can be averted; it is an announcement of what will be.

12. The verb aqim ('I will raise up, I will establish, I will carry out') from qum is the same verb used for establishing covenants (Genesis 6:18, 17:7). Here it is used for establishing judgment — God's destructive word is as certain as God's creative word. What God speaks, God performs.

13. The phrase ad olam ('forever, permanently') intensifies the judgment beyond a single generation — this is not temporary discipline but permanent removal of Eli's line from the priesthood. The fulfillment comes in stages: Hophni and Phinehas die in chapter 4, and Eli's priestly line is eventually displaced by Zadok under Solomon (1 Kings 2:27).

13. The crux of Eli's guilt is stated precisely: ba'avon asher yada ('because of the guilt that he knew about'). Eli's sin was not ignorance but inaction — he had knowledge (yada, the same verb from verse 7) of his sons' corruption and failed to exercise his authority. The contrast with Samuel is pointed: Samuel did not yet know (yada) the LORD, but Eli knew (yada) about the sin and did nothing.

13. The participle meqalelim ('cursing, bringing a curse on themselves') is a textual crux. The Masoretic Qere reads meqalelim lahem ('cursing for themselves' — bringing a curse upon themselves), while a scribal tradition (tiqqun soferim) suggests the original read meqalelim Elohim ('cursing God'). The scribes may have softened the text to avoid the direct blasphemy of 'cursing God.' We followed the Masoretic reading while noting the tradition.

14. The oath formula im yitkapper ('if it shall be atoned' — used as an emphatic negation, 'it shall certainly not be atoned') employs the hitpael of kaphar ('to cover, to atone'). This is devastating because the entire sacrificial system that Eli's family administered was designed precisely to provide atonement. God declares that the system the priests operate cannot save the priests themselves. The instrument of atonement is powerless against the guilt of those who corrupted it.

14. The pairing of zevach ('sacrifice' — blood offerings) and minchah ('grain offering' — non-blood offerings) covers the full spectrum of the sacrificial system. No category of offering can address this guilt. The phrase ad olam ('forever, in perpetuity') mirrors the same phrase in verse 13 — the judgment is permanent, and so is the impossibility of atonement through ritual means.

14. This verse has profound theological implications: it establishes that sacrifice is not mechanically effective. Ritual without integrity does not produce atonement. This principle recurs in the prophets (Isaiah 1:11-15, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24) and is foundational to the broader biblical theology of worship.

15. The detail that Samuel opened the doors (vayyiftach et daltot beit YHWH) shows him resuming his normal duties — the mundane act of opening the sanctuary doors after receiving the most devastating prophetic oracle. The boy who heard God's voice in the night returns to his routine, now carrying a burden he did not ask for. The juxtaposition of cosmic revelation and daily chores is characteristically biblical.

15. The noun mar'ah ('vision, revelation, appearance') is related to the root ra'ah ('to see') rather than chazah (the root of chazon in verse 1). This subtle vocabulary shift suggests Samuel's experience was more than auditory — it included a visual or perceptual component, consistent with the theophanic language of verse 10 where God 'came and stood.'

15. Samuel's fear (yare, 'was afraid') is not cowardice but the natural response of a boy who must deliver a death sentence to the man who raised him. The narrator does not judge Samuel for his reluctance; he simply notes it.

16. Now it is Eli who calls (vayyiqra) and Samuel who responds hinneni ('here I am'). The reversal from the night's pattern is significant — where God called and Samuel ran to Eli, now Eli calls and Samuel responds to Eli. The verb qara here is the same verb used of God's calling throughout the chapter, and the irony is acute: Eli calls to hear the word that God called to deliver.

16. Eli's address Shemuel beni ('Samuel, my son') combines the personal name with the paternal title, matching verse 6. The tenderness is painful given what Samuel must say next.

17. Eli invokes a formal oath curse: koh ya'aseh lekha Elohim vekhoh yosif ('thus may God do to you and thus may He add'). This is a standard oath formula in the historical books (1 Samuel 14:44, 20:13, 2 Samuel 3:9, 1 Kings 2:23), always invoking unspecified but severe divine punishment for breaking the oath's condition. The threat is left vague intentionally — the imagination fills in what the formula leaves open.

17. The verb tekhached ('to hide, to conceal, to deny') from the root kachad appears twice in this verse, framing Eli's demand. He uses the word davar ('word, thing, matter') three times — mah haddavar ('what is the word'), im tekhached davar ('if you conceal a word'), and kol haddavar ('all the word'). Eli wants the complete, unedited message. He already suspects it concerns his house.

17. Eli's demand reveals his character at its most complex: he is the failed father and the compromised priest, but he is also the man who insists on hearing the full truth of God's judgment against himself. He does not let Samuel protect him from the word.

18. The phrase vayyagged lo et kol haddevarim velo kiched mimmennu ('he told him all the words and did not conceal from him') directly answers Eli's demand from verse 17, using the same key verbs (nagad, 'to tell'; kachad, 'to conceal'). Samuel passes his first prophetic test: faithfully delivering the complete word of God regardless of personal cost.

18. Eli's response — YHWH hu hattov be'einav ya'aseh ('He is the LORD; the good in His eyes let Him do') — is a statement of theological submission that can be read as either profound faith or resigned fatalism. The phrase hattov be'einav ('what is good in His eyes') affirms that God's judgment is inherently just — what God sees as right is right. This same theology appears in David's response during Absalom's revolt: 'Let Him do to me what is good in His eyes' (2 Samuel 15:26). Whether Eli speaks from trust or exhaustion, the words themselves are theologically sound: the LORD's prerogative to act according to His own assessment is absolute.

19. The idiom velo hippil mikkol devarav artsah ('he did not let any of his words fall to the ground') is one of the most vivid images for prophetic reliability in the Hebrew Bible. The verb naphal ('to fall') pictures words as physical objects that either reach their target or drop uselessly to the earth. When God ensures that none of Samuel's words 'fall,' it means every prophetic utterance was fulfilled — nothing Samuel said proved empty or failed. This idiom recurs in 2 Kings 10:10 regarding Elijah's words.

19. The phrase vaYHWH hayah immo ('and the LORD was with him') is the covenant-presence formula used of Joseph (Genesis 39:2, 21), Joshua (Joshua 6:27), and David (1 Samuel 18:14). It signals divine favor expressed through observable success and guidance. For Samuel, God's presence means prophetic accuracy — the ultimate credential for a prophet in Israel (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

20. The phrase middan ve'ad Be'er Shava ('from Dan to Beersheba') is the standard biblical merism for the full extent of Israel's settled territory, from the northernmost city to the southernmost. Its use here indicates that Samuel's prophetic reputation was not local but national in scope.

20. The niphal participle ne'eman ('confirmed, faithful, trustworthy, established') from the root aleph-mem-nun ('to be firm, to be reliable') is a rich term. It describes both God's confirmation of Samuel's role and the observable trustworthiness that Israel witnessed. A ne'eman prophet is one whose words consistently prove true — the same root gives us 'amen' (a declaration of trustworthiness) and 'emunah' (faithfulness). Samuel is not merely called a prophet; he is a proven one.

20. The title navi ('prophet') appears here for the first time in connection with Samuel. The word navi likely derives from a root meaning 'to call' or 'to announce' — one who is called by God to announce God's word. Samuel's commissioning in this chapter fulfills the pattern: God called, Samuel listened, and now all Israel knows him as the one through whom God speaks.

21. The verb vayyosef ('he continued') — the same construction from verses 6 and 8 where God 'continued to call' — now describes ongoing divine self-revelation. The God who persisted in calling a confused boy three times now persists in appearing at Shiloh. The verb's recurrence links the one night to a pattern of continued revelation.

21. The niphal niglah ('he revealed himself') from galah ('to uncover') echoes verse 7, where the word of the LORD had 'not yet been revealed' (terem yiggaleh) to Samuel. The chapter's trajectory is now complete: from 'not yet revealed' (v7) to 'revealed himself' (v21). What was absent is now present; what was closed is now open.

21. The phrase bidvar YHWH ('through the word of the LORD') brings the chapter full circle to verse 1, where davar YHWH ('the word of the LORD') was declared rare. The same construct phrase that opened the chapter in scarcity now closes it in abundance. Shiloh has become what it was meant to be: a place where God speaks and is heard.

4

Summary: *Israel goes to war against the Philistines and suffers a devastating defeat at Ebenezer. The elders fetch the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh, expecting it to guarantee victory, but Israel is routed again — thirty thousand foot soldiers fall. The Ark is captured, Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas are killed, and when the news reaches Shiloh, the ninety-eight-year-old priest Eli falls from his seat, breaks his neck, and dies. Phinehas's wife goes into labor, names her son Ichabod — 'no glory' — and dies declaring that the glory has departed from Israel.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter narrates the single most catastrophic event in Israel's pre-monarchic history: the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by a foreign power. The Ark was the visible throne of God's presence — the place where the LORD sat enthroned between the cherubim. Its loss is not merely a military defeat but a theological crisis: has Israel's God been defeated? Has the covenant failed? The name Ichabod (i-kavod, 'where is the glory?' or 'no glory') becomes the chapter's devastating thesis statement. Yet the narrator is careful to distinguish between the Ark as an object and the God who dwells above it — Israel tried to wield God's presence as a weapon, and the result was not divine defeat but divine judgment on Israel's presumption.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew text of verse 1 presents a well-known textual difficulty: the Masoretic Text begins with Samuel's word going out to all Israel, but the Septuagint (LXX) and some Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts include additional material placing this after the events of chapter 3. We follow the MT while noting the discrepancy. In verse 8, the Philistines refer to 'these mighty gods' (elohim addirim) — the plural is ambiguous since elohim can be singular ('God') or plural ('gods'); the Philistines, as polytheists, hear it as plural. The word kavod ('glory') in Ichabod's naming demands an expanded rendering because its theological weight far exceeds the English word 'glory' — it carries connotations of weight, substance, visible radiance, and the tangible manifestation of God's presence.*

Connections: *The capture of the Ark fulfills the judgment pronounced against Eli's house in chapters 2-3: both sons die 'on a single day' as foretold (2:34). The Philistines' terrified memory of 'the gods who struck Egypt with every kind of plague' (v. 8) connects back to the Exodus narrative — but now the roles are reversed: Israel behaves like Egypt, presuming on God's presence rather than submitting to His will. The Ark's journey into Philistine territory will continue in chapters 5-6, where the LORD demonstrates that His power is not diminished by capture — He devastates the Philistines from within their own temples. The glory that 'departed' from Israel is not destroyed but displaced; it operates independently of Israel's control, which is precisely the theological point.*

1The word of Samuel went out to all Israel. Israel marched out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped near Ebenezer,
while the Philistines camped at Aphek. 2The Philistines drew up their battle lines against Israel. The fighting spread, and
Israel was struck down before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield. 3When the troops
returned to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why did the LORD let us be struck down today before the Philistines? Let us
bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from Shiloh so that it may come among us and deliver us from the grip of our
enemies." 4So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD of Armies, who is
enthroned above the cherubim. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark of the Covenant of God. 5When
the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel raised a tremendous war cry, and the ground shook. 6The
Philistines heard the sound of the war cry and said, "What is this tremendous shouting in the camp of the Hebrews?" When
they learned that the Ark of the LORD had come into the camp, 7the Philistines were terrified. They said, "A god has come
into the camp!" Then they said, "This is disaster for us! Nothing like this has happened before. 8This is disaster for us! Who
can rescue us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck Egypt with every kind of plague in the
wilderness." 9"Be strong! Act like warriors, Philistines, or you will serve the Hebrews as they have served you. Fight like
warriors and engage!" 10The Philistines fought, and Israel was crushed. Every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was
immense — thirty thousand Israelite foot soldiers fell. 11The Ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and
Phinehas, were killed. 12A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battle line and reached Shiloh that same day, his
clothes torn and dirt on his head. 13When he arrived, there was Eli, sitting on his chair beside the road, watching — because
his heart was trembling over the Ark of God. 14When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he asked, "What is this uproar?" The
man hurried over and reported to Eli. 15Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were fixed — he could not see. 16The man
said to Eli, "I am the one who came from the battle line — I fled from the fighting today." Eli said, "What happened, my
son?" 17The messenger answered, "Israel fled before the Philistines. There has been a massive slaughter among the troops.
Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead. And the Ark of God has been captured." 18When he mentioned the Ark of
God, Eli fell backward off his chair beside the gate. His neck broke and he died, because the man was old and heavy. He had
judged Israel for forty years. 19His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time. When she heard
the report that the Ark of God was captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she collapsed and went
into labor, because her contractions overwhelmed her. 20As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Do not be afraid
— you have given birth to a son!" But she did not respond, and she paid no attention. 21She named the boy Ichabod, saying,
"The glory has gone into exile from Israel" — because the Ark of God was captured, and because of her father-in-law and her
husband. 22She said, "The glory has gone into exile from Israel, because the Ark of God has been captured."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening clause vayyehi devar-Shemu'el lekhol-Yisra'el ('the word of Samuel came to all Israel') appears to connect to Samuel's prophetic authority established in chapter 3, yet the narrative immediately shifts to a battle in which Samuel plays no role. The Septuagint and 4QSam-a place this clause differently, suggesting early scribal uncertainty about its placement. The MT as it stands creates an ironic juxtaposition: Samuel's word has authority, but Israel does not consult him before going to war.

1. Ebenezer (Even ha-Ezer, 'stone of help') is named proleptically — the name will not be given until 7:12 when Samuel raises a memorial stone after a future victory. The narrator uses the later name for the reader's orientation. Aphek was a strategic Philistine staging ground in the coastal plain, controlling the route into the central hill country.

2. The verb vayyinnagef ('was struck down') is a passive form of nagaf, frequently used for divine judgment — the same root describes the plagues that 'struck' Egypt (Exodus 12:23, 27). The narrator's word choice hints that this defeat is not merely military misfortune but carries a theological dimension. Israel is struck as Egypt once was.

2. The phrase ba-ma'arakhah ba-sadeh ('in the battle line, in the field') indicates open-field combat — Israel was defeated in conventional warfare before the idea of fetching the Ark arose. Four thousand casualties in a single engagement would have been catastrophic for a tribal militia.

3. The elders correctly attribute the defeat to the LORD (negafanu YHWH, 'the LORD struck us') — they recognize divine agency. But their solution bypasses the prophetic channel entirely. They do not ask Samuel, do not inquire of God, and do not consider repentance. Their plan treats the Ark as an instrument they can control.

3. The phrase aron berit-YHWH ('Ark of the Covenant of the LORD') uses the full covenantal title — the Ark represents the binding agreement between God and Israel. Yet the elders treat it as a military asset rather than a covenant symbol. The verb yasha ('to save, deliver') applied to the Ark rather than to God reveals the displacement: they expect the container to do what only its Occupant can do.

4. The divine title YHWH Tseva'ot ('the LORD of Armies') appears here for the first time in the narrative connected to the Ark — it is a military title emphasizing God's sovereignty over both heavenly and earthly forces. The phrase yoshev ha-keruvim ('who sits/is enthroned upon the cherubim') describes the Ark's lid as God's throne — the two golden cherubim on the mercy seat formed the base of an invisible throne. God's presence was understood to dwell in the space above and between them.

4. The mention of Hophni and Phinehas is ominous: the reader already knows from 2:34 that their death on a single day will be the sign confirming judgment on Eli's house. Their presence with the Ark marks them for the fulfillment about to unfold. The narrator names them almost as a death notice in advance.

5. The teru'ah gedolah ('great shout') is a ritual war cry — the same term used for the shout that toppled Jericho's walls (Joshua 6:5, 20). Israel is reenacting the pattern of holy war: the Ark arrives, the war cry goes up, victory follows. But here the pattern will fail because the conditions of holy war — obedience, divine commission, prophetic guidance — have not been met.

5. The phrase vattehem ha-arets ('the earth resounded/shook') conveys the physical force of the sound — tens of thousands shouting in unison. The verb hamah means to murmur, roar, or reverberate. The ground itself trembled with the noise, creating an impression of overwhelming power. The irony is devastating: the sound is enormous, but the substance behind it is hollow.

6. The Philistines call the Israelites ivrim ('Hebrews') — the outsider's term for Israel, used throughout the Philistine encounters in 1 Samuel. The word ivri may derive from the root avar ('to cross over') or from the ancestor Eber. In the Philistine mouth it functions as an ethnic label without covenant connotations — they see Israel as a neighboring people, not as God's covenant partner.

6. The Philistines' intelligence is sharp: they correctly identify the shout as connected to the Ark's arrival. They understand the military-religious significance even if they misinterpret the theology behind it. Their fear in the next verse shows they know the stories of Israel's God.

7. The Philistine exclamation ba elohim el-ha-machaneh ('a god/God has come into the camp') uses elohim ambiguously — the Philistines, as polytheists, likely understand it as 'a god' or 'divine power' rather than as Israel's specific covenant God. The narrator lets their pagan perspective stand without correction.

7. The phrase etmol shilshom (literally 'yesterday, three days ago') is an idiom meaning 'previously, in the past, before now.' The Philistines recognize this battle has changed in character — a supernatural element has entered. Their fear is genuine and their assessment is technically correct: God's Ark is present. What they cannot know is that the Ark's presence does not guarantee God's fighting on Israel's behalf.

8. The Philistines use ha-elohim ha-addirim ha-elleh ('these mighty gods') — the plural adjective addirim ('mighty, majestic') paired with elohim reveals they interpret Israel's God through their own polytheistic framework. They imagine multiple deities. The narrator does not correct them; the irony speaks for itself.

8. The phrase ha-makkim et-Mitsrayim bekhol-makkah ba-midbar ('the ones striking Egypt with every plague in the wilderness') shows the Philistines know the Exodus tradition — but garble it. The plagues struck Egypt in Egypt, not 'in the wilderness.' The Philistines have heard the stories but conflate the Egyptian plagues with wilderness events. Their theology is wrong, but their fear of Israel's God is well-founded — just not for the reasons they think in this particular battle.

8. The word makkah ('blow, plague, strike') shares the root nakah ('to strike') — the Philistines remember God as the one who strikes, which is precisely what makes the Ark's presence terrifying to them.

9. The Philistine commanders rally their troops with hitchazzqu vihyu la-anashim ('be strong and be men') — the same exhortation vocabulary used in Israel's own holy war traditions (Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:6). The verb avad ('to serve') carries the double meaning of military subjugation and slavery: 'lest you serve the Hebrews as they served you.' The Philistines had dominated Israel, and the fear of role reversal drives their courage.

9. The repetition vihyitem la-anashim venilchamtem ('be men and fight') hammers the point: fear of the gods is real, but the alternative — servitude — is worse. The Philistine response to theological terror is pragmatic: fight anyway. Remarkably, this desperate courage will be rewarded — not because the Philistines are righteous, but because God is not fighting for Israel this day.

10. The verb vayyinnagef ('was struck down') repeats from verse 2, but now the scale is catastrophic: sheloshim elef ragli ('thirty thousand foot soldiers') — nearly eight times the first defeat. The phrase vayyanusu ish le-ohalav ('each man fled to his tent') signals total rout: the army dissolves, every

soldier running for survival. 'To his tent' is an idiom for total military dissolution — the army ceases to exist as a fighting force.

10. The narrator calls this ha-makkah gedolah me'od ('a very great blow/slaughter') — the same root makkah the Philistines used to describe God's plagues on Egypt (v. 8). The linguistic echo is bitter: the plague-blow now falls on Israel rather than on their enemies.

11. The verb nilqach ('was taken, was captured') is a passive form of laqach — the Ark did not fall; it was seized. The passive voice leaves the agent ambiguous: the Philistines took it, but God permitted it. This ambiguity is theologically essential — the Ark's capture is simultaneously a Philistine military act and a divine judgment on Israel.

11. The deaths of Hophni and Phinehas fulfill 2:34 precisely. The narrator reports their deaths with the same compression used for Elimelech's death in Ruth 1:3 — brevity as a literary expression of catastrophe. No details of how they died, no last words, no burial. They simply metu ('died').

12. The Benjaminite runner is an unnamed figure whose sole function is to carry the worst news in Israel's memory. His appearance tells the story before his mouth opens: maddav qeru'im va-adamah al-rosho ('his garments torn and earth upon his head') — both are conventional signs of mourning and catastrophe. Torn clothing signifies that the fabric of normal life has been ripped apart; earth on the head symbolizes identification with death and the grave.

12. The phrase bayyom hahu ('that same day') emphasizes speed — the distance from the Aphek/Ebenezer battlefield to Shiloh is roughly twenty miles through hill country. The runner covered this distance in a single day, driven by the urgency of the disaster. His tribal identity as a Benjaminite is noted — Benjamin's territory lay between the battlefield and Shiloh.

13. The scene of Eli is deeply affecting: yoshev al-ha-kisse yad derekh metsappeh ('sitting on a seat beside the road, watching'). The old priest, nearly blind (3:2), sits by the roadside straining for news. The verb tsaphah ('to watch, look out, keep watch') implies anxious vigilance — Eli is a watchman who can barely see.

13. The phrase ki-hayah libbo chared al aron ha-Elohim ('because his heart was trembling concerning the Ark of God') reveals Eli's priorities: despite his failures, his deepest anxiety is for God's Ark, not for his sons. The verb charad ('to tremble, to be anxious, to quake') describes the visceral, physical dread of one who knows that something irreversible may be happening. Eli's trembling heart anticipates the news that will kill him.

14. Eli hears before he sees — his failing eyes cannot make out the runner, but his ears catch the qol ha-tse'aqah ('sound of the outcry'). The word tse'aqah is not ordinary noise; it is the cry of distress, the same word used for Israel's anguished cry in Egypt (Exodus 3:7). The entire city of Shiloh erupts in wailing as the news spreads, and this collective cry reaches Eli before the messenger does.

14. The word hamon ('tumult, uproar, crowd noise') describes the confused, roaring sound of a community in crisis. Eli's question meh qol hehamon hazzeh ('what is this uproar?') parallels the Philistines' question in verse 6 — both sides hear sounds they cannot immediately interpret, but the meanings are reversed: the Philistines heard a shout of confidence, Eli hears a cry of devastation.

15. The phrase ve'einav qamu (literally 'and his eyes had stood still, were fixed') describes eyes that no longer function — they are set, rigid, staring without sight. This is a more severe condition than the dimness mentioned in 3:2; Eli is now effectively blind. The physical detail serves a literary purpose: the man responsible for watching over God's house in Israel can no longer see. His physical blindness mirrors the spiritual blindness that allowed his sons to corrupt the priesthood.

15. At ninety-eight, Eli has served as priest and judge for decades. His age underscores both his long tenure and his physical frailty — the coming fall will be fatal precisely because his body cannot absorb the shock.

16. The runner identifies himself twice: ani habba min-ha-ma'arakhah ('I am the one coming from the battle line') and va-ani min-ha-ma'arakhah nasti hayyom ('and I fled from the battle line today'). The double identification and the admission of flight (nasti, 'I fled') convey the breathless urgency and perhaps shame of a survivor reporting total defeat.

16. Eli's response meh-hayah ha-davar beni ('what happened, my son?') is painfully tender. He addresses the stranger as beni ('my son') — the same term he used for his own sons. The question ha-davar ('the thing, the matter, the word') is open-ended: 'What has the word been?' Eli asks for the report while dreading it.

17. The messenger is called ha-mevasser ('the bearer of news') — a word that can mean either good or bad tidings depending on context. In 2 Samuel 18:19-33, the same term delivers news of Absalom's death to David. Here the mevasser brings only devastation.

17. The four-part structure is rhetorically precise: nas Yisra'el ('Israel fled'), maggefah gedolah ('a great plague/slaughter'), shenei vanekha metu ('your two sons died'), va-aron ha-Elohim nilqachah ('the Ark of God was captured'). Each vegam ('and also') raises the stakes. The word maggefah ('plague, blow, slaughter') echoes the plague language of verses 8 and 10, binding the entire chapter together with the vocabulary of divine striking.

18. The verb vayyippol ('he fell') from the root nafal describes an uncontrolled collapse — Eli topples backward (achorannit) off the chair beside the gate. The mafrekhet ('neck, cervical vertebrae') broke on impact. The detail ki-zaqen ha-ish vekhaved ('because the man was old and heavy') explains why the fall was fatal — an elderly, heavy man falling backward from a seated height suffers an impact that younger bones might survive.

18. The notice vehu shafat et-Yisra'el arba'im shanah ('and he had judged Israel forty years') serves as Eli's obituary — the conventional formula for a judge's tenure (cf. Judges 3:11, 5:31, 8:28). Forty years is a generation. Despite his failures with his sons, Eli served Israel for a full generational span.

19. Three blows strike Phinehas's wife simultaneously: the Ark's capture, her father-in-law's death, and her husband's death. The verb vattikhra ('she crouched, collapsed, bowed down') describes her body folding under the combined weight of grief and labor. The phrase ki-nehefkhu aleiha tsireiha ('because her labor pains turned upon her') uses the verb hafakh ('to turn, to overturn') — her contractions 'turned against her,' suggesting labor that

is violent and premature, triggered by shock.

19. The narrator lists the Ark first among the causes of her distress, maintaining the chapter's pattern: the Ark's fate is the supreme catastrophe, surpassing even personal bereavement.

20. The attending women (ha-nitsavot aleiha, 'the ones standing over her') offer the conventional consolation for a woman in dangerous labor: al-tir'i ki ven yaladt ('do not fear, for you have borne a son'). A son was the highest blessing — an heir, a future, a name preserved. But Phinehas's wife is beyond consolation.

20. The double negative velo antah velo satah libbah ('she did not answer and her heart did not attend') describes a woman who has retreated beyond human communication. The verb satah (from shit, 'to set, place, direct') means she did not set her heart toward the news — the birth of a son, normally the supreme joy, registers as nothing against the loss of the Ark. Her response mirrors Eli's: the Ark's fate eclipses personal loss.

21. The verb galah ('to depart, to go into exile, to be stripped bare') is the primary Hebrew verb for exile — it describes the forced removal of a population from its homeland. Using it for the kavod personifies God's glory as an exile, a captive carried away from its rightful place. This verb choice transforms the Ark's capture from a military event into a theological exile.

21. The narrator maintains the chapter's hierarchy of grief: the Ark is listed first (el-hillaqach aron ha-Elohim), then her father-in-law, then her husband. Even in dying, this woman's priorities mirror Eli's — the loss of God's presence outweighs the loss of family.

22. The repetition of galah kavod mi-Yisra'el ('the glory has gone into exile from Israel') from verse 21 functions as a refrain — a dying woman's last words fixed on a single, overwhelming reality. The simplification from verse 21 (which mentioned three causes) to verse 22 (which mentions only the Ark) reveals her theological clarity: the Ark's loss is the essential catastrophe. Everything else — her husband, her father-in-law, even the thirty thousand dead — is secondary to the departure of God's presence.

22. The chapter ends abruptly after her words. There is no transition, no narrator's comment, no resolution. The reader is left with the raw force of her declaration hanging in the air. The next chapter will show that the kavod is not destroyed — only displaced — but the narrator allows this chapter to close in total darkness.

5

Summary: *The Philistines capture the Ark of God and place it in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod. Dagon falls face-down before the Ark — twice — and the second time his head and hands break off at the threshold. The LORD strikes Ashdod with tumors, then Gath, then Ekron, as the Philistines desperately shuttle the Ark from city to city, unable to keep it and unable to escape its power.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter records one of the most theologically striking episodes in the Hebrew Bible: God fights entirely without Israel. The Ark has been captured, Israel is defeated and leaderless, and yet the LORD wages war against Philistia's chief deity and its cities single-handedly. Dagon's collapse before the Ark is not accidental — the verb 'fallen on his face' (nofel al panav) is the posture of worship, as if the idol is compelled to prostrate before the God it was supposed to have conquered. The second fall shatters Dagon, leaving only the 'fish-trunk' (dagon), his hands and head severed on the threshold — the deity is dismembered in his own house. The Philistines learn what Israel forgot in chapter 4: the Ark is not a talisman to be wielded but the throne of a God who acts on His own terms.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew word for the affliction in this chapter is debated. The Ketiv (written text) reads ofalim (meaning 'tumors, swellings'), while the Qere (reading tradition) substitutes techorim ('hemorrhoids' or 'tumors in the rectal area'). The LXX adds that mice ravaged the land, a detail absent from the MT but reflected in the guilt offering of golden mice in chapter 6. We render the term as 'tumors' — broad enough to cover the semantic range without importing a single medical diagnosis. The word miftan ('threshold') in verse 5 generates an etiological note about why Dagon's priests leap over the threshold rather than step on it — the narrator explains a custom still observed 'to this day,' which grounds the story in ongoing Philistine practice.*

Connections: *The humiliation of Dagon echoes the plagues of Egypt: once again a foreign god is exposed as powerless before the LORD (Exodus 12:12, Numbers 33:4). The Ark's journey through Philistine cities — Ashdod, Gath, Ekron — mirrors a plague narrative in miniature, with each city suffering until it sends the Ark away, just as Pharaoh suffered until he released Israel. The severing of Dagon's hands and head on the threshold inverts the Philistine victory of chapter 4; the captured 'trophy' destroys the captor's god. The Ekronites' cry 'They have brought the Ark of the God of Israel around to us to kill us' echoes the Egyptian cry during the tenth plague (Exodus 12:33).*

God's power does not depend on Israel's faithfulness, army, or even awareness — He acts to defend His own name.

1The Philistines captured the Ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2The Philistines took the Ark of God and
brought it into the temple of Dagon, and they set it beside Dagon. 3When the people of Ashdod rose early the next morning,
Dagon had fallen face-down on the ground before the Ark of the LORD. They picked Dagon up and put him back in his place.
4When they rose early the next morning, Dagon had again fallen face-down on the ground before the Ark of the LORD. The
head of Dagon and both palms of his hands had been cut off on the threshold — only the trunk of Dagon remained. 5This is
why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the temple of Dagon do not step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod — to this
day. 6The hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod. He devastated them and struck them with tumors — both
Ashdod and its surrounding territory. 7When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The Ark of the God of
Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh against us and against Dagon our god." 8They sent word and gathered
all the tyrants of the Philistines to them and asked, "What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?" They answered,
"Let the Ark of the God of Israel be moved to Gath." So they moved the Ark of the God of Israel there. 9After they moved it
there, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic. He struck the men of the city, from the least to
the greatest, and tumors broke out on them. 10So they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. But when the Ark of God arrived at
Ekron, the Ekronites cried out, "They have brought the Ark of the God of Israel around to us to kill us and our people!" 11The
y sent word and gathered all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the Ark of the God of Israel away — let it return to
its own place so that it does not kill us and our people!" For a death-panic had gripped the entire city; the hand of God was
very heavy there. 12The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The narrative opens without transition from Israel's catastrophe in chapter 4. The Ark of God — the throne of the LORD's presence — is now in Philistine hands. The place name Ebenezer ('stone of help') carries bitter irony: the place named for divine help has become the site of divine absence. Ashdod was one of the five principal Philistine cities and home to a major temple of Dagon.
2. The verb yatstsigu ('they set, stationed') implies deliberate placement as a trophy. In ancient warfare, capturing an enemy's cult object and displaying it in your own temple was a declaration that your god had defeated theirs. The Philistines are performing standard victory theology — and the narrator lets the reader feel the full weight of the insult before God responds.
2. Beit Dagon ('house/temple of Dagon') — Dagon was the chief deity of the Philistine pentapolis, likely a grain or fertility god. The name may derive from dagan ('grain') rather than dag ('fish'), though later tradition associated him with a fish-form.
3. The phrase nofel lefanav artsah lifnei aron YHWH ('fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of the LORD') uses the vocabulary of worship prostration. The narrator presents the scene with theological precision: the conquered idol lies face-down before the Ark — the posture of submission, not accident. The people of Ashdod restore Dagon to his place, attempting to reassert their theology, but the next morning will prove the first fall was no coincidence.
3. Note the shift from 'Ark of God' (aron ha'Elohim) in verses 1-2 to 'Ark of the LORD' (aron YHWH) here. When God acts in power, the narrator uses the covenant name YHWH.
4. The verb kerutot ('cut off') is a passive participle suggesting deliberate severance, not accidental breakage. The head and palms are specifically named because they represent a deity's two essential functions: the head for wisdom and authority, the hands for power and action. Without them, the idol is literally incapable of anything — it can neither think nor do.
4. The phrase raq dagon nish'ar alav ('only the dagon remained on/of him') is ambiguous. Dagon here may refer to the trunk/torso of the idol, or it may be a wordplay on dag ('fish'), suggesting a fish-shaped lower body. The KJV renders 'the stump of Dagon'; we use 'trunk' to convey the torso without importing the fish interpretation, which remains uncertain.
5. This etiological note explains a living Philistine custom: priests and worshipers leap over the threshold rather than step on it. The narrator ties a known practice to Dagon's humiliation — every time a Philistine avoids that threshold, they unknowingly reenact their god's defeat. The phrase ad hayom hazeh ('to this day') anchors the narrative in the audience's observable reality.
5. The verb yidrekhu ('they tread, step on') from the root d-r-k can also mean 'to march upon' or 'to dominate.' The priests will not even place their feet on the spot where their god was dismembered — they treat the threshold as contaminated ground, though the narrator implies the contamination is Dagon's shame, not holiness.

6. The phrase vattichbad yad YHWH ('the hand of the LORD was heavy') echoes Exodus 9:3 where God's hand strikes Egypt's livestock. The verb kavad ('to be heavy') is the same root as kavod ('glory, weight'). The hand that carries glory also carries judgment — the weight of divine presence is unbearable for those who oppose it.

6. The Ketiv reads ba'ofalim (, 'tumors, swellings'), while the Qere tradition substitutes batechorim (, 'hemorrhoids' or 'tumors of the lower body'). The LXX adds a detail about mice devastating the land. We render as 'tumors' following the Ketiv, which has the broadest semantic range.

7. The Ashdodites reach the correct theological conclusion: the God of Israel is actively hostile to them and to Dagon. The phrase qashtah yado ('His hand is harsh/hard') uses the same root (q-sh-h) applied to Pharaoh's hardened heart. The Philistines recognize what Pharaoh resisted — this God's power is real and directed. Yet their response is not repentance but relocation: they will try to move the problem rather than submit to the God behind it.

8. The seranim (, 'rulers, lords') are the governors of the five Philistine cities — a political structure without parallel in Israel. The word seren may be related to the Greek tyrannos, reflecting Aegean origins of the Philistines. The decision to send the Ark to Gath is collective but futile: they treat the Ark like a political problem to be redistributed rather than a divine presence to be reckoned with.

8. The threefold repetition of aron Elohei Yisrael ('Ark of the God of Israel') in a single verse is emphatic — the narrator forces the reader to hear the full title again and again, as if the Philistines cannot stop talking about this object they cannot control.

9. The mehumah gedolah me'od ('very great panic/confusion') is the same word used for the divine terror God sends against Israel's enemies in holy war (cf. Deuteronomy 7:23, Joshua 10:10, 1 Samuel 7:10). This is the language of YHWH as warrior — the same God who routed Pharaoh's army now routs a Philistine city. God is waging holy war without Israel on the battlefield.

9. The phrase miqqaton ve'ad gadol ('from the least to the greatest') indicates the plague is total — no social class provides immunity. The Qere reading of vayyisateru ('they broke out') suggests the tumors erupted visibly and painfully.

10. The Ekronites' reaction is immediate terror — they cry out (vayyiz'aqu) before the plague even begins. The verb za'aq is the same cry-of-distress used for Israel's outcry in Egypt (Exodus 2:23). The irony is devastating: the Philistines now cry out exactly as the Israelites once did, but there is no Moses to intercede for them, and the source of their suffering is the very God who delivered Israel.

10. The accusation hesevu elai ('they have brought around to me') uses the first person singular — the individual Ekronite voice breaks through the collective, expressing personal dread. This god kills wherever He goes, and they are next in line.

11. The phrase mehumat mavet ('death-panic, deadly confusion') combines the holy-war terror of mehumah with mavet ('death') — this is not mere illness but a city-wide encounter with mortality. The Philistine rulers are now begged to act, not consulted. The polite deliberation of verse 8 ('What should we do?') has been replaced by desperate imperative: 'Send it away!'

11. The final clause kavdah me'od yad ha'Elohim sham ('the hand of God was very heavy there') echoes verse 6 but escalates. The hand grows heavier with each city — Ashdod suffered, Gath suffered, and now Ekron faces death itself. The plague intensifies as the Philistines persist in keeping what does not belong to them.

12. The verse divides the population into two groups: the dead and the tumor-stricken. There is no third category of the unaffected — God's judgment reaches every person in the city. The brevity of this verse carries narrative force: no elaboration is needed. The facts speak.

12. The final phrase vatta'al shav'at ha'ir hashamayim ('and the cry of the city went up to heaven') echoes the cry of Sodom reaching God (Genesis 18:20-21) and Israel's cry in Egypt (Exodus 2:23). But here the irony is inverted: these are the oppressors crying out, not the oppressed. The structure of Exodus is playing out in miniature — with the Philistines in Pharaoh's role.

6

Summary: *After seven months in Philistine territory, the Ark of God is returned to Israel. Philistine priests and diviners prescribe a guilt offering of five golden tumors and five golden mice — one for each Philistine lord — and devise a test using two nursing cows pulling a new cart. If the cows walk straight to Beth-shemesh against their instinct, the plague was from Israel's God. The cows go directly, confirming divine causation. The people of Beth-shemesh celebrate with sacrifices, but some look into the Ark and are struck down. The chapter ends with the terrified Israelites sending the Ark on to Kiriath-jearim.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most theologically revealing episodes involving pagans in the Hebrew Bible. The Philistine priests instinctively reach for concepts that parallel Israelite sacrificial theology: they prescribe an asham (guilt offering), they speak of 'giving glory' (kavod) to Israel's God, and they reference the Exodus as a cautionary tale. Their theology is imperfect but real — they know enough to fear, enough to attempt atonement, and enough to design an empirical test that respects divine sovereignty. The cow-test is remarkable for its intellectual honesty: the Philistines*

build in a falsification condition. If the cows turn back to their calves, the plague was coincidence. They are willing to be wrong. Meanwhile, the Israelites at Beth-shemesh, who should know better, treat the Ark with less reverence than the Philistines did.

Translation Friction: *The number struck at Beth-shemesh in verse 19 varies dramatically across manuscripts: the Masoretic Text reads 'seventy men, fifty thousand men' — a syntactically awkward combination that most scholars consider a textual corruption (Beth-shemesh was far too small for fifty thousand inhabitants). We render the number as the MT preserves it but note the difficulty. The word ophalim (tumors/growths) in verses 4-5 has traditionally been rendered 'emerods' (hemorrhoids), but the Septuagint and the connection with mice suggest bubonic swellings — plague tumors. The verb hishqif (to look into/at) in verse 19 is debated: did the men of Beth-shemesh look inside the Ark or merely gaze at it? The preposition be- can support either reading.*

Connections: *The Philistines' reference to the Exodus (v6) places this episode in direct conversation with Exodus 7-14 — foreign rulers who 'hardened their hearts' and paid the price. The guilt offering (asham) prescribed by pagan priests anticipates the same term's technical use in Leviticus 5-7, showing that the instinct for reparation-atonement transcends Israel's formal system. The Ark's journey from Philistia to Beth-shemesh to Kiriath-jearim traces a path that will not end until David brings it to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6 — another journey marked by both celebration and sudden death. The striking of the Beth-shemesh men echoes Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:7): proximity to God's holiness without proper reverence is lethal regardless of whether the offenders are Israelite or Philistine.*

1 The Ark of the LORD was in Philistine territory for seven months. 2 The Philistines summoned their priests and diviners and
asked, "What should we do with the Ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place." 3 They said, "If you
are sending back the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty. You must return a guilt offering to him. Then you
will be healed, and you will understand why his hand has not turned away from you." 4 They asked, "What guilt offering
should we return to him?" They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice — matching the number of the
Philistine lords — because the same plague struck all of you and your lords." 5 Make images of your tumors and images of
your mice that are destroying the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you, from your
gods, and from your land. 6 Why would you harden your hearts the way Egypt and Pharaoh hardened theirs? After he dealt
harshly with them, they sent the people away and they left. 7 "Now then, take and prepare one new cart and two nursing cows
that have never worn a yoke. Hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves away from them back to the pen. 8 Then take the
Ark of the LORD and place it on the cart. Put the golden objects that you are returning to him as a guilt offering in a chest
beside it. Send it off and let it go. 9 Then watch: if it goes up the road toward its own territory, to Beth-shemesh, then he is the
one who brought this great disaster on us. But if not, we will know that it was not his hand that struck us — it was just
something that happened to us by chance." 10 The men did exactly that. They took two nursing cows and hitched them to the
cart, and they penned up their calves at home. 11 They placed the Ark of the LORD on the cart, along with the chest
containing the golden mice and the images of their tumors. 12 The cows went straight down the road toward Beth-shemesh.
They kept to one highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn right or left. The Philistine lords walked behind them all the
way to the border of Beth-shemesh. 13 The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley. They looked up, saw
the Ark, and rejoiced at the sight. 14 The cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stopped there beside a large
stone. They split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. 15 The Levites took down the Ark
of the LORD and the chest that was with it, which held the golden objects, and set them on the large stone. The men of
Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD that day. 16 The five Philistine lords watched all of
this and returned to Ekron that same day. 17 These are the golden tumors the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the
LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron — 18 The golden mice matched the
number of all the Philistine cities belonging to the five lords — from fortified city to unwalled village. The great stone on
which they set the Ark of the LORD remains to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite. 19 He struck down some of
the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the LORD. He struck down seventy men — fifty thousand men
— and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a terrible blow. 20 The men of Beth-shemesh said,

"Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? And to whom will he go up from us?" 21They sent messengers to the people of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your city."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The narrative resumes directly from chapter 5, where the Ark caused devastation in Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. The phrase bisedeh Felishtim ('in the field/territory of the Philistines') uses sadeh in its broad sense of 'open country, territory' — the Ark was not confined to one city but had been passed from place to place during these seven months. Seven months is long enough to confirm that the plagues were not coincidence but pattern.
2. The Philistines consult kohanim (priests) and qosemim (diviners) — their own religious specialists. The term qosem ('diviner') is elsewhere condemned in Israelite law (Deuteronomy 18:10), but here the narrative simply records Philistine practice without editorial comment. The question mah-na'aseh ('what should we do?') reveals genuine theological anxiety — they recognize they are dealing with a power they do not control. The phrase neshallechenu limqomo ('we shall send it to its place') already assumes the Ark must be returned; the only question is protocol.
3. The infinitive absolute hashev tashivu ('returning you must return') conveys emphatic obligation — this is not optional. The term asham ('guilt offering') is striking in a Philistine context; it is the technical term for the reparation offering in Leviticus 5:14-6:7, prescribed when someone trespasses against sancta (holy things). The Philistines have, in effect, violated sacred property. The conditional 'then you will be healed' (az teraf'u) links atonement to physical healing — a theology of causation that runs through the Hebrew Bible.
4. The ophalim (rendered 'tumors'; KJV 'emerods') are swellings or growths — likely bubonic swellings given the association with mice/rats. The Septuagint makes the rodent-plague connection more explicit. Five of each matches the five Philistine city-lords (sarnim, a non-Semitic title unique to Philistine rulers — possibly related to Greek tyrannos). The golden replicas function as sympathetic magic: by crafting images of the affliction and sending them away with the Ark, the Philistines hope to send the plague itself away. The logic is: represent the disease, offer it to the offended deity, and the disease departs with the offering.
5. The verb netattem kavod ('give glory/weight') uses the same kavod that described God's presence in the Ark (the 'glory' departed Israel in 4:21-22). The Philistines are being asked to return the honor they stripped from Israel's God by capturing his Ark. The phrase ulai yaqel et-yado ('perhaps he will lighten his hand') uses the root q-l-l, the opposite of k-v-d ('heavy/glory') — a wordplay: give him weight/glory, and perhaps he will make his hand light. The triad 'from you, from your gods, from your land' indicates total systemic judgment — personal, religious, and agricultural.
6. The verb tekabbedu ('you harden') shares the root k-v-d with kavod ('glory') from verse 5 — a sustained wordplay throughout the Philistine priests' speech: give God kavod (weight/glory) rather than giving your hearts koved (heaviness/hardness). The Philistines' knowledge of the Exodus (ka'asher kibbdu Mitsrayim uFar'oh et-libbam) demonstrates that the Exodus story had spread beyond Israel's borders as a cautionary tale. The verb hit'allel ('dealt harshly, made sport of') is the same verb used in Exodus 10:2 where God says he 'made a mockery of' Egypt.
7. Every detail of the test is designed to stack the odds against a divine explanation. The cart is new (chadashah) — never used for any purpose, eliminating the possibility that the cows know the route from habit. The cows are nursing mothers (parot alot, literally 'suckling cows') whose calves will be taken away — every instinct will pull them back toward their young, not forward toward Israel. They have never worn a yoke (lo alah aleihem ol) — they are untrained, unbroken animals who have no habit of pulling a cart in any direction. If these cows walk straight to Beth-shemesh, it cannot be explained naturally.
8. The golden offerings are placed in an argaz ('chest, coffer') beside the Ark — not inside it. The Philistines maintain a physical distinction between the Ark itself and their offering. The word argaz appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, suggesting it may be a Philistine loanword. The instruction veshilachtem oto vehalakh ('send it and it will go') is deliberately open-ended — no driver, no guide. The Ark's journey will be entirely self-directed, or rather, divinely directed.
9. Beth-shemesh ('House of the Sun') was an Israelite town on the border with Philistia, in the Sorek Valley — the nearest Israelite settlement. The phrase derekh gevulo ('the road toward its territory') treats the Ark as having a home territory it might seek. The word miqreh ('chance, accident') from the root q-r-h ('to happen, to encounter') is the Philistines' null hypothesis — if the test fails, the plagues were random events, not divine punishment. This is one of the few places in the Hebrew Bible where characters explicitly consider a non-theological explanation for events.
10. The verb kalu ('shut up, confined') emphasizes the deliberate separation of mothers from calves — maximizing the pull of instinct against the direction the Ark needs to travel. The narrative's spare, factual style — 'the men did so' (vayya'asu ha'anashim ken) — heightens the tension. Every element of the test is now in place.
11. The word techoreihem ('their tumors') uses a different form than ophalim in verse 4 — techorim is the Qere (read) form while ophalim is the Ketiv (written) form. Both refer to the same swellings. The Masoretes apparently considered techorim the more appropriate term for public reading. The careful arrangement — Ark on the cart, chest beside it — mirrors the instructions given in verse 8.
12. The verb vayisharnah (from y-sh-r, 'to be straight, direct') is the key word — these cows went 'straight' against every natural impulse. The infinitive absolute halokh vega'o ('going and lowing') captures simultaneous action: they walked and moaned at the same time — driven forward by divine compulsion while crying out from maternal instinct. The phrase lo saru yamin usmol ('they did not turn right or left') echoes Deuteronomy's language for covenant faithfulness (Deut 5:32, 17:11, 28:14). The five Philistine lords (sarnim) follow as witnesses — the test must be observed to be valid.

13. The wheat harvest places this in late May or early June — about seven months after the Ark's capture (which occurred around the autumn battles). The scene is pastoral and ordinary: farmers in a valley, working the harvest, who suddenly look up and see the Ark of God approaching on a driverless cart pulled by lowing cows. The verb vayismechu ('they rejoiced') is immediate and natural — the God of Israel's throne-seat is coming home. The valley (emeq) of Beth-shemesh is the Sorek Valley, the natural route from Philistia into the Judean hills.

14. The cart stops of its own accord (vatta'amod sham) in a specific field belonging to a man named Joshua (Yehoshua, 'the LORD saves') — a name that resonates given the context of God's salvation of his own Ark. The large stone (even gedolah) becomes an impromptu altar. The people use the cart's wood as fuel and the cows themselves as the burnt offering (olah) — everything that carried the Ark is consecrated by sacrifice. Nothing that served this holy purpose returns to ordinary use. The cows that obeyed God against their nature are now given entirely to God.

15. Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city (Joshua 21:16), which explains the presence of Levites to handle the Ark — a detail that shows the narrative's awareness of proper protocol. The Levites remove the Ark (horidu, 'brought down') and place it on the great stone. The men of the town then offer additional burnt offerings (olot) and fellowship sacrifices (zevachim) — a spontaneous festival of worship. The phrase bayyom hahu ('on that day') marks the event as historically specific and memorable.

16. The Philistine lords have seen enough. They followed the cows to the border (v12), witnessed the Ark's arrival, and now return to Ekron — the last Philistine city to hold the Ark (5:10). The verb ra'u ('they saw') is simple but loaded: they witnessed the test's result with their own eyes. There is no reported reaction — no speech, no worship, no defiance. The narrative simply records their silent departure. Their test has been answered; Israel's God sent the plague.

17. The catalog of five cities — Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron — is the standard list of the Philistine pentapolis, each governed by its own seren (lord). Each city contributes one golden tumor, acknowledging its share in the collective guilt. The list reads like a legal document recording the terms of reparation — each party named, each contribution specified.

18. This verse expands the scope of the offering: the five golden tumors corresponded to the five lords, but the golden mice corresponded to all the cities — fortified (ir mivtsar) and rural (kofer haperazi, 'the open village'). The plague of mice affected the entire agricultural territory. The phrase ad hayyom hazzeh ('to this day') is the narrator's voice, writing from a later period when the stone was still a known landmark. Some scholars read avel hagedolah ('the great Abel/stone of mourning') as a reference to the grief that will follow in verse 19, but it may simply be a place-name or a descriptive term for the large stone.

19. The verb ra'u ba'aron ('they looked into/at the Ark') uses the preposition be- which can mean either 'into' or 'at.' The Targum Jonathan interprets this as gazing at the Ark disrespectfully. Regardless of the exact nature of the offense, the principle is consistent throughout Samuel: the Ark's holiness does not discriminate between Israelite and Philistine, between curiosity and hostility. The number 'seventy men, fifty thousand men' (shiv'im ish chamishim elef ish) is syntactically anomalous — no conjunction connects the two numbers. Josephus (Antiquities 6.1.4) gives seventy. The grief of the people (vayyit'abbelu) mirrors the Philistines' distress — both peoples learn that proximity to the Ark is dangerous.

20. The phrase YHWH ha'Elohim haqqadosh hazzeh ('the LORD, this holy God') piles up divine titles to express the overwhelming otherness the people now feel. The adjective qadosh ('holy') means fundamentally 'set apart, other, dangerous in its purity.' The verb ya'aleh ('will go up') anticipates the Ark's continued journey uphill into the Judean highlands — ultimately to Kiriath-jearim. Beth-shemesh, a border town in the lowlands, sends the Ark further into Israelite territory, distancing themselves from its lethal holiness.

21. Kiriath-jearim ('City of Forests') sits higher in the Judean hills, about ten miles from Beth-shemesh. The verbs redu ('come down') and ha'alu ('bring up') reflect the topography: Beth-shemesh is in the lowland Sorek Valley, Kiriath-jearim in the highlands. The Ark will remain at Kiriath-jearim for twenty years (7:2) until David retrieves it — a remarkably long hiatus during which Israel's central sacred object sits in a private home rather than a sanctuary. The chapter ends not with triumph but with a handoff driven by fear. The Ark has come home, but no one knows how to live with it.

7

Summary: *The Ark arrives at Kiriath-jearim and stays for twenty years while Israel languishes under Philistine domination. Samuel calls the nation to a radical return — put away foreign gods, direct your hearts to the LORD alone, and he will deliver you. Israel gathers at Mizpah for fasting and confession. The Philistines attack the assembly, but the LORD thunders against them and Israel routs them from Mizpah to below Beth-car. Samuel sets up a stone and names it Ebenezer — 'the stone of help' — declaring, 'Up to this point the LORD has helped us.' Samuel serves as judge over Israel for the rest of his life, riding a circuit through Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter marks the hinge between the Ark narrative (chapters 4-6) and the monarchy narrative (chapters 8-12). It is the last chapter in which Israel's system works as designed: a prophet calls for repentance, the people respond, God delivers, and a judge administers justice. Everything that follows — the demand for a king, the rise of Saul, the anointing of David — flows from the inability to sustain what happens here. Samuel is the last shofet, the final judge, and this chapter is his finest hour. The Ebenezer stone is particularly poignant because the name Ebenezer*

appeared earlier in 4:1 as the site of Israel's devastating defeat. The place of disaster becomes the place of memorial — same name, opposite outcome.

Translation Friction: *The twenty-year gap in verse 2 is historically difficult: Samuel's public ministry seems to begin after this period, but the text does not explain what happened during those two decades. The phrase vayyinnahu kol-bet Yisra'el acharei YHWH ('all the house of Israel lamented/yearned after the LORD') uses a verb (n-h-h) whose exact meaning is debated — 'to lament,' 'to be drawn toward,' or 'to turn.' We render it as 'turned in longing' to capture the sense of national grief turning toward God. The verb in verse 6, vayyish'avu mayim vayyishpekhu lifnei YHWH ('they drew water and poured it out before the LORD'), describes a ritual not prescribed anywhere in the Torah — a water-pouring ceremony that may represent tears, humility, or life poured out before God. Its exact significance is uncertain.*

Connections: *The call to 'return to the LORD with all your heart' (v3) echoes Deuteronomy 30:2-10, where Moses promised that even after exile, a wholehearted return would bring restoration. Samuel is enacting Deuteronomy's restoration theology. The removal of Baals and Ashtaroth (v3-4) connects to the recurring cycle in Judges where foreign gods provoke divine judgment and repentance brings deliverance (Judges 2:11-19, 10:6-16). The thunder theophany (v10) recalls Exodus 19:16 at Sinai and anticipates the thunder that will accompany Samuel's rebuke of Israel for demanding a king (12:17-18). The Ebenezer memorial stone parallels Joshua's memorial stones at Gilgal (Joshua 4:20-24) — physical markers that anchor national memory to specific acts of divine intervention.*

1 The men of Kiriath-jearim came and brought up the Ark of the LORD. They took it to the house of Abinadab on the hill and
consecrated his son Eleazar to guard the Ark of the LORD. 2 From the day the Ark settled in Kiriath-jearim, a long time
passed — twenty years. Then all the house of Israel turned in longing toward the LORD. 3 Samuel said to all the house of
Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with your whole heart, then remove the foreign gods from among you — and the
Ashtaroth — and direct your hearts toward the LORD and serve him alone. Then he will rescue you from the hand of the
Philistines." 4 So the Israelites removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone. 5 Samuel said, "Gather all
Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD on your behalf." 6 They assembled at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out
before the LORD. They fasted that day and declared there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the
Israelites at Mizpah. 7 When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had assembled at Mizpah, the Philistine lords marched
up against Israel. When the Israelites heard this, they were terrified of the Philistines. 8 The Israelites said to Samuel, "Do not
stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, so that he will save us from the hand of the Philistines." 9 Samuel took a nursing
lamb — one animal — and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Samuel cried out to the LORD on behalf of
Israel, and the LORD answered him. 10 While Samuel was offering the burnt offering, the Philistines advanced to attack
Israel. But the LORD thundered with a tremendous voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and
they were routed before Israel. 11 The men of Israel charged out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, striking them down
all the way to below Beth-car. 12 Then Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer —
"Stone of Help" — and declared, "Up to this point, the LORD has helped us." 13 The Philistines were subdued and no longer
entered Israelite territory. The hand of the LORD was against the Philistines throughout all the days of Samuel. 14 The cities
that the Philistines had captured from Israel were returned to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel recovered the
surrounding territory from Philistine control. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites. 15 Samuel judged Israel
for the rest of his life. 16 He would travel on a circuit year after year through Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he judged Israel
at all these places. 17 His home base was Ramah, because that was where his house was. There too he judged Israel, and there
he built an altar to the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Kiriath-jearim is in the Judean highlands, hence the verb vayya'alu ('they brought up') — the Ark ascends in elevation. Abinadab's house baggivah ('on the hill') provides a prominent location, though this is a private home, not a sanctuary. The verb qiddesh ('consecrated, set apart') applied to Eleazar indicates formal dedication for sacred duty — the same root as qadosh ('holy'). After the deaths at Beth-shemesh, someone must be ritually prepared to be in the Ark's proximity. The Ark's placement in a private home rather than at Shiloh (which may already be destroyed — see Jeremiah 7:12, 26:6) signals the collapse of Israel's central worship infrastructure.

2. The phrase vayyirbu hayyamim ('the days multiplied') conveys not just duration but accumulation — time piling up, heaviness building. Twenty years (esrim shanah) bridges the Ark narrative to Samuel's public ministry. The verb vayyinnahu is a hapax form in this context; its root n-h-h appears elsewhere meaning 'to lament' or 'to wail' (Ezekiel 32:18), but here with acharei YHWH ('after/toward the LORD') it takes on a directional sense — Israel's grief oriented itself toward God rather than remaining aimless. Some scholars connect it to Arabic cognates meaning 'to turn, to incline.'

3. The verb shavim ('returning') is the participial form of shuv — the Hebrew Bible's primary word for repentance (teshuvah). Samuel's use of the participle implies an ongoing process, not a completed act: 'if you are in the act of returning.' The phrase bekhol-levavkhem ('with your whole heart') echoes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) and Deuteronomy 30:2. The Ashtaroth (plural of Ashtoreth) were Canaanite fertility goddesses associated with Baal worship. The verb hakhinu ('prepare, establish, direct') from the root k-w-n means to fix firmly in place — hearts must not merely feel but be structurally oriented toward God. The phrase iv'duhu levaddo ('serve him alone') is absolute exclusivity — not 'primarily' but 'only.'

4. The narrative records immediate compliance with no resistance or qualification — a rarity in Israel's story. The Baals (be'alim, plural of Ba'al, 'lord, master') were local Canaanite storm and fertility deities, often worshiped at high places. The Ashtaroth (plural of Ashtoreth) were their female counterparts. The phrase vayya'avdu et-YHWH levaddo ('they served the LORD alone') directly echoes Samuel's demand in verse 3 (iv'duhu levaddo). Israel does exactly what Samuel required. The simplicity of the verse — command given, command obeyed — contrasts with the long cycles of partial obedience in Judges.

5. Mizpah (hammitspatah, 'the watchtower') was a significant assembly site in Benjamin's territory, about eight miles north of Jerusalem. It served as a gathering point in Judges 20:1 for inter-tribal assembly. Samuel's role as intercessor — 'I will pray on your behalf' (etpallel ba'adkhem) — places him in the mediatorial tradition of Moses (Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:13-19). The hitpael form of p-l-l (etpallel) suggests intense, sustained intercession, not casual petition. Samuel positions himself as the bridge between a repentant people and their God.

6. The water-pouring ceremony (vayyish'avu mayim vayyishpekhu lifnei YHWH) has no parallel in Torah legislation. David's later act of pouring out water in 2 Samuel 23:16 involves water from Bethlehem's well poured as a libation — but the context differs. Some scholars see this as a rain-petition ritual; others as symbolic of helplessness (cf. 2 Samuel 14:14, 'we are like water poured out on the ground'). The confession chatanu laYHWH ('we have sinned against the LORD') is direct and unqualified — no excuses, no mitigating circumstances. The verb vayyishpot ('he judged') marks Samuel's formal assumption of the shofet role, the last in the line from Othniel through Samson.

7. The Philistines interpret Israel's assembly as a military muster — and from a political standpoint, any large gathering of a subject people would be threatening. The verb vayya'alu ('they went up') indicates the Philistines marched from the coastal plain up into the central hill country. The Israelites' fear (vayyir'u mippenei Felishtim) is realistic: their last major engagement with the Philistines resulted in the devastating defeat at Ebenezer-Aphek (chapter 4) where thirty thousand fell and the Ark was captured. The fear is historically grounded — they have reason to be afraid. The assembly at Mizpah was for repentance, not for war.

8. The plea al-tacharesh mimmenu ('do not be silent from us') uses the root ch-r-sh, which means 'to be silent, to cease speaking.' Israel begs Samuel not to stop interceding — not to fall silent. This is a dramatic reversal from Judges-era patterns where Israel typically reached for weapons first and prayer second. Here the people's instinct is right: they turn to the prophet and ask him to keep praying. The phrase YHWH Eloheinu ('the LORD our God') with the first-person plural possessive is itself an act of faith — they are claiming covenant relationship with the God they have just confessed to betraying.

9. The offering is deliberately modest: a single nursing lamb (teleh chalav, literally 'a milk lamb' — still suckling, therefore young and small). This is not a grand sacrificial spectacle but a simple, whole-hearted offering. The word kalil ('whole, complete') emphasizes that the entire animal was consumed on the altar — nothing held back, nothing eaten by the worshiper. The verb vayyiz'aq ('he cried out') is the same verb used for Israel's desperate cries in Judges (Judges 3:9, 3:15, 6:7, 10:10). The final clause — vayyya'anehu YHWH ('and the LORD answered him') — is the theological turning point of the chapter. Three words that change everything: God heard and responded.

10. The participle ma'aleh ha'olah ('offering up the burnt offering') indicates the sacrifice is still in progress when the Philistines attack — the timing is simultaneous. The verb vayyar'em ('he thundered') from the root r-'-m is used for divine thunder in Psalm 18:14 and 2 Samuel 22:14, where it functions as God's battle-cry. The phrase beqol-gadol ('with a great/loud voice') personifies the thunder as God's voice — this is not weather but warfare. The verb vayyehumem ('he confused/panicked them') appears in Exodus 14:24 (the Egyptian army at the sea), Joshua 10:10 (the Amorites at Gibeon), and Judges 4:15 (Sisera's army) — it is the technical term for divine battle-panic that precedes military rout.

11. The verb vayyetse'u ('they went out') indicates a deliberate sortie — Israel left the assembly point and became the aggressor. The pursuit goes ad-mittachat levet kar ('to below Beth-car'), a location whose exact site is uncertain. The name Beth-car ('house of the lamb/pasture') is otherwise unattested in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase mittachat ('from below, below') indicates downhill movement — the Philistines were driven from the hill country back toward the coastal lowlands, a reversal of their uphill advance in verse 7. The rout covers significant distance, indicating total Philistine collapse.

12. The name Even Ha'ezer is composed of even ('stone') and ezer ('help') — 'stone of help.' The location 'between Mizpah and Shen' (hashshen, 'the tooth' or 'the crag') places the memorial at a specific geographic point. The phrase ad hennah ('up to here, up to this point') is both spatial and temporal — this stone marks both the place and the moment where God's help was manifest. The verb azaranu ('he has helped us') uses the root '-z-r, the same root in ezer — 'help.' The first Ebenezer in 4:1 was a campsite name with no recorded etymology; Samuel now gives the name theological content by connecting it explicitly to divine aid.

13. The verb vayyikkan'u ('they were subdued, humbled') from the root k-n-' indicates enforced submission — the Philistines were brought low. The phrase velo yasfu od lavo ('they did not continue again to come') uses the construction yasaf + infinitive for cessation of repeated action — they stopped coming. This is a summary statement covering the rest of Samuel's active judgeship. The phrase yad-YHWH baPlishti'm ('the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines') echoes the same 'hand of the LORD' that afflicted the Philistines while they held the Ark (5:6, 5:9, 5:11). The hand that struck them in judgment now restrains them in protection of Israel — same hand, different function.

14. The verb vattashovnah ('they returned') uses shuv — the same root as the teshuvah (repentance) of verse 3. Israel returned to God, and the cities returned to Israel — the wordplay links spiritual restoration to territorial restoration. The range 'from Ekron to Gath' (me'Eqron ve'ad-Gat) represents the eastern edge of Philistine territory closest to Israel — not a conquest of Philistia but a recovery of the disputed border zone. The mention of peace with the Amorites (ha'Emori) is unexpected; the term may function here as a general designation for the pre-Israelite Canaanite population, indicating that the era of Samuel's judgeship brought comprehensive regional stability.

15. The phrase kol yemei chayyav ('all the days of his life') indicates lifelong service — Samuel never retired, never abdicated. The verb vayyishpot ('he judged') encompasses more than legal decisions: it includes military leadership, spiritual guidance, and administrative governance. This summary statement positions Samuel alongside the great judges while also setting up the transition: Samuel will judge Israel 'all his days,' but his sons will not follow in his footsteps (8:1-3), and the people will demand a king. The verse reads as both tribute and elegy — the last judge served faithfully, and the system died with him.

16. Samuel's judicial circuit (savav, 'to go around, to make a circuit') through three towns — Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah — establishes an itinerant governance model. Each site carries theological weight: Bethel ('house of God') was the site of Jacob's vision (Genesis 28:19); Gilgal was Joshua's first camp in the promised land (Joshua 4:19-20); Mizpah was the assembly site of this chapter's victory. The phrase middei shanah beshanah ('from year to year, annually') indicates a regular, reliable pattern. Samuel brings justice to the people rather than requiring the people to come to a central location — a model suited to a period without a functioning central sanctuary.

17. The word uteshuvato ('and his return') uses the same root shuv that has appeared throughout this chapter — Samuel's physical return to Ramah after each circuit echoes the spiritual return (teshuvah) he called Israel to in verse 3. Ramah (haramatah, 'the height') was Samuel's birthplace (1:19) and becomes his permanent base. The building of an altar (mizbeiach) at Ramah is significant: Samuel constructs a place of sacrifice at his home, not at a central sanctuary. This reflects the fractured state of Israelite worship after Shiloh's apparent destruction. Samuel functions as prophet, judge, and priest — offering sacrifices, rendering judgments, and speaking God's word — all from his home in Ramah.

8

Summary: *Samuel has grown old and appointed his sons as judges over Israel, but they are corrupt — taking bribes and perverting justice. The elders of Israel gather at Ramah and demand that Samuel appoint a king 'like all the nations.' Samuel is grieved, but God tells him to listen to the people, explaining that they have not rejected Samuel but rejected God himself as their king. God instructs Samuel to warn them solemnly about the 'ways of the king' (mishpat ha-melekh) — a detailed catalog of royal extraction: conscription of sons and daughters, seizure of fields and vineyards, taxation of flocks and grain. The chapter ends with the people refusing to listen, insisting they want a king to judge them and fight their battles, and God telling Samuel to grant their request.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the hinge point of Israel's political theology. The demand for a king is not presented as inherently sinful — God will, in fact, grant the request — but it is framed as a rejection of divine kingship. God's response to Samuel in verse 7 is extraordinary in its vulnerability: 'They have not rejected you; they have rejected me from being king over them.' The God who delivered them from Egypt, who parted the sea and fed them in the wilderness, now finds himself voted out by popular demand. The mishpat ha-melekh (verses 11-18) is not prophecy in the usual sense but sociological realism — Samuel describes what every ancient Near Eastern monarchy actually did. The warning is not 'this might happen' but 'this is what kings are.' Most striking is that God does not override the people's free will. He instructs Samuel to warn them, but when they persist, he says: give them what they want. The theology here is that God sometimes grants requests that grieve him, allowing human choices to play out with their full consequences.*

Translation Friction: *The chapter raises a tension that runs through the rest of Samuel-Kings: is monarchy good or bad? Here the demand is framed negatively — as rejection of God. Yet God himself will later choose David, call him 'a man after my own heart,' and establish an eternal covenant with his dynasty. The resolution is not that kingship itself is wrong, but that the motivation — 'like all the nations' (kekol hagoyim) — represents a fundamental misunderstanding of Israel's identity. They were constituted as unlike the nations. The phrase mishpat ha-melekh is also ambiguous: does it mean 'the just right of the king' (what a king is legally entitled to do) or 'the way kings behave' (a descriptive warning)? The word mishpat can mean*

both 'justice/right' and 'custom/manner,' and the ambiguity may be intentional — what kings claim as their right is precisely what makes them dangerous.

Connections: *The demand for a king 'like all the nations' echoes Deuteronomy 17:14-20, where Moses anticipated this request and set conditions for kingship: the king must be chosen by God, must not accumulate horses or wives or wealth, and must write a personal copy of the Torah. The people in 1 Samuel 8 want a king but show no interest in these safeguards. Samuel's warning about sons taken for chariots and daughters taken for perfumers anticipates Solomon's reign precisely (1 Kings 4-10), where conscription, taxation, and forced labor fulfilled every detail. The phrase 'rejected me from being king over them' (v7) connects backward to Judges 8:23, where Gideon refused kingship saying 'The LORD shall rule over you,' and forward to 1 Samuel 12:12, where Samuel reminds them 'the LORD your God was your king.' The cry 'you will cry out because of your king' (v18) inverts the Exodus pattern — in Egypt they cried out under a foreign king and God answered; under their own chosen king, God will not answer.*

1When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel. 2The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second son was Abijah. They served as judges in Beer-sheba. 3But his sons did not walk in his ways. They chased dishonest profit, took bribes, and twisted justice. 4All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "Look — you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king to govern us, like all the other nations." 6The demand was wrong in Samuel's eyes — when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in everything they say to you. It is not you they have rejected — it is me they have rejected from being king over them." 8This follows the pattern of everything they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this very day — abandoning me and serving other gods. That is what they are doing to you as well. 9So now, listen to their voice. But you must solemnly warn them and declare to them the ways of the king who will reign over them." 10Samuel relayed all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11He said, "This is how the king who reigns over you will operate: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and his cavalry, and they will run ahead of his chariots. 12He will appoint them as commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and to plow his fields and harvest his crops, and to manufacture his weapons and his chariot equipment. 13He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. 14He will take your fields, your vineyards, and your best olive groves, and give them to his officials. 15He will tax a tenth of your grain and your vintage and give it to his court officials and his servants. 16He will take your male servants, your female servants, your best young men, and your donkeys, and put them to work for himself. 17He will take a tenth of your flocks. And you yourselves will become his servants." 18When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you on that day. 19But the people refused to listen to Samuel's voice. They said, "No! There will be a king over us. 20We will be like all the other nations. Our king will govern us, march out ahead of us, and fight our battles." 21Samuel listened to everything the people said and repeated it in the hearing of the LORD. 22The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and install a king for them." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go, each of you, back to your city."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb zaqen ('grew old') signals a leadership transition crisis — the same kind that opened the book with Eli's aging. Samuel repeats the pattern he witnessed: an aging leader whose sons will not carry the mantle faithfully. The phrase vayasem et-banav shofetim ('he set his sons as judges') uses the same root sh-f-t that has defined Israel's governance since the period of the Judges. Samuel is not establishing a dynasty; the office of judge was not hereditary. That he attempts to make it so reflects the subtle drift toward institutionalized power that will culminate in the demand for a king.
2. Joel means 'the LORD is God' and Abijah means 'my father is the LORD' — both theophoric names expressing Samuel's devotion, which makes their corruption all the more painful. Beer-sheba is in the far south of Israel, the opposite end of the country from Samuel's base at Ramah in the north. This geographic distance may have contributed to the sons' corruption — they were far from their father's oversight. The placement at Beer-sheba also means Samuel was attempting to extend judicial coverage across all Israel, from Ramah to Beer-sheba, the traditional expression for the land's full extent.
3. The phrase velo haleku vanav bidrakav ('his sons did not walk in his ways') echoes the identical failure of Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17). Samuel, who replaced Eli's corrupt house, now watches his own house fall to the same disease. The root n-t-h ('to turn aside, bend') appears twice: once for turning after profit and once for twisting justice — the same verb links the moral deviation to the judicial perversion. The word batsa ('unjust gain, dishonest profit') is the same term used in Exodus 18:21, where Jethro advised Moses to appoint judges who 'hate unjust gain.' Samuel's sons are the exact

opposite of Jethro's ideal.

4. The verb vayitqabbetsu ('they gathered themselves') suggests a coordinated, deliberate assembly — this is not a spontaneous complaint but a delegation. The elders (ziqnei Yisra'el) are the recognized tribal leaders, the men who speak for the people collectively. That they travel to Ramah, Samuel's home base, indicates both respect for his authority and a formal petition. Ramah (haRamatah, with the directional he suffix indicating motion toward) was in the tribal territory of Benjamin, roughly central to the population.

5. The phrase simah-lanu melekh ('set for us a king') uses the imperative of s-y-m ('to set, place, appoint') — the same verb used in verse 1 when Samuel 'set' his sons as judges. They want Samuel to do for them what he did for his sons, but bigger. The phrase kekol hagoyim ('like all the nations') is the theological crux of the chapter. Israel's entire covenantal identity was built on distinction from the nations (Leviticus 20:26, Deuteronomy 7:6). The request is not merely political but ontological — they want to restructure Israel's identity around a human king rather than a divine one.

6. The phrase vayera hadavar be'einei Shemu'el ('the thing was evil/bad in Samuel's eyes') uses the root r-'-' ('evil, displeasing') — Samuel perceived the request as genuinely harmful, not merely offensive to his ego. His immediate response is prayer (vayitpallel), not argument — Samuel takes the crisis to God before responding to the elders. This is the mark of Samuel's character throughout the narrative: when faced with a problem beyond his capacity, he prays. The verb hitpallel (reflexive of p-l-l, 'to judge, intercede') literally means 'to judge oneself' or 'to intercede' — Samuel is both processing his own reaction and seeking divine counsel.

7. The verb ma'as ('reject, refuse, spurn') is covenantal language — it appears in Leviticus 26:15 for Israel's rejection of God's statutes, and in 1 Samuel 15:23,26 where God will reject Saul using the same word. The phrase mimmelokh aleihem ('from reigning over them') uses the infinitive of m-l-kh — the same root as melekh. God has been their melekh; they want a different one. The instruction shema beqol ha'am ('listen to the voice of the people') is remarkable — God tells his prophet to obey the people's voice, even though the people's voice is rejecting God. This divine acquiescence to human free will is theologically without parallel in the ancient Near East, where kings ruled by divine compulsion, not popular consent.

8. God places the people's request in a historical pattern stretching from the Exodus to the present. The verbs vaya'azvuni ('they abandoned me') and vaya'avdu elohim acherim ('they served other gods') frame the demand for a king as another instance of Israel's chronic unfaithfulness — not a new sin but the latest expression of an old one. The phrase ken hemah osim gam-lakh ('so they are doing also to you') is God consoling Samuel: this is not personal failure on your part; this is who they are. The comparison between rejecting God and rejecting Samuel elevates Samuel's role — his authority was a direct extension of divine authority — while simultaneously relativizing his pain: he is merely the latest target of Israel's pattern of rejection.

9. The infinitive absolute construction ha'ed ta'id ('warning you shall warn') conveys the highest urgency — Samuel must not merely inform but formally testify. This is legal language: Samuel is placing the people under notice. The phrase mishpat ha-melekh ('the manner/right of the king') uses mishpat in its ambiguous fullness. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the Torah anticipated the demand for a king and prescribed mishpat for royal behavior (limits on horses, wives, wealth). Here, Samuel will describe the actual mishpat of monarchy — not the ideal but the reality. The verb yimlokh ('who will reign') shares the same m-l-kh root as melekh and mimmelokh in verse 7 — the kingship vocabulary saturates the chapter.

10. The verb hasho'alim ('the ones asking') from the root sh-'-l ('to ask, request, demand') carries a wordplay that resonates through the entire book: the name Sha'ul (Saul) comes from the same root. The people who 'ask' (sho'alim) for a king will receive Sha'ul — 'the asked-for one.' The name itself will become an ironic commentary: they asked and they received, but what they received will not be what they hoped for. Samuel faithfully transmits kol divrei YHWH ('all the words of the LORD') — he does not editorialize or soften the message.

11. The verb yiqqach ('he will take') from the root l-q-ch is the keynote verb of the entire warning — it will recur in verses 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. The relentless repetition of 'take' turns the warning into a drumbeat of confiscation. The merkavah ('chariot') and parashim ('horsemen, cavalry') represent the military-industrial complex of ancient Near Eastern monarchy. Israel had been a foot-soldier culture; chariots were the technology of empires (Egypt, Canaan). To staff chariots is to transform Israel's military identity. The runners (ratsu lifnei merkavto) were the royal advance guard — Absalom will later adopt this practice (2 Samuel 15:1) as a sign of royal pretension.

12. The list expands from military display to military command (sarei alafim, sarei chamishim — officers of thousands and fifties), then pivots to agricultural conscription (plowing his fields, harvesting his crops) and industrial production (weapons and chariot equipment). The possessive pronoun 'his' (lo) is relentless: his thousands, his plowing (charisho), his harvest (qetsiro), his war equipment (kelei milchamto), his chariot gear (kelei rikhbo). Everything that was the family's becomes the king's. The progression from soldier to farmer to factory worker shows that royal conscription is not limited to wartime but restructures the entire economy around royal needs.

13. After sons, daughters. The verb yiqqach ('he will take') returns. The three roles — raqqachot (perfumers/ointment makers), tabbachot (cooks/slaughterers), and ofot (bakers) — represent the palace domestic economy. Raqqachot is particularly significant: perfume and ointment production was a high-skill trade in the ancient Near East, connected to both luxury goods and temple worship. The king will conscript daughters not for menial labor but for the palace's elaborate lifestyle apparatus. Each of these roles served the king's table and personal luxury — the daughters of free Israelite families reduced to staffing royal consumption.

14. The triad sadot (fields), keramim (vineyards), and zeitim (olive groves) represents the complete agricultural economy of ancient Israel — grain, wine, and oil. The adjective hatovim ('the best') emphasizes that royal confiscation is selective and extractive. The phrase venatan la'avadav ('and give to his servants') reveals the patronage system at monarchy's core: the king takes from the people to reward his loyalists. This prediction is fulfilled precisely in 1 Samuel 22:7, where Saul asks his Benjaminite supporters, 'Will the son of Jesse give you fields and vineyards?' — royal land redistribution as political currency.

15. The verb ya'asor ('he will tithe, take a tenth') is loaded with theological irony. The tithe (ma'aser) in Israel belonged to God — it was given to the Levites for temple service (Numbers 18:21-24). Now the king will impose his own tithe on top of God's, effectively setting himself up as a parallel deity demanding tribute. The recipients are sarisim ('court officials' — the word can also mean 'eunuchs,' suggesting the elaborate palace bureaucracy of ancient Near Eastern monarchies) and avadim ('servants'). The king creates an entire parasitic class sustained by extraction from the productive population.

16. The confiscation extends now to the household workforce: avadim (male servants), shefachot (female servants), bachurim hatovim ('the best young men' — again hatovim, 'the best,' as in verse 14), and chamorim (donkeys, the primary work animals and transport of non-royal Israel). The verb yiqqach ('he will take') appears for the fifth time. The phrase ve'asah limla'khto ('and put them to his work/service') uses mela'khah — the same word used for God's creative work in Genesis 2:2. The king's 'work' parasitically conscripts the labor that sustained ordinary households. Note the Qere/Ketiv variant: the Ketiv reads bachureichem ('your young men') while some manuscripts and the LXX read beqareichem ('your cattle').

17. The second tithe (ya'asor) now falls on flocks (tso'n), completing the taxation of agriculture: grain, wine, and livestock. The final clause ve'attem tihyu-lo la'avadim ('and you yourselves will become his servants/slaves') is the rhetorical capstone. The pronoun attem ('you yourselves') is emphatic — not just your sons, daughters, fields, and flocks, but you. The word avadim is deliberately chosen: Israel was avadim in Egypt (Exodus 13:3, Deuteronomy 5:6), and God redeemed them to be his avadim (Leviticus 25:42, 55). To become the king's avadim is to exchange divine lordship for human lordship — the very definition of the rejection described in verse 7.

18. The verb za'aq ('to cry out') is the Exodus verb par excellence — it is what Israel did under Pharaoh's oppression (Exodus 2:23). Samuel is warning that monarchy will reproduce the conditions of Egypt. The phrase millifnei malkekem ('because of / from before your king') uses the same preposition (millifnei) used for crying out 'before' Pharaoh's oppression. The emphatic asher bechartem lakhem ('whom you chose for yourselves') places full responsibility on the people — this was not imposed but elected. The phrase velo ya'aneh YHWH ('the LORD will not answer') is one of the most severe statements in the Hebrew Bible: God voluntarily withdrawing his responsiveness. Compare Deuteronomy 1:45 and Proverbs 1:28 for the same devastating pattern.

19. The verb vayema'anu ('they refused') from the root m-'-n ('to refuse, be unwilling') echoes the root m-'-s ('to reject') from verse 7 — different roots but phonetically similar, reinforcing the pattern of refusal. The phrase lishmoa beqol Shemu'el ('to listen to Samuel's voice') inverts God's instruction in verse 7: God told Samuel shema beqol ha'am ('listen to the people's voice'); now the people refuse lishmoa beqol Shemu'el ('to listen to Samuel's voice'). Everyone is listening to someone's voice except God's. The defiant lo ki im-melekh yihyeh aleinu ('No! Rather, a king will be over us!') is blunt — no qualification, no negotiation. Their minds are made.

20. The phrase kekol hagoyim ('like all the nations') repeats from verse 5, forming an inclusio around Samuel's entire warning — they wanted to be like the nations before the warning, and they still want it after. The warning changed nothing. The verb ushefatanu ('he will judge/govern us') uses the same sh-f-t root that has defined leadership throughout Judges and Samuel. The phrase veyatsa lefaneinu ('he will go out before us') uses military language — the king as the one who leads the army out. The phrase venilcham et-milchamoteinu ('he will fight our battles') directly replaces God: compare Exodus 14:14 'The LORD will fight for you' and Deuteronomy 1:30 'The LORD your God who goes before you will fight for you.'

21. The verb vayishma ('he listened') mirrors God's instruction shema ('listen') from verse 7 — Samuel is obediently doing what God commanded: listening to the people's voice. The phrase vayedabbrem be'oznei YHWH ('he spoke them in the ears of the LORD') is striking: Samuel reports to God as to a sovereign, relaying the people's final answer. The anthropomorphic 'ears of the LORD' (oznei YHWH) conveys intimate communication — Samuel is not praying generally but reporting specifically, as a mediator between two parties. God already knew what the people would say (verse 7-8), but the formal relay matters: Samuel fulfills his role as intermediary, ensuring the covenant process is properly witnessed.

22. The verb vehimlakhta ('and you shall cause to reign, install as king') is the Hiphil (causative) of m-l-kh — Samuel is being commissioned as king-maker. The dismissal lekhu ish le'iro ('go, each man to his city') is deliberately anticlimactic after the intensity of the preceding exchange. There is no king yet, no name, no anointing. The people return home having won their argument but without their prize. This sets up chapters 9-10, where God's choice of Saul will unfold through what appears to be a series of coincidences — lost donkeys leading to a prophet's door. The transition from theocracy to monarchy will not be dramatic but quiet, almost accidental in its surface narrative, even as it fulfills the deepest theological upheaval in Israel's history.

9

Summary: *A wealthy Benjaminite named Kish sends his son Saul to find lost donkeys. After days of fruitless searching, Saul's servant suggests consulting a man of God in a nearby town. God has already told Samuel that He will send a man from Benjamin to be anointed as leader over Israel, to deliver the people from the Philistines. When Saul arrives, the LORD identifies him to Samuel, and Samuel honors Saul with the chief seat at a feast and a private audience — all before Saul understands what is happening to him.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The entire chapter operates on dramatic irony. Saul is looking for donkeys; God is looking for a king. The reader knows what Saul does not — that every step of his wandering has been orchestrated by divine intention. The word nagid ('designated leader, prince') is used rather than melekh ('king') when God speaks to Samuel about Saul in verse 16. This distinction is theologically loaded: God is not handing over sovereignty but appointing a military deliverer who remains under divine authority. The chapter also preserves a remarkable editorial note in verse 9 — a parenthetical explaining that the word 'prophet' (navi) used to be 'seer' (ro'eh), revealing the text's awareness of its own linguistic history. This is one of the few places in the Hebrew Bible where the narrator steps outside the story to explain archaic terminology to a later audience.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 9 presents a genuine translation challenge: it is a parenthetical gloss, almost certainly editorial, inserted to explain that what the narrator's audience calls a navi ('prophet') was formerly called a ro'eh ('seer'). The question is whether to render this as a seamless part of the narrative or to preserve its disruptive, explanatory quality. We preserve its parenthetical feel because the interruption itself carries meaning — it reveals layers of authorship and the evolution of Israelite religious vocabulary. Verse 16 uses nagid rather than melekh for Saul's role, and the choice is deliberate but difficult to render in English. 'Prince' carries connotations of royal birth; 'commander' is too military. We use 'leader' because nagid implies an appointed leader designated by God, not a hereditary monarch, and the simplicity of the English matches the directness of the Hebrew. The phrase gibbor chayil in verse 1 describing Kish is another friction point — it can mean 'mighty warrior,' 'man of wealth,' or 'man of standing.' Context suggests social prominence and wealth rather than battlefield prowess, but the term deliberately leaves the categories blurred.*

Connections: *Saul's search for lost donkeys and unexpected discovery of a kingdom echoes a persistent biblical pattern: people seeking small things find cosmic ones (Moses tending sheep finds God at the burning bush, Exodus 3:1-2; David keeping sheep is summoned to kingship, 1 Samuel 16:11). The anointing of a Benjaminite as Israel's first king connects to the near-extinction of Benjamin in Judges 19-21 — the smallest and most damaged tribe produces the first king, continuing the theme of God choosing the unlikely. Samuel's role as ro'eh ('seer') links him to the prophetic tradition where divine knowledge comes through direct revelation rather than institutional mediation. The feast scene where Saul receives the thigh portion (the priest's share in Leviticus 7:32-34) anticipates his royal status before it is publicly declared, and the private rooftop conversation echoes the pattern of secret divine appointments that will recur with David (1 Samuel 16:1-13).*

1There was a man from Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah — a
Benjaminite, a man of standing and strength. 2He had a son named Saul — young, impressive, and there was no one among
the sons of Israel more impressive than he. From his shoulders upward he stood taller than all the people. 3The donkeys
belonging to Kish, Saul's father, had wandered off. Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you, get up, and
go look for the donkeys." 4He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the region of Shalishah, but they did
not find them. They passed through the region of Shaalim — nothing. They passed through the territory of Benjamin, but did
not find them. 5When they came to the territory of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let's turn back —
otherwise my father will stop worrying about the donkeys and start worrying about us." 6The servant said to him, "Listen —
there is a man of God in this town, and the man is highly respected. Everything he says proves true. Let's go there now;
perhaps he can tell us which way to go." 7Saul said to his servant, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? The bread in our
bags is gone, and there is no gift to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" 8The servant answered Saul again: "Look —
I have in my hand a quarter-shekel of silver. I will give it to the man of God, and he will tell us our way." 9(In former times in
Israel, when someone went to inquire of God, they would say, "Come, let us go to the seer" — because the one now called a
prophet was formerly called a seer.) 10Saul said to his servant, "Good idea. Come, let's go." So they went to the town where
the man of God was. 11As they were going up the ascent to the town, they encountered young women coming out to draw
water, and they asked them, "Is the seer here?" 12They answered, "Yes — he is just ahead of you. Hurry now, because he has
come to the town today since there is a sacrifice for the people today at the high place." 13As soon as you enter the town you
will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he arrives, because he blesses the
sacrifice — and after that, the invited guests eat. Go up now, because right about now you will find him." 14They went up to

the town. As they were entering the town, there was Samuel, coming out toward them on his way up to the high place. 15Now the LORD had uncovered Samuel's ear the day before Saul arrived, saying: 16"About this time tomorrow I will send to you a man from the territory of Benjamin. You will anoint him as leader over my people Israel, and he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines — because I have seen my people, for their cry has reached me." 17When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD answered him: "This is the man I told you about. He is the one who will govern my people." 18Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and said, "Please tell me — where is the seer's house?" 19Samuel answered Saul: "I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place, and you will eat with me today. In the morning I will send you on your way, and everything that is in your heart I will tell you." 20"As for your donkeys that went missing three days ago — don't worry about them; they have been found. And to whom does all that Israel desires belong? Is it not to you and to your father's entire house?" 21Saul answered, "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my clan is the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin. Why would you say such a thing to me?" 22Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall, and he gave them a place at the head of the invited guests — about thirty people. 23Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you — the one I told you to set aside." 24The cook lifted up the thigh and what was on it and set it before Saul. Samuel said, "Here is what has been reserved — set it before you and eat, because it was kept for you for this appointed time when I said, 'I have invited the people.'" So Saul ate with Samuel that day. 25They came down from the high place into the town, and Samuel spoke with Saul on the rooftop. 26They rose early, and as dawn was breaking, Samuel called to Saul on the rooftop: "Get up, and I will send you on your way." Saul got up, and the two of them — he and Samuel — went out into the street. 27As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us" — and he went on — "but you, stand here for a moment, so I can make you hear the word of God."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The genealogy traces five generations, grounding Kish firmly in Benjamin. The phrase ish yemini ('a man of the right hand,' i.e., a Benjaminite) is a play on the tribal name Binyamin ('son of the right hand'). The final descriptor gibbor chayil is applied to Kish, not to Saul — the father's social position is what matters for the introduction. In context, gibbor chayil likely denotes a man of wealth, social prominence, and capability rather than strictly a warrior. The same phrase describes Boaz in Ruth 2:1, where it clearly means a man of means and standing.

1. The five-generation genealogy (ben Avi'el ben Tseror ben Bekhorat ben Aficah) is unusually deep, paralleling the genealogy of Elkanah in 1 Samuel 1:1. Both introductions invest heavily in lineage, signaling that family identity matters in this narrative world.

2. The name Sha'ul means 'asked for' or 'requested' — from the verb sha'al ('to ask'). This is profoundly ironic: the man whose name means 'asked for' is the answer to Israel's demand for a king (1 Samuel 8:5-6). The wordplay with Samuel's name (connected to sha'al in 1:20) binds the two figures linguistically.

2. The physical description emphasizes height (gavoah mi-kol ha-am, 'taller than all the people') as Saul's defining visible trait. This is not neutral observation — it sets up the theological contrast with David's selection in chapter 16, where God explicitly rejects the criteria of height and appearance. Saul is everything the human eye would choose.

3. The verb avad ('to be lost, to perish, to wander') is used for the donkeys. The same verb will carry heavier meaning later — things that are 'lost' in 1 Samuel often turn out to be divinely redirected. The donkeys' disappearance is the mundane mechanism God uses to move Saul toward Samuel. The Hebrew atonot (female donkeys) were valuable work animals; their loss was a genuine economic concern for even a wealthy household.

3. Kish's command uses three verbs in sequence: qach ('take'), qum ('arise'), lekh ('go') — an urgent, stacked imperative. He is not making a casual suggestion. The addition of na ('please, now') softens the command slightly, but the father's authority is clear.

4. The repetitive structure — passed through X, did not find; passed through Y, nothing; passed through Z, did not find — creates a rhythm of futility. Each region yields emptiness. The Hebrew va-ayin ('and nothing,' 'and there was not') is starkly abrupt, even more terse than the surrounding negations. The geographic sweep covers a wide area: from Ephraim's hills through Shalishah (possibly northwest of Benjamin) to Shaalim (possibly 'land of foxes') and back into Benjamin. Saul has circled extensively and found nothing.

4. The place names may carry symbolic weight. Shalishah may relate to shalosh ('three') and Shaalim to shu'al ('fox'). If so, the names paint a landscape of fragmented, wild territory — fitting for a search that leads nowhere by human reckoning but everywhere by divine design.

5. The land of Zuph connects directly to Samuel's genealogy — Zuph is Samuel's ancestor (1 Samuel 1:1). Without knowing it, Saul has wandered into Samuel's ancestral territory. The verb da'ag ('to worry, to be anxious') reveals Saul's concern for his father's emotional state — a detail that humanizes him and shows filial loyalty. The verb chadal ('to cease, to stop') paired with min ('from') gives the sense of Kish redirecting his anxiety from the donkeys to his missing son.

5. Saul's impulse to return home is the natural, sensible response. The narrative tension depends on what happens next: the servant's suggestion will redirect Saul toward Samuel and toward his destiny. Human wisdom says go home; divine providence says keep going.

6. The servant calls Samuel ish Elohim ('man of God') — a title that designates a person who carries divine authority and whose words have demonstrable power. The phrase nikhbad ('honored, weighty, respected') comes from the root kavod ('glory, weight, honor'). The servant's recommendation is grounded in Samuel's track record: kol asher yedabber bo yavo ('all that he speaks surely comes') uses the infinitive absolute construction (bo yavo) to emphasize certainty — his words never fail.

6. The servant's knowledge of Samuel suggests he is more informed about the religious landscape than his master. The phrase et darkenu asher halakhnu aleha ('our way on which we have gone') is specific — the servant is asking not for general prophecy but for practical direction about their journey. They are consulting a seer about donkeys, not about kingdoms.

7. Saul's concern about arriving empty-handed reflects the cultural expectation that one does not consult a man of God without a gift. The word teshurah ('gift, present') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible — it is a rare term for a token of respect or a consultation fee. The verb azal ('is spent, is gone, is used up') describes the bread as entirely consumed. Saul's practical concern — we have nothing to offer — reveals both proper etiquette and his limited perspective. He is worried about protocol while God is arranging a coronation.

8. The servant produces reva sheqel kesef ('a quarter-shekel of silver') — a small amount, but enough to serve as a consultation gift. The servant's resourcefulness advances the narrative at every turn: he knew about the man of God, and now he has the means to pay. The verb nimtsa ('is found') in nimtsa be-yadi ('is found in my hand') suggests the silver was unexpectedly available — even this small detail serves the theme of divine provision through ordinary circumstances.

8. The servant's confidence — veheggid lanu et darkenu ('and he will tell us our way') — contrasts with Saul's hesitation. The servant expects results; Saul was ready to go home.

9. We preserve the parenthetical format because the verse is not part of the narrative flow — it is a scholarly note embedded in the text. The phrase le-fanim be-Yisra'el ('in former times in Israel') signals that the narrator is speaking from a later vantage point. The verb darash ('to inquire, to seek') when paired with Elohim ('God') is a technical term for seeking divine guidance through a prophet or oracle.

9. The distinction between ro'eh and navi is historically significant. The ro'eh tradition appears to be older, associated with individual seers who could locate lost objects, identify hidden information, and perceive divine intent. The navi tradition emphasizes the prophetic office as a channel of God's proclaimed word. Samuel bridges both roles — he is the last of the old seers and the first of the institutional prophets.

10. Saul's response tov devarkha ('good is your word') is brief and decisive — once persuaded, he commits. The phrase is literally 'your word is good,' affirming the servant's suggestion. The pace of the narrative accelerates here after the slow, repetitive searching of verse 4. The shift from wandering to purposeful movement signals that the story is converging on its goal.

11. The scene of meeting women at a water source is a recurring biblical type-scene — encounters at wells typically signal pivotal moments (Genesis 24:11-14 for Rebekah, Genesis 29:1-12 for Rachel, Exodus 2:15-21 for Zipporah). Here the pattern is adapted: instead of a betrothal, the women direct Saul toward his anointing. The word na'arot ('young women') and the activity of drawing water (lish'ov mayim) deliberately invoke the convention, and the audience would have recognized the echo.

11. The use of ha-ro'eh ('the seer') rather than ha-navi ('the prophet') in their question follows the narrator's explanation in verse 9 — they use the older terminology that fits the pre-prophetic idiom of the story's setting.

12. The young women's response is surprisingly detailed and urgent. They use maher ('hurry') and atah ('now') to press speed. The mention of the bamah ('high place') is significant — before the centralization of worship in Jerusalem under Josiah's reform (2 Kings 23), local high places served as legitimate worship sites. Samuel presides over sacrificial worship at a bamah without any narrative disapproval, reflecting the pre-Deuteronomic setting of the story.

12. The word zevach ('sacrifice') here refers to a communal sacrificial feast — the meat of the offering would be shared among the participants after the sacred portion was offered. This is the feast at which Saul will receive the place of honor.

13. The women's knowledge of Samuel's schedule and role reveals his authority in the community. He is the one who mevarekh ha-zevach ('blesses the sacrifice') — without his blessing, no one eats. The word ha-qeru'im ('the invited ones, the called ones') indicates that this is not an open public meal but a curated guest list. Saul will be seated among the qeru'im as a guest of honor — an invitation he does not yet know is waiting for him.

13. The repetition of timtse'un oto ('you will find him') at the beginning and end of the women's speech creates a frame of certainty: you will find him, so go now, you will find him. The verb matsa ('to find') echoes the search for the donkeys — they could not find (lo matsa'u) the animals, but they will find the seer.

14. The timing is precise to the point of being providential — just as Saul enters, Samuel exits, heading in their direction. The phrase yotse liqratam ('coming out to meet them') uses the same construction used for deliberate encounters elsewhere, but here Samuel does not yet know who they are. The convergence is orchestrated from above: God has placed these two men on a collision course, and the narrator presents the moment with understated drama — vehineh Shemu'el ('and there was Samuel').

15. The idiom galah ozen ('to uncover the ear') appears in 2 Samuel 7:27, Ruth 4:4, and Job 33:16, always denoting the private disclosure of information that would otherwise remain hidden. We retain the literal image ('uncovered Samuel's ear') rather than flattening it to 'told Samuel' because the idiom preserves the physicality of prophetic experience — revelation is not merely informational but sensory.

15. The temporal marker yom echad ('one day') is precise. God prepared Samuel exactly twenty-four hours before the moment of meeting. The narrative is structured so the reader learns God's plan (verses 15-16) before Saul does, creating dramatic irony that will persist through the entire chapter.

16. The title nagid is theologically charged and deliberately chosen over melekh ('king'). A nagid is appointed by God and accountable to God; the term preserves divine sovereignty over Israel's governance. We render it 'leader' because the term conveys appointed authority without implying autonomous royal power. The word will recur at critical moments in 1-2 Samuel.

16. The phrase ba'ah tsa'aqatam elai ('their cry has come to me') uses tsa'aqah — the same word for the cry of Israel in Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:9). God responds to the Philistine oppression with the same language used for the Egyptian oppression, framing Saul's appointment as a new exodus-type deliverance.

17. The verb atsar is rendered 'govern' rather than 'reign' to reflect its restraining connotation. The word does not appear in the standard vocabulary of kingship — it carries overtones of holding, checking, and containing. Some scholars translate it 'restrain' (i.e., Saul will hold back the people from disintegration), which fits the political context of Philistine pressure and internal tribal fragmentation.

17. The divine identification of Saul — zeh ya'atsor be-ammi ('this one will govern my people') — uses the emphatic demonstrative zeh ('this one'), physically pointing to Saul. God identifies the future leader not by name or genealogy but by pointing: this one, right there.

18. The dramatic irony reaches its peak. Saul asks the seer where the seer lives — he is speaking to the very man he is looking for and does not know it. The sha'ar ('gate') was the public gathering place where legal and social transactions occurred; it is the town's center of activity. Saul's request is polite — haggidah na li ('please tell me') uses the particle na for courtesy — and entirely mundane. He has no idea he is standing before the man who will change his life.

18. The verb nagash ('to approach, to draw near') often carries ritual or formal connotations in Hebrew (approaching an altar, drawing near to God). Its use here may subtly signal that Saul is approaching something far more significant than he realizes.

19. Samuel's self-identification anokhi ha-ro'eh ('I am the seer') is direct and authoritative. His instructions reverse the expected social hierarchy — he tells Saul aleh le-fanai ('go up before me'), giving Saul the position of precedence by having him walk ahead. The promise vekhol asher bilvavekha aggid lakh ('everything that is in your heart I will tell you') goes far beyond donkey-finding. Samuel claims to know the contents of Saul's heart — a seer's knowledge that extends to inner thoughts and unspoken desires.

19. The sequence of Samuel's commands — eat with me today, I will send you tomorrow, and I will reveal your heart — creates a structured program: fellowship, then revelation, then commission. Samuel is not improvising; he is following the divine plan disclosed to him the day before.

20. Samuel demonstrates his identity as seer by knowing about the donkeys before Saul mentions them. The phrase al tasem et libbkha lahen ('do not set your heart on them') means 'stop worrying about them' — the verb sum ('to set, to place') with lev ('heart') describes where one directs attention and concern. Samuel redirects Saul's heart from donkeys to destiny.

20. The phrase kol chemdat Yisra'el ('all the desire of Israel') is ambiguous and provocative. Chemdah means 'desire, delight, precious thing' — Samuel is saying that everything Israel longs for now belongs to Saul and his father's house. The statement hints at kingship without naming it, leaving Saul to grasp the implication. The inclusion of kol beit avikha ('all your father's house') extends the promise beyond Saul individually to his dynasty.

21. Saul's response mirrors Gideon's protest in Judges 6:15 ('my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house') — both men respond to divine selection with claims of insignificance. Whether Saul's humility is genuine or performative is debated. Benjamin was indeed the smallest tribe after the near-annihilation recorded in Judges 20-21, so his claim has historical basis. The phrase mi-qatannei shivtei Yisra'el ('from the smallest of the tribes of Israel') uses qatan ('small, insignificant') — the same word used when God chose David over his brothers (1 Samuel 16:11).

21. The question lamah dibbarta elai ka-davar ha-zeh ('why have you spoken to me a thing like this?') reveals Saul's bewilderment. He came looking for donkeys and is hearing intimations of national destiny.

22. The lishkah ('hall, chamber, room') is the dining room attached to the high place where the sacrificial feast takes place. Samuel seats Saul be-rosh ha-qeru'im ('at the head of the called ones') — the position of highest honor among the invited guests. This is a public act of distinction: in a room of thirty prominent people, the unknown stranger from Benjamin is placed first. The number thirty (kishloshim) may suggest a formal council or representative gathering rather than a casual meal.

22. Samuel's actions speak before his words. By seating Saul at the head, he signals Saul's importance to the entire assembly without yet explaining why. The guests witness the honor without understanding its full significance.

23. The word tabbach ('cook, butcher') comes from the root tavach ('to slaughter'). Samuel had pre-arranged this: he gave the cook a specific portion (manah) with instructions to keep it in reserve (sim otah immakh, 'place it with you'). This advance preparation reveals that Samuel expected Saul's arrival — the divine revelation of verse 15-16 had already been translated into practical action. The seer does not merely receive knowledge; he acts on it.

24. The shoq ('thigh') is the priestly portion in the Levitical system. Its presentation to Saul carries implicit sacral significance — he is being treated as someone who holds a sacred office. The phrase ve-he'aleha ('and what was upon it') likely refers to the fat or additional meat on the thigh portion, indicating a generous, complete serving.

24. The Hebrew of this verse is textually difficult. The phrase la-mo'ed shamur lekha le'mor ha-am qarati has been interpreted variously. Our rendering takes it as: 'for this appointed time it was kept for you, since I said I have invited the people' — meaning Samuel set aside the portion when he organized the feast, knowing that God's appointed guest would arrive. The word mo'ed ('appointed time') resonates with its use for Israel's sacred festivals, elevating this meal beyond ordinary hospitality.

25. The gag ('roof, rooftop') was a flat surface used for private conversation, sleeping, and retreat in ancient Israelite homes. Samuel's choice to speak with Saul al ha-gag ('on the rooftop') signals a private, confidential conversation — above the household, away from listening ears. The verb dibber ('he spoke') without specifying the content creates suspense. The narrator withholds what Samuel told Saul on the rooftop, preserving the mystery of this private revelation. The reader knows from verses 15-16 what the subject must be, but the conversation itself remains unrecorded.

26. The phrase ka'alot ha-shachar ('as the dawn was rising') uses the verb alah ('to go up') for the dawn — the sun ascends as Saul's destiny ascends. Samuel's command qumah va-ashallchekka ('get up and I will send you') uses the same verb shalach ('to send') that God used in verse 16 ('I will send to you a man'). God sent Saul to Samuel; now Samuel sends Saul forward into his commission. The word ha-chutzah ('outside, into the open') indicates they moved from the private rooftop into the public street — the transition from private revelation to the beginning of public action.

27. The phrase amod ka-yom ('stand here for a moment,' literally 'stand as the day' or 'stand now') signals a pause in movement — physical stillness before a life-altering word. The verb ashmi'akha ('I will make you hear') uses the causative stem, emphasizing that this is not casual information but divinely authorized communication that Samuel will actively transmit. The word davar ('word') in davar Elohim means both 'word' and 'thing/matter' — the word of God is not merely speech but reality-creating substance.

27. The chapter ends mid-action, with Saul standing still and Samuel about to speak. This is a deliberate cliffhanger — the anointing itself is reserved for chapter 10:1, creating a chapter break that suspends the reader at the moment of maximum anticipation.

10

Summary: *Samuel privately anoints Saul as ruler over Israel and gives him three signs to confirm the divine appointment: he will meet men near Rachel's tomb who tell him the donkeys are found, then three men going up to God at Bethel will give him bread, and finally he will encounter a band of prophets at Gibeah and the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon him and he will prophesy with them. All three signs come true that same day. Samuel then convenes Israel at Mizpah, where the lot falls on Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. When they search for him, Saul is found hiding among the baggage. Samuel presents him to the people — taller than anyone — and declares him God's chosen. Some valiant men rally to Saul, but certain worthless men despise him and bring him no tribute. Saul keeps silent.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains the most detailed anointing scene in the Hebrew Bible. Samuel does not merely pour oil; he kisses Saul, explains the significance of the act, and then provides three escalating confirmatory signs — each more supernatural than the last. The first sign involves ordinary information (the donkeys are found), the second involves unsolicited provision (bread from strangers), and the third involves radical personal transformation (the Spirit of God changing Saul into a different man). The progression mirrors how God confirms a calling: through circumstances, through provision, and finally through inner transformation. The proverb 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' (hagam Sha'ul banneviim) became a lasting idiom in Israel — the skeptic's question about whether an unlikely person truly belongs among the inspired. That Saul hides among the baggage at Mizpah is one of the Bible's most psychologically revealing moments: the man God has chosen does not want to be found.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 1 in the Masoretic Text is unusually long and some scholars believe the opening phrase ('Then Samuel took a flask of oil...') originally began a sentence that continued into what is now verse 2 — the verse division may be secondary. The Hebrew of verse 1 also contains the phrase halo ki meshachakha YHWH al nachalato lenagid ('Has not the LORD anointed you as ruler over his inheritance?'), which the Septuagint expands significantly, adding an entire clause about Saul saving Israel from their enemies. We follow the MT but note the LXX divergence. The word tsemach in verse 2 (rendered 'Zelzah' as a place name) is obscure and its location uncertain. The phrase vayyitnabbe betokham ('he prophesied among them') in verse 10 raises the question of what prophesying means here — ecstatic behavior, musical worship, or spoken oracles. The Hebrew hitpael form of n-b-a suggests ecstatic or reflexive prophetic behavior rather than formal oracular speech.*

Connections: *The anointing of Saul connects directly to Samuel's warning in chapter 8 about what a king will do, and to God's instruction in 9:16 to anoint a man from Benjamin. The oil flask (pak hashemen) echoes priestly anointing in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, but here it is applied to a political-military leader — the first time in Israel's history that royal anointing occurs. The Spirit rushing upon Saul (ruach Elohim tsalchah) uses the same verb (tsalach) later applied to Samson (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14) and to David after his anointing (1 Samuel 16:13). The lot-casting at Mizpah recalls Joshua's distribution of land by lot (Joshua 18-19) and anticipates the Urim and Thummim decisions of Israel's later history. Saul hiding among the baggage will find its dark mirror in his later disobedience when he spares Agag and the best livestock (chapter 15) — a man who hides from authority eventually abuses it.*

1 Samuel took the flask of oil and poured it over Saul's head. He kissed him and said, "The LORD has anointed you as leader
over his own inheritance." 2 "When you leave me today, you will find two men near Rachel's tomb, at the border of Benjamin
in Zelzah. They will tell you, 'The donkeys you went looking for have been found. Your father has stopped worrying about the
donkeys and is now anxious about you, saying, What can I do about my son?'" 3 "From there, continue on until you reach the
oak of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there — one carrying three young goats, another carrying
three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine." 4 "They will greet you with a blessing of peace and give you two
loaves of bread. Accept them from their hands." 5 "After that you will come to Gibeah of God, where the Philistine garrison is
stationed. As you enter the town, you will encounter a band of prophets coming down from the high place, with lyres,
tambourines, flutes, and harps playing before them, and they will be prophesying." 6 "The Spirit of the LORD will rush upon
you, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be transformed into a different man." 7 "When these signs come to you,
do whatever your hand finds to do, because God is with you." 8 "Then go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will come down to you
to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Wait seven days until I come to you, and I will tell you what to do." 9
As Saul turned his shoulder to leave Samuel, God gave him a different heart. And all those signs were fulfilled that same day.
10 When they arrived at Gibeah, a band of prophets came to meet him. The Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied
among them. 11 Everyone who had known him before saw him prophesying with the prophets, and the people said to one
another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul really among the prophets?" 12 A man from there responded, "And
who is their father?" That is why it became a proverb: "Is Saul really among the prophets?" 13 When the prophesying ended,
Saul went to the high place. 14 Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where did you go?" Saul said, "To look for the
donkeys. When we could not find them, we went to Samuel." 15 Saul's uncle said, "Tell me — what did Samuel say to you?" 16 S
aul told his uncle, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But about the matter of the kingship — what Samuel
had said — he told him nothing. 17 Samuel summoned the people to the LORD at Mizpah. 18 He said to the Israelites, "This is
what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up from Egypt. I rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the
power of all the kingdoms that oppressed you.'" 19 "But today you have rejected your God — the one who saves you from all
your disasters and distresses — and you have said to him, 'No — set a king over us.' Now then, present yourselves before the
LORD by your tribes and by your clans." 20 Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel forward, and the tribe of Benjamin was
selected by lot. 21 He brought the tribe of Benjamin forward by its clans, and the clan of Matri was selected. Then Saul son of
Kish was selected. But when they searched for him, he could not be found. 22 They inquired of the LORD again, "Has the man
come here?" And the LORD said, "He is there, hiding among the baggage." 23 They ran and brought him out from there.
When he stood among the people, he was taller than everyone else from his shoulders up. 24 Samuel said to all the people,
"Do you see the one the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people!" All the people shouted, "Long
live the king!" 25 Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship, wrote them in a document, and deposited
it before the LORD. Then Samuel dismissed all the people, each to his own home. 26 Saul also went home to Gibeah, and with
him went valiant men whose hearts God had touched. 27 But certain worthless men said, "How can this one save us?" They
despised him and brought him no tribute. But Saul kept silent.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The pak hashemen ('flask of oil') uses pak, a small vessel — not the shofar (horn) used for David's anointing in 16:13. Some commentators see the fragile flask as foreshadowing Saul's fragile reign versus David's more enduring horn-anointing. The verb mashach ('to anoint') is the root of mashiach ('messiah/anointed one'). The term nagid ('ruler, leader, one placed at the front') differs from melekh ('king') — nagid emphasizes appointed military-political leadership under God's authority, while melekh carries connotations of sovereign rule. The LXX significantly expands this verse, adding 'over his people, over Israel, and you shall reign over the people of the LORD, and you shall save them from the hand of their enemies round about.'

2. Rachel's tomb (qevurat Rachel) near the Benjamin border is a significant landmark — Rachel was the mother of Benjamin, making this location ancestrally meaningful for Saul the Benjaminite. The place name Zelzah (betseltsach) is obscure; its location remains uncertain and the word may be corrupt. The shift from Kish worrying about donkeys to worrying about his son (mah e'eseh livni) is poignant: the mundane search for livestock has escalated into a father's fear for his child. The verb da'ag ('to be anxious, to worry') conveys genuine emotional distress, not casual concern.

3. The elon Tavor ('oak of Tabor') is a sacred tree serving as a landmark — trees frequently mark holy sites in the patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12:6; 35:8). The three men are pilgrims heading to Bethel ('House of God'), carrying offerings: young goats (gedayim) for sacrifice, bread (lechem) for a grain offering or communal meal, and wine (yayin) for a drink offering. This is a complete sacrificial provision. The term nevel-yayin ('skin of wine') uses nevel for a leather wineskin — the same word that elsewhere means a stringed instrument (both have rounded, bulging shapes).

4. The phrase sha'alu lekha leshalom ('they will ask about your peace/welfare') is the standard Hebrew greeting — but here strangers will spontaneously offer both greeting and provision to a man they do not know. That pilgrims carrying offerings to God would divert part of their provision to Saul is a sign of unsolicited divine favor. The instruction velaqachta miyyadam ('accept from their hands') is significant: Saul must receive, not refuse. Accepting provision from strangers is an act of trust in the God who arranged the encounter.

5. Gibeah ha'Elohim ('Hill of God') is likely Saul's own hometown of Gibeah in Benjamin — the Philistine garrison there underscores how deeply Philistia has penetrated into Israelite territory. The chevel nevi'im ('band/company of prophets') uses chevel, literally 'cord, rope,' suggesting a bound-together group — these are not isolated individuals but a prophetic community. The instruments — nevel (lyre), tof (hand-drum/tambourine), chalil (flute/pipe), and kinnor (harp) — indicate that prophetic activity was accompanied by music. The hitpael form mitnabbe'im ('prophesying') suggests ecstatic, Spirit-driven behavior rather than formal oracular proclamation.

6. The verb tsalchah (from tsalach, 'to rush upon, to prosper') is the characteristic verb for the Spirit's powerful, sudden action on individuals — it is used of Samson (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14) and later of David (1 Samuel 16:13). The phrase ruach YHWH ('Spirit of the LORD') denotes God's active, empowering presence — not an abstract force but the personal energy of the living God directed at a specific person for a specific purpose. The phrase le'ish acher ('into a different man') uses acher ('other, different') — this is not improvement but replacement; Saul will become someone he was not before.

7. The phrase aseh lekha asher timtsa yadekha ('do for yourself what your hand finds') is an idiom for seizing the opportunity at hand — acting decisively when the moment comes. Samuel does not give Saul a detailed action plan; he gives him signs to confirm God's presence and then tells him to act on his own judgment. This is the essence of Spirit-empowered leadership: God confirms the calling, then the leader must act with courage. The grounding clause ki ha'Elohim immakh ('because God is with you') is the ultimate authorization — not strategy, not resources, but divine presence.

8. This instruction becomes critically important in chapter 13, where Saul fails to wait the full seven days and offers the sacrifice himself — the act that costs him his dynasty. Samuel is establishing a chain of authority: Saul leads, but Samuel mediates between God and king. The burnt offerings (olot) represent total consecration to God; the peace offerings (zivchei shelamim) represent communion and covenant fellowship. Gilgal, near Jericho, was the site of Israel's first camp after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:19-20) — a place of new beginnings. The seven-day wait is a test of obedience embedded within the commission.

9. The phrase kehafnoto shikhmo ('when he turned his shoulder') is vivid physical description — the narrative captures the exact moment of departure. The verb hafakh ('to turn, transform, overturn') is used for dramatic reversals throughout the Hebrew Bible: the overthrow of Sodom (Genesis 19:25), turning water to blood (Exodus 7:17), and turning mourning to joy (Esther 9:22). Lev acher ('a different heart') uses the same adjective acher ('other, different') as ish acher ('a different man') in verse 6. The confirmation vayyavo'u khol-ha'otot ha'elleh bayyom hahu ('all those signs came that day') compresses what must have been hours of travel into a single summary statement.

10. The third sign is now fulfilled. The verb vatitslach ('rushed upon') is the same tsalach promised in verse 6, now narrated as accomplished fact. The phrase vayyitnabbe betokham ('he prophesied among/in the midst of them') uses the hitpael form of n-b-a, which suggests ecstatic, Spirit-driven prophetic behavior — Saul is swept up into something larger than himself. The plural 'they arrived' (vayyavo'u) indicates Saul was traveling with companions, possibly including the servant from chapter 9. The scene is public: Saul prophesies in the open, and the people who know him are watching.

11. The phrase kol-yode'o me'itmol shilshom ('all who knew him from yesterday and the day before,' i.e., 'from before') establishes that this behavior is unprecedented for Saul. His neighbors know him as a farmer's son, not a prophet. The question mah-zeh hayah leven-Qish ('what has happened to the son of Kish?') expresses genuine bewilderment — they identify him by his father's name, emphasizing his ordinary family origin. The question hagam Sha'ul banneviim ('Is Saul also among the prophets?') becomes a proverbial saying in Israel (referenced again in 19:24), expressing incredulity when an unlikely person displays unexpected spiritual capacity.

12. The phrase umi avihem ('and who is their father?') is one of the most debated lines in 1 Samuel. The pronoun 'their' could refer to the prophets (challenging the assumption that prophecy requires noble lineage) or could be a rhetorical challenge about Saul specifically. The word mashal ('proverb, parable, byword') indicates that the saying transcended this specific event and entered Israel's cultural vocabulary. A mashal is a compressed piece of wisdom that captures a recurring human situation in a memorable phrase.

13. The verb vaykhal ('he finished, he completed') indicates the prophetic episode was temporary — it had a beginning and an end. The Spirit's rushing was for a specific moment, not a permanent state. Saul then goes to the bamah ('high place'), the elevated worship site. This may be the same high place the prophets were descending from in verse 5, or a different one. High places were the standard local worship sites before the temple was built — they were elevated platforms, sometimes with structures, used for sacrifice and prayer.

14. The dod ('uncle') of Saul appears without prior introduction — the narrative assumes the reader knows the family context. The uncle's question is casual, but Saul's answer is carefully edited: he mentions Samuel but omits the anointing entirely. The phrase vanir'eh ki-ayin ('we saw that they were nowhere') explains the escalation from donkey-search to prophet-consultation, making the visit to Samuel sound practical rather than revelatory.

15. The uncle's follow-up question (mah-amar lakhem Shemu'el, 'what did Samuel say to you?') presses further. The particle na ('please, I ask') adds urgency — he senses there is more to the story than a donkey search. The uncle uses the plural lakhem ('to you all'), including the servant in the question.

16. The infinitive absolute haged higgid ('declaring he declared / he certainly told') gives emphatic force to Saul's partial truth — he makes the donkey report sound thorough while omitting everything that matters. The term melukhah ('kingship, royal authority') is the narrator's word, not Saul's — Saul does not use it because he does not speak of it at all. The narrator's aside (ve'et devar hammelukhah lo-higgid lo) breaks the dialogue pattern to make a psychological observation: Saul is already managing information, already guarding the secret of his anointing.

17. The verb vayyats'eq ('he cried out, he summoned') conveys urgent, authoritative calling — this is a national assembly, not a casual gathering. Mizpah (hammitspah, 'the watchtower') was a traditional assembly site in Benjamin (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 7:5-6). The phrase el-YHWH ('to the LORD') indicates this is a sacred convocation — the people are summoned not just to hear Samuel but to stand before God. What follows is a public, lot-based selection to confirm what has already been determined privately.

18. Samuel speaks with prophetic authority — koh amar YHWH ('thus says the LORD') is the standard messenger formula used by prophets throughout the Hebrew Bible. God recites his own resume: He'eleiti ('I brought up') references the Exodus, and va'atsil ('I rescued') from the root n-ts-l references ongoing deliverance. The phrase kol-hammamlakhot hallochatsim etkhem ('all the kingdoms that oppressed you') summarizes the entire Judges period — Moab, Canaan, Midian, Ammon, Philistia. God's point is: I have been your deliverer all along. The request for a king is a rejection of that history.

19. The verb me'astem ('you have rejected') is strong — ma'as means to refuse, reject, despise. God does not describe the people's request as misguided or premature but as rejection. The participle moshi'a ('who saves') is in the present tense — God is not merely their past deliverer but their ongoing savior. The phrase ra'oteikhem vetsaroteikhem ('your disasters and your distresses') covers both external calamities and internal pressures. The command hityatssevu ('present yourselves') uses the hitpael, implying deliberate, formal positioning — they must stand formally before God for the lot to be cast. The organization leshivteikhem ule'alpeikhem ('by your tribes and by your thousands/clans') follows the military census structure.

20. The verb vayyiqqarev ('he brought near') is a technical term for presenting before God, often used in sacrificial contexts. The verb vayyillakhed ('was taken, was captured') from l-k-d means literally 'was seized' — the lot 'captures' the chosen party. The mechanism of the lot is not described — it may have been Urim and Thummim, casting stones, or another sacred lot procedure. The passive voice ('was taken') emphasizes that the selection is not Samuel's doing but God's. Benjamin, the smallest tribe (Judges 21:6), is chosen — God's pattern of selecting the least continues.

21. The Matri clan (mishpachat hammaTri) appears only here in the Hebrew Bible; nothing else is known about it. The triple narrowing (tribe, clan, individual) follows the procedure used when Achan was identified in Joshua 7:16-18. The phrase vayvaqshuhu velo nimtsa ('they sought him and he was not found') creates dramatic tension: God's lot has identified Saul, but Saul himself is absent. The verb biqesh ('to seek') echoes the donkey search of chapter 9, creating an ironic reversal — the seeker has become the sought.

22. The verb vayyish'alu ('they inquired') puns on Saul's name (Sha'ul, 'asked for / requested'). The inquiry of the LORD (ba-YHWH) likely involved Urim and Thummim or another oracular device — God gives a direct, locational answer. The verb nechba ('has hidden himself') from ch-b-a means to hide deliberately; this is not accidental absence but intentional concealment. The kelim ('baggage, vessels, equipment') refers to the assembled supplies and gear the people brought to Mizpah. The image of Israel's first king hiding among luggage has generated centuries of commentary on the psychology of divine calling.

23. The verb vayyarutsu ('they ran') conveys urgency and excitement — the crowd rushes to retrieve their king. The verb vayyityatsev ('he stood, he positioned himself') uses the same root as hityatssevu ('present yourselves') in verse 19: the people were told to present themselves before God, and now Saul finally does the same. His physical stature — taller than everyone mishikhmo vama'lah ('from his shoulders and upward') — is emphasized as visible confirmation of his selection. The same description appeared in 9:2. In a culture that associated height with leadership capacity, Saul looks the part, whatever his internal reluctance.

24. Samuel's presentation uses bachar ('to choose, to elect') — the verb of divine selection used for Israel itself (Deuteronomy 7:6). The rhetorical question hare'item ('do you see?') forces the crowd to look and acknowledge. The phrase ein kamahu bekhol-ha'am ('there is none like him among all the people') is ambiguous — it could refer to his height, his character, or simply his unique divine selection. The acclamation vayyari'u ('they

shouted') followed by yechi hammelekh ('long live the king!') is Israel's first royal acclamation — the birth of the monarchy in a single shout. The word melekh ('king') is now spoken aloud by the people; the transition from theocracy to monarchy is verbally enacted.

25. The mishpat hammelukhah ('the rights/manner of kingship') is a constitutional document — mishpat here means 'established ordinance, regulation, charter.' This may be distinct from the mishpat hammelekh ('the manner of the king') in 8:11-18, which was a warning; this appears to be a positive charter defining how kingship should function under God. Samuel writes it bassefer ('in the/a document') and places it lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') — likely at a sanctuary, as a covenant witness. This is Israel's first written constitution, stored in sacred space to indicate that the king's authority derives from and answers to God.

26. Saul returns not to a palace but to his home in Gibeah — the monarchy has no infrastructure yet. The chayil ('valiant men, men of substance') who accompany him are not conscripts but volunteers drawn by divine impulse: asher-naga Elohim belibbam ('whose hearts God had touched'). The verb naga ('to touch, to strike') suggests direct divine contact — God physically reaching into these men's hearts to stir loyalty toward Saul. This is a small, Spirit-formed entourage, not an army. The new king goes home with a handful of God-touched followers.

27. The phrase benei veliyya'al ('sons of worthlessness/wickedness') is a Hebrew idiom for morally bankrupt troublemakers — beliyya'al may compound beli ('without') and ya'al ('worth, profit'). The verb vayyivzuhu ('they despised him') from b-z-h is the same verb used when Esau 'despised' his birthright (Genesis 25:34) — it indicates contemptuous disregard. The minchah ('tribute, gift, offering') they withhold is the standard acknowledgment of a new ruler's authority; refusing it is a political act of defiance. The final phrase vayyehi kemmacharish ('he was as one being silent') uses the hiphil participle of ch-r-sh ('to plow, to be silent, to be deaf'). The comparative ke- ('like, as') is unusual — he was 'like' one who keeps silent, as if the narrator sees him choosing silence rather than silence being his natural state.

11

Summary: *Nahash the Ammonite besieges Jabesh-gilead and offers a humiliating treaty: he will gouge out every man's right eye as a disgrace to all Israel. The elders of Jabesh ask for seven days to seek help. When the news reaches Gibeah, the Spirit of God rushes upon Saul in fierce anger. He butchers a pair of oxen, sends the pieces throughout Israel as a summons, and musters a massive army. Saul divides his forces into three companies, attacks at the morning watch, and shatters the Ammonites so completely that no two survivors remain together. The people then gather at Gilgal to renew Saul's kingship with sacrifices and celebration.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is Saul at his absolute best — the leader Israel hoped for. The Spirit of God (ruach Elohim) comes on him not in a worship setting but in response to injustice: he hears about Nahash's cruelty and the Spirit transforms his anger into decisive military action. This is the intended design of charismatic kingship — divine empowerment channeled through righteous fury on behalf of the vulnerable. Saul's dismemberment of the oxen deliberately echoes the Levite's dismemberment of his concubine in Judges 19:29, but where that act led to civil war and near-annihilation of Benjamin, Saul's act unites all Israel for the first time since the conquest. The chapter also preserves one of the most generous moments in Saul's life: when the people want to execute those who doubted his kingship (10:27), Saul refuses, declaring that no one will be put to death on a day when the LORD has given deliverance to Israel. This is the Saul who could have been — magnanimous in victory, attributing success to God, restraining vengeance.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between this chapter and the preceding narratives of Saul's selection presents a well-known source-critical puzzle. In chapter 10, Saul has already been publicly chosen by lot at Mizpah, yet 11:15 describes the people going to Gilgal to 'make Saul king' (vayyamlikhu sham et-Sha'ul) as though it were a fresh installation. The verb chadesh ('renew') in Samuel's phrase nachdeshshah sham hammelukhah ('let us renew the kingship there') attempts to harmonize the accounts — this is a renewal, not a first coronation. The Septuagint (especially 4QSam) preserves a longer introduction to this chapter that provides context about Nahash's prior atrocities against the Gadites and Reubenites, material absent from the Masoretic Text. Whether this is original text lost from MT or a later expansion in the LXX tradition remains debated.*

Connections: *The Jabesh-gilead connection is deeply layered. In Judges 21, after the civil war against Benjamin, the other tribes attacked Jabesh-gilead for not joining the fight, killed most of its inhabitants, and gave 400 surviving virgins to the Benjaminites as wives. Saul is a Benjaminite. The people of Jabesh-gilead may be his kinsmen through those forced marriages — which gives his rescue a personal dimension the text does not make explicit but the original audience would recognize. This bond endures: when Saul and his sons die at Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:11-13), it is the men of Jabesh-gilead who risk their lives to recover and bury the bodies. The dismemberment*

of oxen sent throughout Israel echoes Judges 19:29 (the Levite's concubine) but reverses its outcome: that act produced tribal civil war, this one produces tribal unity. Saul's declaration in verse 13 that 'the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel' (asah YHWH teshu'ah beYisra'el) uses vocabulary that will later describe David's victories — and that Saul himself will never use again with such unguarded faith.

1 Nahash the Ammonite marched up and laid siege to Jabesh-gilead. All the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a treaty
with us and we will serve you." 2 Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you: I will
gouge out every one of your right eyes. I will set this as a disgrace on all Israel." 3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us
seven days so we can send messengers throughout all the territory of Israel. If no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender
to you." 4 The messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported the situation to the people. All the people raised their voices
and wept. 5 Just then Saul was coming in from the field, behind his oxen. Saul asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why
are they weeping?" They told him what the men of Jabesh had reported. 6 The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard
this report, and his anger blazed fiercely. 7 He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent them throughout all the
territory of Israel by messengers, saying, "Whoever does not march out after Saul and after Samuel — this is what will be
done to his oxen!" The dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they marched out as one. 8 He mustered them at Bezek: the
Israelites numbered three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. 9 They told the messengers who had
come, "Say this to the men of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun grows hot, you will have deliverance.'" The
messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, and they rejoiced. 10 The men of Jabesh then said to the
Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." 11 The next day Saul
divided the army into three companies. They entered the Ammonite camp during the morning watch and struck Ammon
until the heat of the day. The survivors scattered so completely that no two of them were left together. 12 The people said to
Samuel, "Who was it that said, 'Should Saul reign over us?' Hand those men over so we can put them to death!" 13 But Saul
said, "No one will be put to death today, because today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel." 14 Then Samuel
said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingship there." 15 All the people went to Gilgal and made Saul
king there before the LORD at Gilgal. They offered fellowship sacrifices there before the LORD, and Saul and all the men of
Israel celebrated with tremendous joy.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb vayya'al ('he went up') indicates military advance from the east, ascending from the Jordan valley toward the Gilead highlands. Nachash is both a personal name and the Hebrew word for 'serpent' — the narrator may intend the resonance. The phrase kerot-lanu verit ('cut a treaty with us') uses the standard Hebrew idiom for covenant-making (literally 'cut'), which involves ritual animal slaughter to solemnize the agreement. The verb na'avdekka ('we will serve you') implies vassal tribute and political subjection — not slavery in the chattel sense, but the surrender of sovereignty.

2. The verb naqor ('gouge out, bore out') is graphic and specific — this is not wounding but deliberate mutilation. The phrase kol-ein yamin ('every right eye') applies to the entire male population, not select individuals. The word cherpah ('disgrace, reproach, shame') is a strong term for public humiliation — it appears elsewhere for the 'reproach of Egypt' removed by circumcision at Gilgal (Joshua 5:9) and for Goliath's defiance of Israel's armies (1 Samuel 17:26). Nahash intends this as a national statement: Israel is too weak to protect its own people.

3. The verb heref ('give respite, let go, relax') asks Nahash to ease the pressure temporarily. The phrase bekhol gevul Yisra'el ('throughout all the territory of Israel') shows that the elders plan a national appeal, not a local one — they need someone with authority over all tribes. The word moshi'a ('savior, deliverer, rescuer') is the participle of y-sh-', the root behind the name Yehoshua/Joshua and the noun yeshu'ah ('salvation'). The elders are asking whether Israel has a deliverer. The verb veyatsa'nu ('we will come out') means surrender by exiting the city gates — opening themselves to Nahash's terms.

4. Gibeah is identified as Giv'at Sha'ul ('Gibeah of Saul') — his hometown and de facto capital. The messengers speak be'oznei ha'am ('in the ears of the people'), a public declaration. The people's response is weeping (vayyivku), not action — they grieve but have no plan. This is the state of Israel without activated leadership: they feel the pain but cannot organize a response. Saul is notably absent from this scene; he will arrive in the next verse from the fields, still living as a farmer despite having been chosen as king.

5. The phrase acharei habaqar min-hassadeh ('behind the cattle from the field') paints Saul as still fully embedded in agrarian life. He is literally following oxen home from plowing or grazing. The question mah-la'am ki yivku ('what is with the people that they weep?') shows he is unaware of the crisis — no messenger system, no intelligence network. The verb vayesapperu-lo ('they recounted to him') uses the Piel intensive of s-p-r, suggesting a full and detailed account of the situation.

6. The verb tsalach ('to rush, to advance powerfully') in the Qal describes the Spirit's violent onset — this is not gradual inspiration but sudden seizure. The same verb describes the Spirit coming on Samson before he tore a lion apart (Judges 14:6). The phrase vayyichar appo ('his anger burned') uses the standard Hebrew idiom for fierce anger — literally 'his nose burned,' since the flaring of nostrils was associated with rage. The adverb me'od ('greatly, exceedingly') intensifies: this is not irritation but consuming wrath. The combination of ruach Elohim and anger is theologically significant — the Spirit does not suppress Saul's emotion but sanctifies it for action.

7. The phrase tsemed baqar ('a pair/yoke of oxen') — likely Saul's own working animals, the ones he was just walking behind. The verb vayenattechehu ('he cut it into pieces') uses the same Piel of n-t-ch used for butchering sacrificial animals (Leviticus 1:6) and for the Levite's dismemberment of his concubine (Judges 19:29). The allusion is unmistakable. The phrase pachad YHWH ('dread/terror of the LORD') indicates a supernaturally induced fear — not merely intimidation by Saul's threat but a divine compulsion that unites the tribes. The phrase ke'ish echad ('as one man') denotes perfect unanimity — a united Israel that has not been seen since Joshua's generation.

8. Bezek is located in the central hill country, strategically positioned for a march east to the Jordan valley and across to Jabesh-gilead. The separate counting of Judah from the rest of Israel (benei Yisra'el ... ve'ish Yehudah) may reflect an early political distinction between Judah and the northern tribes that will later become the divided monarchy — or it may simply reflect separate tribal musters. The numbers (300,000 and 30,000) are large by any ancient standard; the Hebrew word elef can mean 'thousand' or 'military unit/clan,' and some scholars read these as 300 units and 30 units respectively. The verb vayyifqedem ('he mustered/counted them') uses the root p-q-d, which implies both numbering and assuming command responsibility.

9. The word teshu'ah ('deliverance, rescue, salvation') is from the same y-sh-' root as moshi'a ('deliverer') in verse 3 — the elders asked for a moshi'a, and now teshu'ah is promised. The time marker bechom hashemesh ('when the sun grows hot') means mid-morning, approximately 9-10 AM — indicating the attack will come at dawn and the battle will be decided by mid-morning. The messengers' return with good news transforms the mood of Jabesh: vayyismachu ('they rejoiced'). The promise is specific — not 'soon' but 'tomorrow by mid-morning.'

10. The verb netse' ('we will come out') is the same verb from verse 3 (veyatsa'nu), where it meant surrender. Here it functions as deliberate misdirection — the Ammonites hear capitulation, but the men of Jabesh mean something quite different. The phrase kekhol-hattov be'eineikhem ('according to all the good in your eyes') is an idiom of total submission, but in context it is strategic deception: keeping Nahash complacent until Saul's army arrives.

11. The division into sheloshah rashim ('three heads/companies') is a standard ancient Near Eastern tactical formation — it allows a three-sided attack that creates confusion and prevents organized retreat. Gideon used the same tactic (Judges 7:16), as will Abishai and David later (2 Samuel 18:2). The ashmoret habboqer ('morning watch') is the last watch of the night, roughly 2-6 AM — Saul attacks in the pre-dawn darkness when the Ammonite camp is least alert. The phrase ad-chom hayyom ('until the heat of the day') matches the promise of verse 9: deliverance by mid-morning. The final clause velo nish'aru-vam shenayim yachad ('not two of them remained together') is a Hebrew idiom for total rout — the army disintegrated so completely that survivors fled individually, unable to regroup.

12. This refers back to the benei veliyya'al ('worthless men') of 10:27 who despised Saul and refused to bring him gifts. Now, after the decisive victory, the people's loyalty has swung to the opposite extreme — they want blood vengeance against Saul's critics. The verb nemitem ('we will put them to death') shows the crowd demanding execution. They address Samuel, not Saul, indicating that Samuel still holds judicial authority alongside Saul's military authority. The mob's zeal, while understandable, reveals the danger of populist energy: yesterday's indifference has become today's demand for purges.

13. The phrase lo-yumat ish ('no man will be put to death') is a royal decree — Saul exercises his authority not to punish but to show mercy. The verb asah ('accomplished, made, did') credits the LORD as the active agent of the teshu'ah ('deliverance'). Saul does not say 'I won' or 'we won' but 'the LORD accomplished.' The same root y-sh-' (teshu'ah) has run through the chapter from the elders' plea for a moshi'a (v3) through the promise of teshu'ah (v9) to this theological declaration. Saul's magnanimity here contrasts sharply with the vindictive kings who will follow in Israel's history.

14. The verb nachdeshshah ('let us renew') from ch-d-sh ('to make new, to renew') is carefully chosen — it does not say 'let us establish' (which would imply this is the first coronation) but 'let us renew' (which acknowledges prior installations at Mizpah in chapter 10). Gilgal is a site loaded with covenantal memory: it is where Israel first camped after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:19-20), where circumcision was renewed (Joshua 5:2-9), and where the 'reproach of Egypt' was rolled away. Samuel's choice of Gilgal for the kingship renewal connects Saul's reign to the conquest narrative — a new chapter in the same story. The word melukhah ('kingship') refers to the institution and office, not just the person.

15. The verb vayyamlikhu ('they made king') is a Hiphil of m-l-kh — the people actively install Saul as king. The phrase lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') indicates a sacral ceremony at a recognized worship site. The zevachim shelamim ('fellowship/peace sacrifices') are from the root sh-l-m ('wholeness, peace, completion') — these are offerings of celebration and communion, where God, priest, and worshiper all receive portions. The communal eating makes this a covenant meal binding the nation to its new king. The final phrase vayyismach sham Sha'ul vekhol anshei Yisra'el ad-me'od ('Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced there exceedingly') places Saul and his people in perfect harmony — a unity that will not survive the next few chapters.

12

Summary: *Samuel gathers all Israel and delivers his farewell address as judge, formally transferring leadership to the newly anointed king. He challenges the people to testify whether he has ever defrauded them, then prosecutes a covenant lawsuit (riv) against Israel, rehearsing God's righteous acts from the exodus through the judges. He declares their demand for a king an act of rejection against the LORD, then calls down thunder and rain during wheat harvest as a divine sign confirming his words. The people, terrified, beg Samuel to intercede for them. Samuel closes with a warning: if Israel and their king serve the LORD faithfully, all will be well — but if they turn to empty things (tohu), both they and their king will be swept away.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is structured as a formal covenant lawsuit — the Hebrew riv pattern found in the prophets (Micah 6:1-8, Hosea 4:1-3). Samuel stands as both plaintiff's attorney and witness, arraigning Israel before God. The lawsuit follows a recognizable Near Eastern legal form: the summoning of witnesses (verses 1-5), the recitation of the suzerain's past faithfulness (verses 6-11), the accusation of breach (verses 12-13), and the pronouncement of conditional sentence (verses 14-15). What makes this passage extraordinary is that the judge who prosecutes the case simultaneously announces his own retirement — Samuel is dismantling the system he embodied. He is the last judge, and the thunder he calls down is not merely a miracle but a divine seal on the lawsuit, God's own testimony entering the court record. The wheat harvest setting is also significant: thunder and rain during wheat harvest (late May to early June) is virtually unheard of in the Levant, making the sign unmistakable.*

Translation Friction: *The central tension is theological: Samuel declares that asking for a king was a great evil (ra'ah gedolah, verse 17), yet God has already granted the king (verse 13). The text does not resolve whether monarchy is inherently wrong or merely wrongly motivated. Samuel's statement in verse 12 — 'the LORD your God is your king' — frames the issue as competing kingships, but verse 14 immediately offers a path forward where both the human king and the divine king coexist. Translators must decide whether ra'ah here means 'evil' (moral fault) or 'disaster' (harmful consequence). We render it as 'evil' because the context treats the request as a breach of covenant loyalty, not merely a strategic mistake. Verse 21 introduces tohu ('emptiness, chaos'), the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the formless void before creation. Applying this cosmic term to idols is a deliberate theological claim: to follow other gods is to choose pre-creation nothingness over the God who orders existence.*

Connections: *Samuel's covenant lawsuit echoes Moses' farewell in Deuteronomy 31-32, where Moses also recites God's faithfulness, predicts Israel's unfaithfulness, and calls witnesses. The formula 'the LORD and his anointed' in verse 3 anticipates the pairing that will define the rest of 1-2 Samuel: God and his chosen king, a relationship that will fracture with Saul and be restored with David. The thunder-and-rain sign connects to Elijah's drought on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) — both are weather events that serve as divine testimony in a covenant dispute. Samuel's promise in verse 23 that it would be sin for him to stop praying for Israel establishes intercessory prayer as a prophetic obligation, a thread that runs through Jeremiah (7:16, 11:14) and into the New Testament's understanding of Christ's ongoing intercession (Hebrews 7:25). The word tohu in verse 21 deliberately evokes Genesis 1:2, framing idolatry as a return to primordial chaos.*

1 Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to your voice in everything you said to me, and I have set a king over you. 2 Now —
the king walks before you. As for me, I have grown old and gray, and my sons are here among you. I have walked before you
from my youth until this day. 3 Here I am. Testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed: Whose ox have I
taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I crushed? From whose hand have I accepted a
bribe to look the other way? Tell me, and I will make it right." 4 They said, "You have not cheated us. You have not crushed
us. You have not taken anything from anyone's hand." 5 He said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed
is witness this day, that you have found nothing in my hand." And they said, "He is witness." 6 Samuel said to the people, "It
is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your ancestors up from the land of Egypt. 7 Now then, stand
here, and I will bring a case against you before the LORD — the case of all the righteous acts of the LORD that he performed
for you and for your ancestors. 8 When Jacob went into Egypt and your ancestors cried out to the LORD, the LORD sent

Moses and Aaron, and they brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place. 9But they forgot the LORD their God, so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab — and these made war against them. 10They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. Now rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you.' 11The LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and he rescued you from the hand of your enemies on every side, so that you lived in safety. 12But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No — a king must reign over us!' — even though the LORD your God was your king. 13Now then — here is the king you chose, the one you asked for. The LORD has set a king over you. 14If you fear the LORD and serve him and listen to his voice and do not rebel against the command of the LORD — then both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. 15But if you do not listen to the voice of the LORD and you rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your ancestors. 16Now stand and witness this great thing that the LORD is about to do before your eyes. 17Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call on the LORD, and he will send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your evil is great — this thing you have done in the eyes of the LORD, asking for a king." 18Samuel called on the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day. All the people feared the LORD — and Samuel — greatly. 19All the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we do not die! For we have added to all our sins this evil — asking for a king." 20Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid. You have indeed done all this evil — but do not turn away from following the LORD. Serve the LORD with all your heart. 21Do not turn aside after empty things that cannot help and cannot rescue — for they are emptiness itself. 22For the LORD will not abandon his people, for the sake of his great name — because the LORD was pleased to make you his own people. 23As for me — far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you. I will teach you the good and straight path. 24Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. 25But if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb shamati ('I have listened') is the same root as Samuel's own name (shemu'el, popularly connected to shama, 'to hear'). The man whose name means 'heard by God' has now heard the people — but what they asked for grieves him. The verb himlikhti ('I have caused to reign') is the Hiphil form of malakh, indicating that Samuel served as the agent of royal installation, though God was the ultimate authority behind it.
2. The repetition of mithallekh/hithallakhti ('walks/I have walked') creates a deliberate handoff: Samuel's public conduct is now being transferred to the king. The Hithpael form of halakh carries the sense of ongoing, visible conduct — how one lives in full view of others. Samuel's claim that he walked before them from his youth (min-ne'uray) reaches back to his childhood service at Shiloh (chapter 2-3).
2. The mention of 'my sons are with you' is a painful concession. Samuel's sons were corrupt judges (8:1-3), and their failure was the stated reason Israel demanded a king. Samuel does not defend them here — he simply notes their presence and moves on to his own record.
3. The phrase neged YHWH ve-neged meshicho ('before the LORD and before his anointed') establishes the two witnesses required by Deuteronomic law: God and the king. The word mashiach ('anointed one') here refers to Saul — this is one of the earliest uses of the term that will later develop into the concept of the Messiah. Samuel places his entire career under oath before both divine and human authority.
3. The verb ratsoti ('I have crushed') comes from ratsats, meaning to crush, oppress, or break — it describes the abuse of judicial power to destroy the vulnerable. This is stronger than mere exploitation; it implies using authority to grind people down. Samuel's rhetorical questions follow the pattern of Mosaic judicial ethics (Deuteronomy 16:19) and anticipate the prophetic indictments of corrupt leaders (Ezekiel 34, Micah 3).
4. The people's threefold denial precisely mirrors Samuel's questions from verse 3 — using the same verbs ashaqta ('you cheated'), ratsota ('you crushed'), and laqachta ('you took'). The repetition functions as formal legal testimony: the community publicly certifies Samuel's integrity. The word me'umah ('anything at all') is emphatic — not even the smallest thing was taken. This public acquittal is Samuel's vindication before he prosecutes Israel's case.
5. The word ed ('witness') appears three times in rapid succession — Samuel declares it twice and the people confirm it once. The legal procedure is now sealed: God and the king serve as witnesses, and the people have ratified the verdict. The phrase bakhem ('against you') is striking — the witnesses are against the people, not against Samuel. By clearing Samuel, Israel has inadvertently placed themselves under scrutiny. Samuel's clean hands become the foil for Israel's guilty request. The stage is set for the prosecution to shift from Samuel's defense to Israel's indictment.
6. The verb asah here means 'made' in the sense of 'appointed, established' — God made Moses and Aaron into what they were. This opening line sets the framework for the covenant lawsuit: before any accusation, the prosecutor establishes the suzerain's credentials. The pattern mirrors Hittite treaty forms where the great king recites his benevolent acts before listing the vassal's obligations. Samuel begins with the foundational saving act: the

exodus from Egypt (he'elah, 'brought up'), using the same verb that will recur throughout the historical review.

7. The word tsidqot (plural of tsedaqah) here means 'righteous acts' or 'acts of covenant faithfulness' — not abstract righteousness but concrete historical interventions where God proved faithful. The term carries legal weight: these are God's demonstrations of covenant loyalty that obligate a response from the vassal. Samuel will now recite these acts as a prosecutor presents evidence.

7. The construction ishafetah itkhem ('I will judge/argue with you') uses the same root as Samuel's title — he is the shofet ('judge'). His final act as judge is not to adjudicate between two Israelites but to adjudicate between God and Israel. The preposition lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') indicates that God is both the offended party and the presiding authority — the covenant lawsuit is tried in God's own court.

8. Samuel compresses centuries into a single sentence: Jacob's descent into Egypt, the oppression, the cry (za'aqu, a cry of distress in covenant context), the sending of deliverers, and the settlement in Canaan. The verb za'aqu ('they cried out') is the technical term for covenant appeal — the cry of the vassal to the suzerain when the treaty is being violated by a third party. God's response (sending Moses and Aaron) is presented as fulfilling his covenant obligation.

8. The phrase ba-maqom hazzeh ('in this place') likely refers to the land of Canaan generally, though some interpreters connect it specifically to the location of the assembly (Gilgal or Mizpah). The settlement in the land is the culmination of God's saving act — not just rescue from Egypt but establishment in the promised territory.

9. The verb shakhchu ('they forgot') is not mere forgetfulness but covenantal amnesia — deliberate failure to remember God's acts. In covenant theology, to 'remember' (zakhar) is to act on the relationship; to 'forget' (shakhach) is to abandon it. The consequence is expressed with the commercial verb vayyimkor ('he sold them'), depicting God handing Israel over to enemies as one transfers property. The metaphor is deliberately degrading: the people who forgot their Redeemer are sold like goods.

9. The three enemies — Sisera (Judges 4-5), the Philistines (Judges 13-16), and the king of Moab (Judges 3:12-30) — represent threats from the north, west, and east respectively. Samuel selects enemies that encircle Israel, showing that covenant unfaithfulness exposed them on every front.

10. The cry follows a fixed pattern from the book of Judges: sin, suffering, crying out, deliverance. The confession chatanu ('we have sinned') is paired with the specific charge azavnu ('we abandoned') — the same verb used for covenant breach. The Baals (ba'alim, plural 'lords, masters') and Ashtaroth (plural of Ashtoreth, the Canaanite fertility goddess) represent the full spectrum of Canaanite worship. The people's promise ve-na'avdekka ('and we will serve you') uses the same verb (avad) they used for serving the Baals — the question of whom Israel will serve is the chapter's central issue.

11. Jerubbaal is Gideon's alternate name (Judges 6:32), meaning 'let Baal contend' — Samuel pointedly uses this name rather than Gideon, keeping the anti-Baal polemic alive. Bedan is debated: some identify him with Barak (Judges 4-5), others with Samson, and some see it as an otherwise unknown judge. The Septuagint reads 'Barak' here. Jephthah delivered Israel from the Ammonites (Judges 11). Samuel includes himself in the list — he is the last in the chain of deliverers God sent.

11. The verb vayyatsel ('he rescued') and the phrase vateshvu vetach ('you lived in safety') complete the cycle: Israel sinned, cried out, and God delivered. Samuel's point is that this pattern should have been sufficient — God always answered. The demand for a king breaks this established pattern of trust.

12. The clause ki melekh yimlokh aleinu ('a king must reign over us') uses the emphatic construction of the verb malakh with the cognate noun melekh — 'a king must king over us.' The intensity of the demand is embedded in the grammar. Samuel juxtaposes this with va-YHWH Eloheikhem malkekhem ('and the LORD your God is your king'), creating an irreconcilable collision: Israel already has a king, but they demanded another.

12. Nahash's invasion (detailed in chapter 11) was the immediate trigger for the monarchy demand, but Samuel frames it as the latest iteration of the Judges cycle — another enemy, another moment where Israel should have cried out to God but instead sought a structural solution. The shift from 'cry out to God' to 'give us a king' is the covenant breach Samuel is prosecuting.

13. The verb she'eltem ('you asked for') is from sha'al ('to ask'), the root embedded in the name Sha'ul (Saul). The wordplay saturates 1 Samuel: Hannah 'asked' for a son, the people 'asked' for a king, and the king's very name means 'asked for.' Samuel distinguishes between two agents: bechartem ('you chose') places the initiative on Israel, but natan YHWH ('the LORD has given') acknowledges that God ratified the request. The tension is unresolved — the king is simultaneously Israel's choice and God's gift, a paradox that will define Saul's entire reign.

14. The conditional im ('if') introduces a fork in Israel's future — one path leads to flourishing, the other to destruction (verse 15). The four verbs (fear, serve, listen, not rebel) are not synonyms but an ascending sequence of covenant commitment: reverence, active service, attentive obedience, and refusal to resist.

14. The phrase gam attem ve-gam hammelekh ('both you and the king') binds the people and their ruler to the same standard. The king is not above covenant law — he stands under the same conditions as every Israelite. This principle, articulated here, becomes the theological standard by which every king in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings will be judged.

15. The apodosis — ve-hayetah yad YHWH bakhem ('the hand of the LORD will be against you') — uses the image of God's hand as an instrument of judgment. The same 'hand of the LORD' that delivered Israel from Egypt (Exodus 9:3) and struck the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:6-9) will now turn against his own people. The phrase u-va'avoteikhem ('and against your ancestors') is textually difficult; the Septuagint reads 'and against your king,' which fits the context better since verse 14 addressed both people and king. The MT reading may preserve the original, connecting Israel's future disobedience to their ancestors' pattern of rebellion.

16. The verb hityatsvu ('stand') echoes the same legal summons from verse 7 — the defendants who were called to hear the case are now ordered to stand for the verdict's demonstration. The phrase ha-davar ha-gadol hazzeh ('this great thing') signals a theophanic event — God is about to intervene visibly. The construction oseh le-eineikhem ('doing before your eyes') emphasizes eyewitness experience: this will not be reported secondhand but seen in real time.

17. The rhetorical question halo qetsir chittim hayyom ('is it not wheat harvest today?') forces the audience to acknowledge what they already know: this is the dry season. Any rain that follows will be impossible to explain naturally. Samuel is engineering a situation where the sign is self-authenticating.

17. The phrase ra'atkhem rabbah ('your evil is great') uses ra'ah ('evil, wickedness, disaster') paired with rabbah ('great, much'). Samuel classifies the monarchy request not as a mistake or a preference but as a great evil (ra'ah gedolah). The word lish'ol ('to ask') — from sha'al — continues the wordplay with the name Sha'ul. Israel's 'asking' for a king produced 'the asked-for one,' but the asking itself was the transgression.

18. The sequence is immediate: Samuel called (vayyiqra), the LORD gave (vayyitten) — no delay, no waiting. The storm arrives as a divine response to prophetic prayer in real time. The word qolot ('thunderclaps,' literally 'voices') is the same word used for God's voice at Sinai (Exodus 19:16), connecting this moment to the original covenant-making event. The people's fear (vayyira) extends to both God and Samuel — the prophet's authority is confirmed alongside the divine demonstration. The phrase et YHWH ve-et Shemu'el ('the LORD and Samuel') pairs God and prophet just as verse 3 paired God and the anointed king. Samuel's authority, now publicly vindicated, is the very authority he is laying down.

19. The people's plea hitpallel be'ad avadekha ('pray on behalf of your servants') uses the same verb for intercessory prayer (hitpallel) that will anchor Samuel's commitment in verse 23. They call themselves avadekha ('your servants'), submitting to Samuel's authority even as he retires from office. The phrase yasafnu al kol chatoteinu ra'ah ('we have added to all our sins an evil') is a remarkable confession: the people acknowledge not just the sin of asking for a king but that it was added to an already existing accumulation of sins. The verb lish'ol ('to ask') appears yet again — the 'asking' that produced Saul is now confessed as the crowning transgression.

20. Samuel's response is pastorally remarkable: he confirms the sin (attem asitem et kol ha-ra'ah hazzot, 'you have done all this evil') but immediately pivots to the path forward. The conjunction akh ('but, only, nevertheless') is the hinge — it acknowledges the past without letting it determine the future. The prohibition al tasuru me-acharei YHWH ('do not turn aside from after the LORD') uses sur ('to turn aside, to depart'), the verb that will later describe Saul's own falling away. The command va-avadtem et YHWH be-khol levavkhem ('serve the LORD with all your heart') echoes the Shema's language (Deuteronomy 6:5) — total devotion, not partial compliance.

21. The Hebrew ha-tohu ('the emptiness') is deliberately shocking in context. This is the word from Genesis 1:2 — tohu va-vohu ('formless and void'). Applying it to idols equates them with pre-creation chaos: they are not merely powerless but anti-real, the negation of everything God's creative word brought into being. Samuel is not saying idols are weak; he is saying they are nothing.

21. The double negation — lo yo'ilu ('they do not profit') and lo yatsilu ('they do not deliver') — eliminates both categories of divine benefit. A god who cannot profit you in peace or deliver you in war is not a god at all. The clause ki tohu hemmah ('for they are tohu') delivers the verdict: emptiness is not what they produce but what they are.

22. The verb yittosh ('he will cast off, abandon') is a strong term for total rejection — it means to hurl away, to fling aside. Samuel's assurance is that God will not do this, despite the evil Israel has committed. The ground of this assurance is ba'avur shemo ha-gadol ('on account of his great name') — God's reputation among the nations is bound to Israel's existence. To destroy Israel would be to unmake his own testimony.

22. The verb ho'il ('he was pleased, he undertook willingly') appears in the Hiphil and carries the sense of free, gracious initiative. God was not compelled to choose Israel; he delighted to do so. This is the doctrine of election stated in its simplest form: God's choice preceded Israel's performance and is not contingent on it. The phrase etkhem lo le-am ('you as his people') uses the possessive — Israel belongs to God not by their decision but by his.

23. The word chalilah ('far be it, God forbid') derives from chalal ('to profane, to desecrate'). Samuel is saying that ceasing to intercede would be an act of profanation — not merely neglect but sacrilege. This elevates intercessory prayer from a spiritual practice to a covenant duty. The construction me-chato la-YHWH me-chadol lehitpallel ('from sinning against the LORD by ceasing to pray') makes the cessation of prayer the sin itself, not merely a path to sin.

23. The verb horeithi ('I will teach/instruct') comes from yarah, the same root that gives us Torah ('instruction, law'). Samuel's teaching role continues after his judicial role ends — he transitions from judge to prophet-teacher. The phrase be-derekh ha-tovah ve-ha-yesharah ('in the good and straight path') uses two adjectives: tov ('good' — morally excellent) and yashar ('straight, upright' — without deviation). The path is both ethically good and directionally clear.

24. The particle akh ('only, but') narrows everything to a single demand: fear and serve. The phrase be-emet ('in truth, in faithfulness') adds the quality of consistency — not sporadic devotion but truthful, reliable service. The verb re'u ('consider, see') calls the people to review the evidence Samuel has just presented: the historical recital of God's acts. The phrase et asher higdil immakhem ('what he has made great with you' or 'the great things he has done for you') summarizes the entire covenant lawsuit — God's track record of faithfulness is the ground for Israel's obligation.

25. The infinitive absolute hare'a tare'u ('doing evil you will do evil') conveys not a single act but a sustained pattern of wickedness. Samuel is not warning against a momentary lapse but against a settled trajectory of rebellion.

25. The verb tissafu ('you will be swept away') carries the force of sudden, total destruction. Its use in the Sodom narrative (Genesis 19:15, 17) gives it eschatological weight — this is not gradual decline but catastrophic erasure. The pairing gam attem gam malkekhem ('both you and your king') is

Samuel's final word on the monarchy: the king does not exempt the people from covenant consequences, nor do the people exempt the king. They rise or fall together.

13

Summary: *Saul has reigned for two years when his son Jonathan strikes the Philistine garrison at Geba, provoking a massive Philistine mobilization. The Philistines assemble an overwhelming force at Michmash — chariots, cavalry, and infantry described as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Israelite army disintegrates: soldiers hide in caves, thickets, and cisterns; others flee across the Jordan. Saul waits at Gilgal for Samuel, who had set a seven-day deadline. When the prophet does not appear and the army is melting away, Saul offers the burnt offering himself. Samuel arrives immediately afterward, condemns Saul's disobedience, and declares that his dynasty will not continue — the LORD has already sought out a man after his own heart. The chapter closes with a portrait of Philistine military supremacy: they have monopolized ironworking so completely that not a single sword or spear can be found among the Israelites except with Saul and Jonathan.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter marks the pivotal hinge in Saul's story — the moment his kingship begins its irreversible decline. The theological logic is precise: Saul was given the kingdom conditionally (chapter 10), proved himself worthy in battle (chapter 11), received Samuel's farewell charge with its demand for obedience (chapter 12), and now fails the first real test of faith under pressure. What makes the scene devastating is that Saul's reasoning is entirely logical from a military standpoint — his army is deserting, the enemy is overwhelming, and he needs divine favor before battle. His sin is not that he wanted to worship God but that he seized a priestly prerogative that was not his to take. The phrase ish kilbavo ('a man after God's heart') in verse 14 is one of the most consequential in the Hebrew Bible — it introduces the unnamed David as God's chosen replacement before David has appeared in the narrative. The reader knows Saul is finished before David has even been born into the story.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 1 contains one of the most discussed textual problems in the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretic Text reads ben-shanah Sha'ul bemalko — literally 'Saul was a son of [X] year(s) when he became king' — but the number is missing. The text then says 'and he reigned two years over Israel,' which contradicts the extended timeline of his reign in the rest of Samuel and in Acts 13:21 (which gives forty years). The Septuagint omits the verse entirely. Some scholars argue the number was lost through scribal damage; others suggest the formula was inserted later by an editor following the standard regnal formula pattern (compare 2 Samuel 5:4) but the original text never contained Saul's age. The 'two years' may refer not to his total reign but to the period before the events of this chapter. Additionally, Saul's sacrifice raises questions about the rigidity of cultic roles in this period — in 1 Samuel 6:14-15 the men of Beth-shemesh offered sacrifices, and in 2 Samuel 6:17-18 David himself offers burnt offerings. The severity of Samuel's rebuke may reflect prophetic-royal tension as much as strict priestly law.*

Connections: *The seven-day wait at Gilgal connects directly to Samuel's instructions in 10:8, where the prophet told Saul to go down to Gilgal, wait seven days, and Samuel would come to offer sacrifices and reveal what Saul should do. Saul's failure is therefore not spontaneous but a violation of a specific, prior command. The phrase ish kilbavo ('a man after his heart') will be explicitly applied to David in Acts 13:22 and echoes throughout the Davidic covenant theology — God's choice of David is not based on appearance or lineage but on the orientation of the heart toward God (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7). The Philistine iron monopoly in verses 19-22 provides essential military context for the entire Saul-David narrative: Israel fights at a catastrophic technological disadvantage, making Jonathan's solo attack in chapter 14 and David's victory over Goliath in chapter 17 all the more extraordinary. The three Philistine raiding parties (v.17-18) anticipate the ongoing Philistine pressure that will define Saul's reign and ultimately kill him at Mount Gilboa.*

1 Saul was [——] years old when he became king, and he reigned two years over Israel. 2 Saul selected three thousand men
from Israel. Two thousand were with Saul at Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and one thousand were with
Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the troops he sent home, each man to his tent. 3 Jonathan struck down the
Philistine garrison at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Saul sounded the ram's horn throughout all the land, saying,

"Let the Hebrews hear!" 4All Israel heard the report: "Saul has struck down the Philistine garrison" — and Israel had made itself repulsive to the Philistines. The people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal. 5The Philistines assembled to fight against Israel: thirty thousand chariots, six thousand cavalry, and foot soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They marched up and encamped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven. 6When the men of Israel saw how desperate their situation was — for the army was hard-pressed — the soldiers hid themselves in caves, in thorn thickets, among rocks, in underground vaults, and in cisterns. 7Some Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the territory of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and the entire army that stayed with him was trembling. 8He waited seven days, until the appointed time that Samuel had set. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the army was scattering away from him. 9Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings to me." And he offered up the burnt offering. 10Just as he finished offering the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet him and greet him. 11Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul answered, "I saw that the army was scattering away from me, and you had not come within the appointed days, and the Philistines were assembling at Michmash —" 12"I thought, 'The Philistines are about to march down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering." 13Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God that he gave you. Had you obeyed, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel permanently." 14But now your kingdom will not endure. The LORD has sought out for himself a man whose heart is aligned with his own, and the LORD has appointed him as leader over his people — because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you. 15Samuel got up and went from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul counted the troops remaining with him — about six hundred men. 16Saul and his son Jonathan, along with the troops remaining with them, were stationed at Geba of Benjamin, while the Philistines were encamped at Michmash. 17Raiding parties went out from the Philistine camp in three divisions. One division turned toward the road to Ophrah, toward the territory of Shual. 18The second division turned toward the road to Beth-horon, and the third division turned toward the border road that overlooks the Valley of Hyenas, toward the wilderness. 19No metalsmith could be found anywhere in the land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, "The Hebrews must not be allowed to make swords or spears." 20All Israel had to go down to the Philistines to sharpen their plowshares, their mattocks, their axes, and their plowpoints. 21The charge was a pim for the plowshares and the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the three-pronged forks, the axes, and for setting the ox-goads. 22So on the day of battle, not a sword or spear could be found in the hands of any of the troops with Saul and Jonathan. Only Saul and his son Jonathan had them. 23A Philistine outpost had moved forward to the pass of Michmash.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase ben-shanah Sha'ul bemalko follows the standard Deuteronomistic regnal formula (cf. ben-sheloshim shanah David bemalko in 2 Samuel 5:4, 'David was thirty years old when he became king'), but the numeral before shanah is absent. The Masoretic Text preserves this gap faithfully rather than inventing a number. The phrase ushtei shanim malakh ('and two years he reigned') uses the standard reign-duration formula, but the number is almost certainly incomplete or refers to a partial period. Some scholars emend to read 'Saul was thirty years old' or 'forty years old' based on parallel formulae, but no manuscript evidence supports a specific number.

2. The verb vayyivchar ('he chose/selected') indicates a deliberate military reorganization — Saul has moved from calling up the entire tribal levy (chapter 11) to maintaining a standing force. The number sheloshet alafim ('three thousand') may mean three thousand men or three military units (elef as 'clan/unit'). Michmash (Mikhmas) is strategically positioned on the northern side of a deep ravine (the Wadi Suweinit) that forms a natural border with Philistine-controlled territory. Jonathan's posting at Gibeah of Benjamin (Giv'at Binyamin) puts him at Saul's home base. The phrase ish le'ohalav ('each man to his tent') is the standard dismissal formula for tribal militia.

3. The word netsiv can mean 'garrison,' 'pillar,' or 'prefect/governor' — in context it refers to a Philistine military outpost or its commanding officer. The location Geva (Geba) is distinct from Giv'ah (Gibeah) though the names are similar and both are in Benjaminite territory. The verb vayyakh ('he struck') indicates a decisive military attack, not a skirmish. The shofar (ram's horn) was the standard instrument for military mobilization and alarm. The term ha'Ivrim ('the Hebrews') is used rather than benei Yisra'el — this designation appears primarily in contexts involving foreign relations or foreign perception of Israel.

4. The verb niv'ash (Niphal of b-'-sh, 'to stink, become odious') is vivid and visceral — Israel has made itself stink in the perception of the Philistines. The same root appears in Exodus 5:21 where the Israelite foremen say Moses has made them 'stink' before Pharaoh. The attribution of Jonathan's attack to Saul (hikkah Sha'ul, 'Saul struck') may reflect how the news traveled or may indicate Saul's public claim of the act. The verb vayyitsa'aqu ('they were summoned/cried out') at Gilgal indicates an urgent military assembly at the traditional mustering site in the Jordan valley.

5. The number sheloshim elef rekhev ('thirty thousand chariots') is textually suspect — the Syriac Peshitta and some LXX manuscripts read sheloshet alafim ('three thousand'), which is militarily more plausible. Even three thousand chariots would represent an enormous force. The phrase ke'chol asher al-sefat-hayyam larov ('like the sand on the lip of the sea for multitude') deliberately echoes the Abrahamic blessing language of Genesis 22:17 — applied here to the enemy, a devastating inversion. Beth-aven ('house of wickedness/emptiness') is either a separate location east of Bethel or a polemical renaming of Bethel itself ('house of God' becomes 'house of nothing').

6. The verb vayyitchab'u ('they hid themselves') uses the Hitpael reflexive — they actively sought concealment. The five hiding places form a comprehensive catalog: me'arot (caves, natural limestone cavities abundant in the central highlands), chavachim (thorny thickets — the word is rare and may relate to choach, 'thorn'), sela'im (rock formations, cliff crevices), tserichim (vaulted chambers, possibly underground tombs or cellars — the word is debated), and borot (cisterns, water storage pits cut into rock, which when dry could conceal a person). The phrase ki tsar-lo ('because it was narrow/tight for him') uses tsar in its spatial sense — the people feel trapped.

7. The term Ivrim ('Hebrews') rather than 'Israelites' reappears — in contexts of flight and subjection, the less dignified ethnic designation is used (cf. verse 3). The verb avru ('they crossed') creates a wordplay with Ivrim — 'the Hebrews (Ivrim) crossed (avru),' both from the root '-v-r ('to cross over'). The verb chardu ('they trembled') from ch-r-d denotes fear-induced shaking — physical trembling, not mere anxiety. The phrase acharav ('after him') indicates they followed Saul, but their following was characterized by terror, not confidence.

8. The verb vayyochel ('he waited') from y-ch-l indicates patient, expectant waiting — Saul endured the full duration. The phrase lammo'ed asher Shemu'el ('until the appointed time that Samuel [set]') refers back to the specific instruction in 10:8. The verb vayyafets ('scattered, dispersed') from p-w-ts describes the army breaking apart and drifting away — a stronger image than mere desertion, suggesting dissolution. The phrase me'alav ('from upon him') indicates the troops were departing from Saul's immediate presence — he could see them leaving.

9. The verb haggishu ('bring near, present') is the Hiphil imperative of n-g-sh — a priestly term for presenting offerings at the altar. The olah ('burnt offering') is the whole-animal sacrifice consumed entirely by fire, representing complete consecration to God (see Leviticus 1). The shelamim ('peace/fellowship offerings') involve shared eating — portions for God (burned fat), the priest, and the worshiper (see Leviticus 3). The phrase vayyaal ha'olah ('and he offered up the burnt offering') uses the Hiphil of '-l-h ('to cause to go up'), the technical term for making a sacrifice ascend as smoke to God. The brevity of the narrator's report — no divine response, no fire from heaven — is itself a theological statement: this offering is not accepted.

10. The temporal clause kekhalloto leha'alot ('as he finished offering up') uses the infinitive construct — the action of offering is literally just completed. The particle vehineh ('and look!') introduces sudden, dramatic appearance — Samuel materializes at the worst possible moment. The verb vayyetse' ('he went out') indicates Saul leaves whatever sacrificial area he was in to approach Samuel. The infinitive levarkho ('to bless him') can mean 'to greet him' — barakh in the Piel is the standard greeting verb, though its root meaning ('to bless') adds layers of irony: Saul comes to bless the prophet whose blessing he has just forfeited.

11. The question meh asita ('what have you done?') is a confrontational formula — it demands an accounting, not an explanation. Saul's response begins with ki-ra'iti ('because I saw') — he frames his action as a rational response to observed conditions. The verb nafats ('scattered, shattered') is stronger than the earlier vayyafets — the army is breaking apart violently. The phrase ve'attah lo-va'ta lemo'ed hayyamim ('and you did not come within the appointed days') directly blames Samuel for the delay. Saul's defense is logically structured: three ki ('because') clauses presenting escalating threats.

12. The phrase penei YHWH lo chilliti ('I had not softened the face of the LORD') uses the Piel of ch-l-h ('to make weak, to entreat, to soften') with panim ('face') — a standard idiom for seeking God's favor through prayer or sacrifice. The verb va'et'appaq (Hitpael of '-p-q, 'to restrain, force, compel oneself') is rare and suggests internal struggle — Saul claims he acted against his own reluctance. The same root appears in Genesis 43:31 and Isaiah 42:14 for restraining powerful emotions before finally acting. Saul's self-presentation is as a man driven to act by desperate circumstances, not as one who casually overstepped his authority.

13. The verb niskalta (Niphal of s-k-l, 'to be foolish, act foolishly') is a moral-intellectual judgment — not 'sinful' in the cultic sense but 'stupid' in the consequential sense. Saul made a catastrophically wrong choice. The phrase mitsvat YHWH Elohekha ('the command of the LORD your God') specifies that this was a direct divine instruction mediated through Samuel (10:8), not a general principle. The phrase hekhin YHWH et-mamlakhtekha ('the LORD would have established your kingdom') uses the Hiphil of k-w-n ('to establish, make firm') — the same verb used for God establishing David's throne in 2 Samuel 7:12. The conditional ki attah ('for then/had you obeyed') reveals that Saul's dynasty could have been the permanent one.

14. The verb taqum ('will stand/endure') from q-w-m — Saul's kingdom will not 'rise' into permanence; it is structurally doomed. The verb biqqesh (Piel of b-q-sh, 'to seek, search for') is in the perfect tense — the seeking is already completed, the man already found. The phrase ish kilvavo ('a man according to his heart') is one of the most debated in the Hebrew Bible: does kilvavo mean 'after God's own heart' (a man whose heart matches God's desires) or 'a man of God's choosing' (a man whom God's heart has selected)? Both readings are grammatically valid. The word nagid ('leader, designated one, prince-regent') implies appointment for future rule rather than immediate enthronement — the nagid is the one God has designated, who will rule when the time comes.

15. The verb vayyaqom ('he arose/got up') followed by vayyaal ('he went up') describes Samuel's physical departure — the verbs convey decisive, final movement. The absence of any further interaction between Samuel and Saul at this point is narratively significant. The verb vayyifqod ('he counted/mustered') from p-q-d indicates a military census of available forces. The number ke-shesh me'ot ish ('about six hundred men') is precise enough to convey the catastrophic attrition: from three thousand (v.2) to six hundred — a loss of eighty percent before any battle has been fought.

16. The text reads Geva Binyamin (some manuscripts read Giv'ah, 'Gibeah') — the two towns are close together in Benjaminite territory and the names are frequently confused in the manuscripts. The verb yoshvim ('sitting, dwelling, stationed') suggests a defensive posture — Saul is not advancing but holding position. The contrast between Saul's six hundred at Geba and the Philistine host at Michmash — separated by the deep Wadi Suweinit ravine — establishes the military geography for the events of chapter 14, where Jonathan will cross the pass with only his armor-bearer.

17. The noun hammashchit ('the destroyer/devastator') from sh-ch-t indicates organized raiding — not a pitched battle but systematic plundering and destruction. The division into sheloshah rashim ('three heads/companies') mirrors Saul's own three-company tactic in 11:11, but here it is the enemy employing the strategy. Ophrah is likely the Benjaminite Ophrah (distinct from the Ophrah of Judges 6:11 in Manasseh). The 'land of Shual' (erets Shu'al, 'land of the fox/jackal') is a district north of Michmash — the name may reflect the terrain's wild character.

18. Beth-horon (Beit Choron, 'house of the hollow/cave') refers to the twin towns of Upper and Lower Beth-horon on the main east-west route through the Aijalon valley — a strategically vital pass. The phrase hannishqaf al-gei hatsevo'im ('overlooking the Valley of the Hyenas') uses the Niphal participle of sh-q-f ('to look down upon, overlook') — the road gives a commanding view down into the valley. Tsevo'im means 'hyenas' (from tsavoa, 'hyena'), indicating a desolate, predator-inhabited ravine. Hammidbarah ('toward the wilderness') points east, toward the Judean desert descending to the Dead Sea and Jordan valley.

19. The word charash ('craftsman, smith, metalworker') from ch-r-sh ('to engrave, plow, work skillfully') here refers specifically to a metalsmith — someone who could forge iron or bronze into weapons. The phrase lo yimmatse' ('could not be found') uses the Niphal of m-ts-' — they were not merely rare but entirely absent. The Philistine rationale is stated directly: pen ya'asu ha'Ivrim cherev o chanit ('lest the Hebrews make sword or spear'). The term Ivrim ('Hebrews') is again used in a context of foreign domination — the Philistines use the ethnic label rather than 'Israel.' The word cherev ('sword') and chanit ('spear') represent the two basic infantry weapons of the period.

20. The verb vayyerdu ('they went down') indicates geographical descent from the Israelite highlands to the Philistine coastal plain. The verb liltosh ('to sharpen, to hammer sharp') describes the metalworking process of re-edging dulled tools. The four implements are: maharashtah ('plowshare,' the cutting blade of the plow), et ('mattock,' a heavy digging tool), qardummo ('his axe,' a cutting/chopping tool), and maharashtah (variant form, 'plowpoint' or possibly a second type of plow blade — the text may list two plow-related tools with different functions). The exact identification of all four tools is debated among scholars.

21. The word pim (also spelled payim) was a mystery until the discovery of inscribed stone weights in archaeological excavations. It equals approximately two-thirds of a shekel (about 7.6 grams of silver). The word happetsirah ('the charge, the price, the sharpening fee') from p-ts-r is also rare. The shelosh qilleshon ('three-pronged fork') is an agricultural pitchfork. The darvan ('ox-goad') is a long pointed stick used to drive oxen — even this simple tool required Philistine metalworking for its iron point. The verse catalogs every agricultural implement that required periodic sharpening, demonstrating the total scope of Philistine economic control.

22. The phrase beyom milchemet ('on the day of battle') marks the moment of truth — when the Philistine iron monopoly translates into battlefield reality. The phrase velo nimtsa' cherev vachanit ('neither sword nor spear was found') uses the Niphal of m-ts-' again — weapons simply do not exist in the Israelite ranks. The phrase beyad kol-ha'am ('in the hand of all the people') is comprehensive — not one soldier among the six hundred is properly armed. The final clause vattimatse' leSha'ul uleYonatan beno ('but there was found for Saul and Jonathan his son') isolates the two as the only armed Israelites. The contrast is absolute: two weapons versus an entire Philistine army.

23. The word matsav ('outpost, standing garrison, stationed force') from n-ts-v is related to netsiv (verse 3) but indicates a forward-deployed position rather than a permanent garrison. The phrase ma'avar Mikhmas ('the pass/crossing of Michmash') refers to the narrow rocky defile between Michmash and Geba — identified with the modern Wadi Suweinit, a deep ravine with steep cliffs on both sides. This is the exact location described in 14:4-5, where two rocky crags named Botsets and Seneh flank the passage. The Philistine control of this pass effectively traps Saul's force south of the ravine.

14

Summary: *Jonathan, without telling his father Saul, takes only his armor-bearer on a daring two-man assault against a Philistine garrison at the pass of Michmash. God confirms the mission through a sign, and Jonathan and his armor-bearer kill about twenty men, triggering a divinely amplified panic throughout the Philistine camp. Saul's watchmen see the confusion, and Saul musters his small force to pursue. Meanwhile, Saul has bound the army with a rash oath — a curse on anyone who eats food before evening. Jonathan, who never heard the oath, eats wild honey in the forest. When Saul attempts to inquire of God through the sacred lots, God does not answer. The lots identify Jonathan as the oath-breaker. Saul declares that Jonathan must die, but the people intervene and ransom Jonathan, declaring that he fought alongside God that day. The chapter closes with a summary of Saul's wars and family.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is a study in contrasts between two models of faith and leadership. Jonathan acts with stunning theological clarity: 'Nothing prevents the LORD from saving by many or by few' (v6). He does not presume on God — he proposes a sign, waits for confirmation, and only then attacks. His faith is bold yet submitted. Saul, by contrast, sits under a pomegranate tree with a shrinking army (v2), issues an oath that harms his own troops (v24-30), and nearly executes his own son for an oath Jonathan never heard (v44). The irony is devastating: the man who should be leading is sitting, and the prince is doing the king's work. The chapter also preserves a critical textual moment in verses 41-42 where the Septuagint (drawing from a Hebrew Vorlage likely reflected in 4QSam) preserves a much longer and more explicit description of the Urim and Thummim lot-casting procedure, material almost certainly lost from the Masoretic Text through haplography. Jonathan's rescue by the people using the verb padah ('ransom/redeem') in verse 45 introduces sacrificial substitution language — the people redeem Jonathan from death, insisting that his victory was accomplished 'with God.'*

Translation Friction: *The textual history of this chapter is among the most significant in Samuel. The MT of verse 41 reads simply 'Give a perfect lot' (havah tamim), while the LXX preserves a substantially longer text in which Saul explicitly addresses God, asks why he has not answered, and requests that the Urim and Thummim distinguish between himself and Jonathan on one side and the people on the other. Most text critics regard the LXX as preserving the earlier reading, with the MT having lost material through homoioteleuton (the scribe's eye skipping between similar phrase endings). This matters theologically: the longer text makes explicit that Urim and Thummim are the mechanism of divine inquiry, information only implied in the MT. Additionally, verse 18 presents a discrepancy — the MT says Saul called for the 'ark of God,' while the LXX reads 'ephod,' which fits the context far better since the ephod (containing the Urim and Thummim) is the instrument of priestly inquiry, and the ark was at Kiriath-jearim, not with Saul's army. Most scholars follow the LXX here. Saul's oath in verse 24 and its consequences raise questions about the theology of rash vows — the text never endorses Saul's oath as righteous, and Jonathan's critique of it (vv29-30) stands unchallenged by the narrator.*

Connections: *Jonathan's faith declaration in verse 6 ('Nothing prevents the LORD from saving by many or by few') establishes a theological principle that echoes forward to David and Goliath (chapter 17), where another young man confronts a vastly superior enemy trusting in divine, not numerical, advantage. The Michmash pass assault recalls Gideon's reduction from 32,000 to 300 (Judges 7) — God's pattern of delivering through the few to ensure that credit belongs to him alone. Saul's rash oath belongs to a biblical pattern of devastating vows: Jephthah's vow that cost his daughter's life (Judges 11:30-40) is the closest parallel, and the text invites comparison — both are military leaders whose misguided oaths threaten their own children. But where Jephthah carried out his vow, the people prevent Saul from doing so. The verb padah ('ransom') used for Jonathan's rescue is the same verb used for the redemption of firstborn sons (Exodus 13:13-15) and for God's redemption of Israel from Egypt — the people are performing a theological act, not merely a political rescue. The chapter's closing genealogical note (vv49-51) introduces names that will dominate the coming narrative: Abner the commander, and the daughters Merab and Michal — Michal will become David's wife and the hinge of the Saul-David conflict.*

1One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man who carried his weapons, "Come, let's cross over to the Philistine
outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father. 2Saul was sitting at the edge of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree
at Migron, and the force with him was about six hundred men. 3Ahijah son of Ahitub — brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas,
son of Eli, priest of the LORD at Shiloh — was wearing the ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. 4Bet
ween the passes by which Jonathan intended to cross to the Philistine outpost, there was a rocky crag on one side and a
rocky crag on the other. One was named Bozez and the other Seneh. 5One crag rose as a cliff face on the north, facing
Michmash, and the other on the south, facing Geba. 6Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come, let's cross over to the
outpost of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act for us, because nothing prevents the LORD from saving —
whether by many or by few." 7His armor-bearer said to him, "Do everything that is in your heart. Go forward — I am with
you, heart and soul." 8Jonathan said, "Right — we are going to cross over toward those men and let them see us." 9"If they
say to us, 'Stay where you are until we come down to you,' then we will stand in place and not go up to them." 10"But if they
say, 'Come up to us' — then we will climb up, because the LORD has given them into our hands. That will be the sign for us."

11The two of them revealed themselves to the Philistine outpost. The Philistines said, "Look — Hebrews coming out of the
holes where they have been hiding." 12The men of the outpost called out to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us
and we will teach you a lesson!" Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up behind me — the LORD has given them into
Israel's hand." 13Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell
before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer finished them off behind him. 14That first strike by Jonathan and his armor-bearer
killed about twenty men within roughly half the area a team of oxen could plow in a day. 15Terror struck the camp — in the
field, among all the troops, the outpost, and the raiding parties — they all trembled. The ground itself shook. It became a
God-sent panic. 16Saul's lookouts in Gibeah of Benjamin watched as the Philistine horde was dissolving, scattering in every
direction. 17Saul said to the troops with him, "Take a count and find out who has left us." They took the count, and Jonathan
and his armor-bearer were missing. 18Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ephod of God here" — for the ephod of God was with
the Israelites at that time. 19While Saul was still speaking to the priest, the commotion in the Philistine camp kept growing
louder and louder. Saul said to the priest, "Pull your hand back." 20Saul and all the troops with him rallied and advanced to
the battle. When they arrived, every Philistine's sword was turned against his neighbor — the confusion was catastrophic. 21T
he Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines — who had gone up with them into the camp from the surrounding
area — even they turned to join the Israelites under Saul and Jonathan. 22And all the Israelites who had been hiding in the
hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, and they too joined the pursuit in battle. 23The LORD saved
Israel that day, and the battle moved past Beth-aven. 24The men of Israel were hard-pressed that day, because Saul had
bound the troops with an oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food before evening, until I have taken vengeance on
my enemies!" So none of the troops ate anything. 25The whole army entered a forest, and there was honey on the surface of
the ground. 26When the troops entered the forest, honey was flowing freely, but no one raised his hand to his mouth,
because the troops feared the oath. 27But Jonathan had not heard when his father bound the troops with the oath. He
reached out the tip of the staff in his hand, dipped it into the honeycomb, brought his hand to his mouth — and his eyes
brightened. 28One of the soldiers spoke up and said, "Your father strictly bound the troops with an oath, saying, 'Cursed is
the man who eats food today.'" The troops were exhausted. 29Jonathan said, "My father has brought trouble on the land.
Look at how my eyes have brightened because I tasted just a little of this honey." 30How much greater would the victory have
been if the troops had eaten freely today from the plunder of their enemies! The slaughter among the Philistines would have
been far greater. 31They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon, and the troops were utterly
exhausted. 32The troops rushed at the plunder, seizing sheep, cattle, and calves, and slaughtered them right on the ground.
The troops ate the meat with the blood still in it. 33Someone reported to Saul, "Look, the troops are sinning against the
LORD by eating meat with the blood." He said, "You have acted treacherously! Roll a large stone over to me right now." 34Sa
ul said, "Spread out among the troops and tell them: Every man bring his ox, every man his sheep — slaughter them here on
this stone and eat. Do not sin against the LORD by eating meat with the blood." All the troops brought their animals that
night, each man leading his ox by hand, and slaughtered them there. 35Saul built an altar to the LORD. It was the first altar
he had ever built to the LORD. 36Saul said, "Let's go down after the Philistines tonight and plunder them until dawn, and not
leave a single man alive." The troops said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us approach God here
first." 37Saul inquired of God: "Should I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did
not answer him that day. 38Saul said, "Come forward — all the leaders of the troops. Find out and determine what sin has
been committed today." 39"As the LORD who saves Israel lives — even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he will certainly
die." But not a single person among all the troops said a word. 40He said to all Israel, "You will stand on one side, and I and
my son Jonathan will stand on the other." The people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." 41Saul said to the LORD,
the God of Israel, "Why have you not answered your servant today? If the guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, LORD God of
Israel, let the answer be Urim. If the guilt is in your people Israel, let the answer be Thummim." Jonathan and Saul were
selected by lot, and the people were cleared. 42Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was
selected. 43Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me — what have you done?" Jonathan told him: "I tasted a little honey with the tip of
the staff in my hand. Here I am — I am ready to die." 44Saul said, "May God do this to me and worse — you will certainly die,

Jonathan." 45But the people said to Saul, "Should Jonathan die — the one who accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Absolutely not! As the LORD lives, not a single hair from his head will fall to the ground, because he fought alongside God today." The people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die. 46Saul broke off the pursuit of the Philistines, and the Philistines returned to their own territory. 47Saul had secured the kingship over Israel and waged war on every side against all his enemies: against Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted defeat. 48He mustered a fighting force and struck Amalek, and he rescued Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. 49The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malki-shua. The names of his two daughters: the firstborn was Merab, and the younger was Michal. 50The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of his army commander was Abner son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51Kish was Saul's father, and Ner, Abner's father, was the son of Abiel. 52The war against the Philistines was fierce throughout Saul's entire reign. Whenever Saul saw a strong warrior or any capable fighting man, he would recruit him into his service.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase vayehi hayyom ('it happened one day') is a standard narrative opener indicating an unspecified but significant day. Jonathan is identified as ben-Sha'ul ('son of Saul') to establish the royal connection. The na'ar nosei khelav ('the young man carrying his weapons') is a military attendant — an armor-bearer who also fights. The verb na'averah ('let us cross over') from '-v-r implies crossing a geographic barrier (the wadi between the two cliff faces described in v4-5). The final clause ule'aviv lo higgid ('but to his father he did not tell') uses the Hiphil of n-g-d ('to declare, to report') — Jonathan deliberately withheld this plan from Saul.
2. The participle yoshev ('sitting') contrasts sharply with Jonathan's initiative in v1. Migron is a location near Gibeah; some scholars identify it with a site north of Michmash. The rimmon ('pomegranate tree') is a specific landmark — the definite article ha-rimmon indicates a known tree. Six hundred men is all that remains of Saul's army after the desertions described in 13:6-7 — a catastrophic reduction from the original force. This number echoes the 600 Benjaminite survivors of the civil war in Judges 20:47, another Benjaminite remnant.
3. The genealogy traces Ahijah (Achiyyah, 'my brother is YAH') through Ahitub, past Ichabod (I-khavod, 'where is the glory?'), through Phinehas (Pinechas) to Eli — the entire priestly line that fell under God's judgment in chapters 2-4. The ephod (efod) here is the priestly vestment containing the pocket (choshen) that held the Urim and Thummim for divine consultation. The phrase nosei efod ('wearing/carrying the ephod') identifies Ahijah as the active consulting priest. The clause veha'am lo yada' ki halakh Yonatan ('the people did not know that Jonathan had gone') — even Saul did not know, as v17 will confirm.
4. The ma'averot ('passes, crossing-points') are the narrow defiles in the wadi system. The phrase shen-hasela' ('tooth of the rock') is a vivid geographic term — a jagged, protruding crag. Two such formations face each other across the pass. Bozez (Botsets) likely derives from b-ts-ts ('to gleam, to shine'), suggesting a light-colored or sun-facing cliff. Seneh (Senneh) likely relates to seneh ('thorn-bush'), the same word used for the burning bush in Exodus 3:2-4. Whether this connection is coincidental or narratively significant is debated.
5. The noun matsuq ('cliff, pillar of rock') intensifies the description — these are not gentle slopes but sheer rock faces. The northern crag faces Michmash (Mikhmash), where the Philistines are encamped. The southern crag faces Geva' (Geba), where Jonathan's starting position is. Jonathan must climb the northern cliff to reach the Philistine outpost — ascending a sheer face toward an enemy looking down. The geography is preserved in the modern Wadi Suweinit near the Palestinian village of Mukhmas.
6. The term ha'arelim ('the uncircumcised') is Israel's standard term of contempt for the Philistines — it identifies them as outside the Abrahamic covenant and therefore outside divine protection. The particle ulay ('perhaps') is theologically important: Jonathan does not presume on God but expresses hopeful openness. The noun ma'atsor ('restraint, barrier, hindrance') from '-ts-r means there is literally nothing that can hold God back. The Hiphil infinitive lehoshi'a ('to save, to deliver') is from the root y-sh-' — the salvation root. The contrast berav o vim'at ('by many or by few') states the theological principle in its purest form: divine deliverance is independent of human resources.
7. The phrase kol-asher bilvavekha ('all that is in your heart') grants Jonathan complete authority — the armor-bearer submits fully to his commander's judgment. The imperative neteh lekha ('turn, go forward, proceed') expresses readiness to move. The declaration hinneni immekha kilevavekha ('here I am with you according to your heart') is a triple affirmation: presence (hinneni), companionship (immekha), and shared purpose (kilevavekha). The word levav ('heart') appears twice in this verse, emphasizing that the armor-bearer's inner conviction matches Jonathan's own.
8. The verb overim ('crossing over') resumes the language of v1 and v6 — they will cross the wadi. The Niphal veniglinu ('we will reveal ourselves, we will be disclosed') from g-l-h means they will deliberately make themselves visible. This is part of Jonathan's sign: they will expose themselves to the enemy and let the Philistines' response determine whether God has granted them the initiative. Stealth is abandoned in favor of a faith-test.
9. The first option of the sign: if the Philistines say dommu ('stand still, wait, be silent') — a command to halt — and declare they will come down, Jonathan reads this as God withholding the signal. The phrase ve'amadnu tachteinu ('we will stand in our place') means they will hold position and abort the mission. Jonathan's sign is not arbitrary; it has tactical logic — if the enemy comes to them on the cliff face, the disadvantage of terrain belongs to Jonathan. He needs them to stay put and invite the climb.

10. The imperative 'alu ('come up') from the Philistines is intended as mockery — inviting two men to climb a cliff toward an armed garrison is a taunt. Jonathan reads this taunt as the sign (ot) of divine authorization. The verb netanam ('he has given them') is a prophetic perfect — future action described with past-tense certainty because God's decision is already made. The phrase beyadenu ('into our hand') is the standard expression for military victory granted by God. The word ot ('sign') links Jonathan's method to the broader prophetic tradition of seeking and receiving divine confirmation before action.

11. The Niphal vayyiggalu ('they revealed themselves') from g-l-h — the deliberate exposure described in v8. The word Ivrim ('Hebrews') is used by non-Israelites throughout Samuel and Exodus — it may be an exonym (outsider-name) with condescending overtones. The chorim ('holes') are the caves and crevices mentioned in 13:6. The participle yotse'im ('coming out') and the relative clause asher hitchabbe'u sham ('where they hid themselves') — the Philistines read the situation as desperate refugees emerging from hiding, not as warriors attacking.

12. The phrase venodi'ah etkhem davar (literally 'we will cause you to know a thing') is an idiomatic threat — 'we'll give you something to remember.' It functions as the sign Jonathan specified in v10. Jonathan's command 'aleh acharai ('climb up behind me') shows he leads the assault personally, going first up the cliff face. The shift from beyadenu ('into our hand,' v10) to beyad Yisra'el ('into Israel's hand') widens the scope — this is not Jonathan's private victory but God's deliverance for the nation.

13. The phrase al-yadav ve'al-raglav ('on his hands and on his feet') describes literal hand-and-foot climbing — scrambling up the rock face. This is not metaphor; the terrain requires it. The verb vayyippelu ('they fell') before Jonathan could indicate they collapsed in panic, were struck down, or stumbled — the text leaves the mechanism ambiguous. The participle memottet ('putting to death, finishing off') from m-v-t (Polel) describes the armor-bearer's role as executioner of those Jonathan has already downed. The combat choreography is precise: Jonathan leads and strikes first, the armor-bearer follows and ensures the kill.

14. The phrase makkah rishonah ('first strike, initial slaughter') implies there will be more killing to follow — this is just the opening blow. The measurement keba'chatsi ma'anah tsemed sadeh ('about half a furrow of a yoke of field') is an agricultural land measure — the area one team of oxen could plow in a single pass, roughly half an acre. Using farming units for a battlefield measurement is distinctly Israelite. The number ke'esrim ish ('about twenty men') is modest enough to be credible — the narrator is not inflating the count.

15. The noun charadah ('trembling, terror, anxiety') from ch-r-d appears three times in this verse (charadah, chardu, cherdat), creating an intensifying repetition. The categories of troops affected expand outward: the camp (machaneh), the field (sadeh), all the people (kol-ha'am), the garrison (matsav), and the raiding parties (mashchit, literally 'destroyers'). The verb vattirgaz ('it quaked') from r-g-z describes seismic trembling. The climactic phrase cherdat Elohim ('trembling of God') uses the divine name as a superlative intensifier — this is not ordinary panic but supernaturally induced, overwhelming terror.

16. The tsofim ('lookouts, watchmen') are Saul's scouts stationed to observe Philistine movements. From Gibeah they can see across to Michmash. The verb namog ('melting, dissolving') from m-u-g describes the army losing cohesion — troops flowing away like liquid. The phrase vayelekh vahalom ('going and striking') is difficult — it may mean the Philistines were scattering in confusion while striking each other, or it may describe the mass moving and collapsing. The LXX reads the scene as the camp dissolving in all directions.

17. The imperative piquedu-na ('muster, take a count, please') from p-q-d shows Saul trying to understand the situation through administrative means — counting heads rather than inquiring of God. Only after the count reveals Jonathan's absence does Saul begin to understand what has happened. The verb halakh me'immanu ('has gone from us') — Saul does not yet know that Jonathan left deliberately to attack; he only knows someone is missing.

18. TEXTUAL NOTE: The MT reads aron ha-Elohim ('ark of God') but the LXX reads efod ('ephod'). The rendering follows the LXX. The ark was at Kiriath-jearim (7:1-2), not with Saul's army. Ahijah was already identified as wearing the ephod in v3. The verb haggisah ('bring near') is a Hiphil imperative of n-g-sh, commonly used for bringing sacred objects or offerings close for ritual use. The entire context — Saul wanting to inquire of God before battle — points to the ephod (and its Urim and Thummim), not the ark.

19. The phrase halokh varav ('going and increasing') is an intensifying construction — the noise continually grows. The command esof yadekha ('gather in your hand') tells the priest to stop the Urim and Thummim procedure. The 'hand' likely refers to the priest reaching into the ephod's pouch to draw the lots. Saul's impatience here echoes his premature sacrifice in 13:8-12 — both are moments where Saul acts before the proper ritual or prophetic process is complete. The narrator records this without explicit condemnation, but the pattern is unmistakable.

20. The verb vayyizza'eq ('he cried out, he rallied') from z-'-q is the war cry that musters the troops. The phrase cherev ish bere'ehu ('the sword of each man against his neighbor') describes the Philistines killing each other in the panic — a phenomenon that occurs repeatedly in biblical holy war narratives (Judges 7:22, 2 Chronicles 20:23). The word mehumah ('confusion, tumult, panic') is a technical term for divinely induced battlefield chaos — it shares a root with the tohom of Genesis 1:2, primordial disorder. The phrase gedolah me'od ('very great') intensifies: this is total disintegration of military order.

21. The Ivrim ('Hebrews') here are Israelites who had defected to or been conscripted by the Philistines — collaborators or forced laborers who served in the Philistine army. The phrase ke'etmol shilshom ('as yesterday and the day before,' i.e., 'previously, in earlier times') indicates an established arrangement. When the panic breaks out, these Hebrews switch sides — they turn (lihyot im, 'to be with') Israel. The narrator distinguishes between these turncoats and the Israelites who had remained with Saul, without explicit condemnation of the former. Battlefield loyalty shifts were common in ancient Near Eastern warfare.

22. The Hithpael participle hammitchabbe'im ('those hiding themselves') from ch-v-' recalls 13:6 — these are the deserters and refugees who fled Saul's army. When word spreads that the Philistines are in full retreat, they emerge and join the pursuit. The verb vayyadebiqu ('they pursued closely, they clung after') from d-v-q indicates aggressive, close pursuit — staying right on the enemy's heels. The phrase behar-Efrayim ('in the hill country of Ephraim') places these refugees north of the battlefield, in territory the fleeing Philistines would pass through.

23. The Hiphil vayyosha' ('he saved, he delivered') from y-sh-' is the central salvation verb of the Hebrew Bible — the root of the names Joshua and Jesus. Its subject is YHWH alone. Beth-aven (Beit Aven, 'house of wickedness') is located near Bethel; some scholars suggest it is a polemical renaming of Bethel ('house of God') after it became associated with idolatrous worship. The phrase vehamillchamah averah ('and the battle passed beyond') indicates the pursuit continued well past the initial engagement zone.

24. The verb vayyoel ('he made swear, he adjured') from '-l-h is related to alah ('oath, curse') — Saul binds the people under a self-imprecating oath. The word arur ('cursed') invokes covenant-curse language — whoever breaks this oath falls under divine malediction. The phrase veniqamti me'oyevai ('and I will be avenged on my enemies') centers the entire military campaign on Saul's personal vendetta rather than God's deliverance. The verb nigas ('pressed, distressed, oppressed') describes the physical and psychological toll of fighting all day without food. The phrase lo ta'am kol-ha'am lachem ('all the people did not taste food') confirms universal compliance — except for Jonathan, who never heard the oath.

25. The phrase kol-ha'arets ('all the land/earth') here functions as 'the whole group' or 'everyone.' The ya'ar ('forest, woodland') is likely in the hill country west of Michmash. The devash ('honey') on penei hasadeh ('the face of the field/ground') is wild honey — probably from a ground-level or low-hanging hive. The forest dripping with honey creates a scene of abundant provision: God has just given them victory and now provides sustenance — but Saul's oath prevents them from receiving it.

26. The phrase helekh devash ('a flow of honey') describes honey actively dripping or running — the hive is overflowing. The image is almost torturous: exhausted, starving soldiers walking through a forest dripping with honey, and no one dares eat. The verb massig ('bringing, reaching') with yado el-piv ('his hand to his mouth') — the most basic human gesture of eating. The noun shevu'ah ('oath, sworn declaration') from sh-v-' is the binding force that restrains them. The fear (yare') is not of Saul personally but of the sacred curse — breaking a sworn oath in Israel's worldview invited divine retribution.

27. The clause lo shama' behashbi'a aviv et-ha'am ('he had not heard when his father made the people swear') establishes Jonathan's complete ignorance — the oath is not binding on one who never heard it, though Saul will not see it that way. The matteh ('staff, rod') is Jonathan's walking/fighting stick. The ya'arat haddevash ('honeycomb,' literally 'forest of honey') is a dense mass of wild honeycomb. The phrase vatta'ornah einav ('his eyes brightened/became light') from '-v-r ('to be light') is an idiom for physical revitalization — the opposite of the dim eyes of exhaustion or fasting (cf. v29). The brightening of eyes signals that the honey did exactly what food should do for exhausted warriors.

28. The phrase hashbe'a hishbi'a ('he made solemnly swear, he strictly adjured') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis — the oath was emphatic and public. The soldier informs Jonathan of what he missed. The final clause vayya'af ha'am ('the people were faint/exhausted') from '-y-f uses a verb meaning to be weary to the point of collapse — the oath's toll on fighting men who have been pursuing all day without food. The narrator places this observation right after Jonathan's eyes brighten from eating, creating an implicit contrast: Jonathan is revived, everyone else is collapsing.

29. The verb akhar ('to trouble, to stir up disaster') is loaded — it connects Saul to Achan (Akhan from the same root) whose trespass at Jericho brought defeat on all Israel (Joshua 7). Jonathan's use of this word is a serious accusation. The phrase re'u-na ('look, please') invites the soldiers to observe the evidence. The clause ki oru einai ('because my eyes have brightened') from '-v-r proves his point physically — the honey worked. The phrase me'at devash hazzeh ('a little of this honey') minimizes the amount: even a tiny portion of what God provided through the forest would have transformed the army's effectiveness.

30. The particle af ki ('how much more') introduces an a fortiori argument — if a little honey did this much, imagine if the whole army had eaten. The phrase akhol akhal ('had freely eaten') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis — unrestricted eating. The noun mishellal oyeveihem ('from the plunder of their enemies') — the food seized from the fleeing Philistines was available but forbidden. Jonathan argues that the oath limited the scope of God's victory: the makkah ('strike, slaughter, defeat') against the Philistines would have been ravetah ('greater, more extensive') if the army had been properly fed. Jonathan's critique is both military and theological: Saul's oath hindered what God was doing.

31. The pursuit extended from Mikhmash (Michmash, the starting point) to Ayyalon (Aijalon), a distance of roughly 15-20 miles westward through the hill country toward the coastal plain — a full day's hard march and fighting. The phrase vayya'af ha'am me'od ('the people were very faint') repeats the exhaustion motif from v28 with the intensifier me'od ('very, exceedingly'). These men have been fighting and running all day on empty stomachs because of Saul's oath. The narrator ensures the reader understands the human cost of Saul's reckless vow.

32. The phrase vayya'as ha'am el-hashalal ('the people rushed/flew at the plunder') uses a verb suggesting violent, undisciplined haste. The animals — tso'n (sheep/goats), baqar (cattle), benei vaqar (calves) — represent significant captured livestock. The phrase vayyishchatu al-ha'arets ('they slaughtered on the ground') means they killed the animals where they stood rather than using a proper slaughtering site with drainage for the blood. The critical phrase vayyokhal ha'am al-haddam ('the people ate with/on the blood') indicates they consumed meat without properly draining the blood — a violation of the prohibition in Leviticus 17:10-14 and Genesis 9:4.

33. The report uses the participle chot'im ('sinning, missing the mark') — the people are in active violation of Torah. Saul's response begadtem ('you have acted treacherously, you have dealt faithlessly') from b-g-d is a strong accusation of covenant betrayal. The command gollu elai even gedolah ('roll to me a large stone') — Saul improvises a solution: a large stone will serve as a raised slaughtering surface so the blood can drain properly. The stone elevates the killing above ground level, allowing blood to flow away rather than pool around the meat. This shows Saul can think practically about religious law, even though his oath caused the problem.

34. The imperative putsu ('scatter, disperse') sends messengers throughout the camp. The phrase ish shoro ve'ish seihu ('each man his ox and each man his sheep') requires orderly, individual slaughter on the elevated stone. The verb ushechatetem bazzeh ('and you shall slaughter on this') — bazzeh ('on this') refers to the great stone. The prohibition velo-techetu laYHWH le'ekhol el-haddam ('do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood') shows Saul correctly identifying the theological issue. The nighttime setting (hallaylah) indicates this continued after dark — the troops were so hungry they slaughtered and ate through the night.

35. The verb vayyiven ('he built') from b-n-h is the standard term for altar construction. The phrase oto hechel livnot mizbe'ach laYHWH ('it he began to build an altar to the LORD' — i.e., 'that was the first altar he built to the LORD') uses hechel ('he began') in a way that emphasizes the novelty of the act. Some read this as 'he began by building' (i.e., this was his first), others as a comment on his overall reign. The repeated phrase laYHWH ('to the LORD') twice in one verse may emphasize that this altar is properly dedicated — unlike the improper ground-slaughter.

36. The cohortative neredah ('let us go down') from y-r-d suits the geography — the Philistines are retreating westward and downhill toward the coastal plain. The verb navozah ('let us plunder') from b-z-z means to strip the defeated of all valuables. The phrase ad-or habboqer ('until the light of morning') — a night operation extending to dawn. The troops' kol-hattov be'einekha aseh ('do whatever is good in your eyes') is formulaic deference. The priest's niqerevah halom el-ha-Elohim ('let us draw near here to God') uses language of sacred approach — qerev is the verb for approaching the divine presence, and halom ('here, to this place') suggests using the ephod right where they are.

37. The verb vayyish'al ('he inquired') from sh-'-l — the same root as Saul's own name (Sha'ul, 'asked/requested'). The two questions follow the binary format required by the Urim and Thummim: yes/no answers. The crushing phrase velo anahu bayyom hahu ('he did not answer him that day') — God's refusal to communicate through the appointed channel indicates a breach in the relationship. In 28:6, this same silence will recur when Saul desperately seeks guidance before his final battle, and 'the LORD did not answer him, not by dreams, not by Urim, not by prophets.'

38. The imperative goshu halom ('draw near here') summons the leaders for investigation. The pinnot ha'am ('corners of the people') is an idiom for the leaders — the 'cornerstones' who hold the community together. The verbs ude'u ur'u ('know and see') demand both intellectual understanding and visible evidence. The noun hachattat ('the sin') from ch-t-' — Saul assumes that God's silence must be caused by sin, which is correct in the framework of holy war theology. But the irony is that the 'sin' is Jonathan eating honey he never knew was forbidden.

39. Saul swears by the living God (chai-YHWH) — another oath on top of the first one. The phrase hammoshi'a et-Yisra'el ('who saves Israel') is bitterly ironic: Saul invokes God as Israel's savior in the same breath that he threatens to kill the man through whom God just saved Israel. The phrase mot yamut ('he will surely die') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis — death is certain. The people's silence (ein onehu mikkol-ha'am, 'none answering him from all the people') is pregnant: they know Jonathan ate the honey, they know the oath was unjust, but no one dares contradict a king swearing by God's name.

40. Saul divides the lot-casting into two groups: the people on one side (ever echad) and the royal house (Saul and Jonathan) on the other. This is the initial binary division for the Urim and Thummim process — the lots will determine which side bears the guilt. The people's repeated deference hattov be'einekha aseh ('do what is good in your eyes') shows compliance but not enthusiasm. They are watching Saul move toward a conclusion they fear.

41. CRITICAL TEXTUAL NOTE: The MT reads only havah tamim ('give perfection/completeness'), which is grammatically awkward and widely regarded as a truncation. The LXX (and 4QSam) preserves the full text of Saul's prayer, which explicitly names the Urim and Thummim as the two possible lot-outcomes. This longer reading is followed by most modern text critics (McCarter, Cross, Tov) and is almost certainly original. The loss in the MT is best explained by homoioteleuton — the word Yisra'el appears multiple times in the full text, and a scribe's eye skipped from one occurrence to a later one, dropping the intervening material. The verb vayyillakhed ('he was taken/caught') from l-k-d is the technical term for being identified by sacred lot (cf. Joshua 7:14-18, where Achan is 'taken' by lot).

42. The imperative happilu ('cast') is the standard term for lot-casting — literally 'cause to fall.' The phrase beini uvein Yonatan beni ('between me and between Jonathan my son') sets up the final binary. The verb vayyillakhed ('was taken/caught') identifies Jonathan. The brevity of the verse is striking — no editorializing, no divine speech, just the stark result. The narrative tension is at its peak: Saul has sworn Jonathan will die (v39), the lots have identified Jonathan, and the audience knows Jonathan is innocent.

43. The imperative haggidah li ('tell me') from n-g-d demands full disclosure. Jonathan's response uses the infinitive absolute ta'om ta'amti ('I certainly tasted') — an honest, unvarnished admission. The phrase me'at devash ('a little honey') — minimizing the quantity emphasizes the absurdity: death for a taste of honey. The declaration hinneni amut ('here I am, I will die') combines hinneni (the response of covenant readiness) with amut ('I will die') — Jonathan accepts the sentence with the composure of a man whose conscience is clear. He does not say 'I deserve to die' — only that he is prepared to.

44. The formula koh ya'aseh Elohim vekhoh yosif ('thus may God do and thus may he add') is a conditional self-curse — if I fail to carry this out, may God punish me and then some. The phrase mot tamut ('dying you will die,' i.e., 'you will certainly die') is the strongest possible death sentence in Hebrew. Using it for Jonathan — the hero of the day — reveals the full absurdity of Saul's oath-driven logic. The narrator records the sentence without endorsement.

45. The rhetorical question haYonatan yamut ('should Jonathan die?') expects a forceful 'no.' The noun yeshu'ah ('salvation, deliverance') from y-sh-' attributes the victory to Jonathan as God's agent. The oath formula chai-YHWH ('as the LORD lives') matches Saul's own oath formula, creating a direct confrontation of sworn declarations. The idiom im-yippol missa'arat rosho artsah ('if a hair of his head falls to the ground') — a guarantee of absolute safety. The phrase im-Elohim asah ('with God he acted/worked') — the people declare Jonathan's battle was a partnership with God. The verb vayyifdu ('they ransomed/redeemed') from p-d-h is the critical term — redemption language typically reserved for God's saving acts or the

substitutionary redemption of firstborn sons.

46. The verb vayya'al ('he went up') from '-l-h here means Saul ascended back from the lowland pursuit — returning eastward and upward from the coastal plain toward the hill country. The phrase halekhu limqomam ('they went to their place') — the Philistines retreated to Philistia (the coastal cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath). The pursuit ends without a decisive Philistine defeat.

47. The phrase lakhad hammelukhah ('he seized/secured the kingship') from l-k-d uses the same 'capture' verb as the lot-casting — Saul took hold of royal power. The list of enemies covers all compass directions: Moab (east of the Dead Sea), Ammon (Transjordan), Edom (south, Negev to the Gulf of Aqaba), Zobah (Aramean kingdom north of Damascus), and Philistines (western coastal plain). The phrase uvkhol asher-yifneh yarshi'a ('wherever he turned, he condemned/defeated') — the Hiphil of r-sh-' normally means 'to condemn, to declare guilty,' which is an unusual way to describe military victory. Some emend to yatsliyach ('he succeeded') or read it as 'he prevailed.' The MT reading may be deliberately ambiguous.

48. The phrase vayya'as chayil ('he made/gathered strength/valor') can mean either 'he acted valiantly' or 'he mustered an army.' The Amalek campaign described here will be narrated in full in chapter 15 — and it will become the occasion of Saul's definitive rejection by God. The verb vayyatsel ('he rescued, he delivered') from n-ts-l credits Saul with rescuing Israel from the shosehu ('the one plundering him'). This summary presents Saul in the best possible light as a military king, which makes the coming narrative of his disobedience and rejection all the more tragic.

49. The three sons listed here do not include Ish-bosheth (Eshbaal), who appears in 2 Samuel 2:8 — either Ishvi is an alternate name or Ish-bosheth is omitted. Malki-shu'a means 'my king is noble/generous.' The daughters are listed by birth order: Merav (firstborn) and Mikhal (younger). Both names will feature prominently: Merab in the broken betrothal to David (18:17-19), Michal in the love story and later estrangement (18:20-28, 2 Samuel 6:16-23). The genealogical format follows ancient Near Eastern royal chronicle conventions.

50. Achinoam (Ahinoam, 'my brother is delight/pleasantness') daughter of Achimaats (Ahimaaz) — a different Ahinoam from the one David later marries (25:43). Avner (Abner, 'my father is a lamp') son of Ner is identified as Saul's dod ('uncle' or 'kinsman'). Abner will become a major figure: he will champion Ish-bosheth after Saul's death, oppose David, and eventually be killed by Joab (2 Samuel 3). As sar-tseva'o ('commander of his army'), Abner holds the most powerful military position in the kingdom.

51. The genealogy clarifies the family relationships: Kish (Qish) is Saul's father (as established in 9:1), and Ner is Abner's father. Both Kish and Ner are identified as sons of Abiel (Avi'el, 'my father is God'), making Saul and Abner cousins. This explains Abner's fierce loyalty to Saul's house — they are close kin. The genealogy also anchors the royal house in the tribe of Benjamin.

52. The adjective chazaqah ('strong, fierce, hard') describes the Philistine war as a grinding, sustained conflict. The phrase kol yemei Sha'ul ('all the days of Saul') encompasses his entire reign — the war never ends. The verb vayya'asfehu ('he gathered him, he recruited him') from '-s-f shows a systematic policy of military conscription based on observed ability. The phrase ish gibbor ('mighty man, warrior') and ben-chayil ('son of valor, capable man') are the elite warrior designations that David will embody. This recruiting policy ironically sets the stage for David's arrival at court and the beginning of Saul's undoing.

15

Summary: *Samuel delivers the LORD's command to Saul: march against Amalek and execute total cherem — devoted destruction of everything and everyone. Saul wages a successful campaign, crushing the Amalekite forces from Havilah to Shur. But he spares King Agag alive and allows his troops to keep the best livestock, claiming the animals are for sacrifice to the LORD. God tells Samuel he regrets making Saul king. Samuel confronts Saul at Gilgal with one of the most devastating theological verdicts in the Hebrew Bible: 'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.' Saul is rejected as king. He begs Samuel not to humiliate him publicly, and Samuel briefly accompanies him — but as Samuel turns to leave, Saul tears his robe, and Samuel declares that the LORD has torn the kingdom from him and given it to a neighbor who is better. Samuel then personally executes Agag before the LORD at Gilgal. The two men part and never see each other again, though Samuel grieves over Saul for the rest of his life.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains what may be the single most important theological statement about worship in the entire Hebrew Bible: hashmoa' mizzevach tov lehaqshiv mechelev eilim — 'to obey is better than sacrifice, to listen than the fat of rams' (v22). This is not a late prophetic innovation; it is placed in the mouth of the last judge and first prophet of the monarchical period, at the very inception of kingship. The statement does not abolish sacrifice — it subordinates it. Ritual without obedience is not merely insufficient; it is rebellion (meri) and divination (qesem). Samuel equates Saul's self-willed 'worship' with the pagan practices Israel was commanded to destroy. The chapter also introduces an extraordinary theological tension around the verb nacham ('relent, repent, be grieved'). In verse 11, the LORD says 'I regret (nichamti) that I made Saul king.' In verse 29, Samuel declares 'the Eternal One of Israel does not lie and does not relent (yinnachem),*

for he is not a human being that he should relent (lehinnachem).' Then in verse 35, the narrator states 'the LORD regretted (nicham) that he had made Saul king.' The same verb is both affirmed and denied of God within a single chapter. This is not carelessness — it is the text wrestling with divine sovereignty and divine grief simultaneously, refusing to resolve the tension.

Translation Friction: *The cherem command against Amalek raises profound moral questions that the text itself does not soften. The instruction in verse 3 is comprehensive: kill men, women, children, infants, and all livestock. Modern readers recoil; ancient readers would have understood cherem as the total consecration of war spoil to God — nothing may be profited from, everything belongs to the divine realm. The tension is compounded by the fact that Saul is condemned not for excessive violence but for insufficient obedience to the destruction order. Critical scholarship identifies multiple layers: the Amalekite conflict tradition (Exodus 17:8-16, Deuteronomy 25:17-19), the Deuteronomistic theological framework that interprets Saul's reign as failed, and the possible retrojection of later anti-Amalekite sentiment. The Kenites receiving advance warning (v6) shows that the narrator recognizes ethical distinctions within the campaign — innocents can be spared. The nacham tension (vv11, 29, 35) has generated centuries of theological debate: does God change his mind? The text presents both positions without harmonizing them, suggesting that divine constancy and divine responsiveness to human action are both true and irreducible.*

Connections: *The Amalekite war connects directly to Exodus 17:8-16, where Amalek attacked Israel's rear — the weak, the exhausted, the stragglers — during the wilderness journey, and to Deuteronomy 25:17-19, which commands Israel to 'blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.' Saul's failure to complete cherem mirrors Achan's violation of cherem at Jericho (Joshua 7), where one man's retention of devoted goods brought disaster on all Israel. The verb ma'as ('reject') creates a devastating wordplay: because Saul rejected (ma'asta) the word of the LORD, the LORD has rejected (vayyima'asekha) him as king — the punishment mirrors the crime in the same root. Samuel's statement about obedience and sacrifice anticipates the prophetic tradition of Hosea 6:6 ('I desire loyal love and not sacrifice'), Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8, and Psalm 51:16-17. The tearing of the robe in verse 27 becomes a recurring symbol of torn kingship: Ahijah will tear a garment into twelve pieces before Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:30-31). Agag's death at Gilgal brings the Amalekite thread to a temporary close, but Amalek resurfaces: David will fight them (1 Samuel 30), and an Amalekite will claim to have killed Saul (2 Samuel 1:8-10). The Amalekite line persists all the way to Haman the Agagite in Esther — a descendant of the royal house Saul was supposed to destroy.*

1Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over his people, over Israel. Now listen to the voice of the
LORD's words. 2This is what the LORD of Armies says: 'I have called to account what Amalek did to Israel — how he set an
ambush against him on the road when he came up from Egypt. 3Now go and strike Amalek. Devote to destruction everything
that belongs to him. Do not show him pity. Kill man and woman, child and nursing infant, ox and sheep, camel and
donkey.'" 4Saul summoned the people and mustered them at Telaim: two hundred thousand foot soldiers, along with ten
thousand men of Judah. 5Saul advanced to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the wadi. 6Saul said to the Kenites, "Go
— withdraw — get away from the Amalekites before I sweep you away with them, because you showed faithful love to all the
Israelites when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites. 7Saul struck the Amalekites
from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8He captured Agag king of Amalek alive, but he devoted all the
people to destruction by the edge of the sword. 9But Saul and the people showed pity on Agag and on the best of the flock
and the herd — the fattened animals, the lambs, and everything of value. They were unwilling to devote these to destruction.
Only what was worthless and unwanted did they devote to destruction. 10Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11"I
regret that I made Saul king, because he has turned away from following me and has not carried out my commands." Samuel
was deeply grieved, and he cried out to the LORD all night long. 12Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, but he was
told, "Saul went to Carmel, and there he set up a monument for himself. Then he turned and moved on down to Gilgal." 13Sa
muel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you by the LORD! I have carried out the word of the LORD." 14Samuel
said, "Then what is this sound of sheep in my ears? And the sound of cattle that I am hearing?" 15Saul said, "They brought
them from the Amalekites, because the people showed pity on the best of the sheep and cattle in order to sacrifice them to
the LORD your God. But the rest we devoted to destruction." 16Samuel said to Saul, "Stop. Let me tell you what the LORD
said to me last night." Saul said to him, "Speak." 17Samuel said, "Were you not small in your own eyes when you were made

head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18The LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go and devote to destruction the sinners — the Amalekites. Fight against them until you have finished them off.' 19So why did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do what is evil in the LORD's eyes?" 20Saul said to Samuel, "But I did obey the voice of the LORD! I went on the mission the LORD sent me on. I brought back Agag king of Amalek, and I devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21But the people took sheep and cattle from the plunder — the best of what was devoted to destruction — to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal." 22Samuel said, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice; to listen is better than the fat of rams. 23For rebellion is the sin of divination, and defiance is wickedness and idolatry. Because you rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD has rejected you as king." 24Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the command of the LORD and your instructions, because I was afraid of the people and I listened to their voice. 25Now please forgive my sin and come back with me so I can worship the LORD." 26Samuel said to Saul, "I will not go back with you, because you rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 27As Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the edge of his robe and it tore. 28Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to a neighbor of yours who is better than you. 29Moreover, the Enduring One of Israel does not lie and does not relent, for he is not a human being, that he should relent." 30Saul said, "I have sinned. But now, please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel. Come back with me so I may bow down to the LORD your God." 31So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul bowed down to the LORD. 32Then Samuel said, "Bring Agag king of Amalek to me." Agag came to him in chains. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death has turned away." 33Samuel said, "Just as your sword made women childless, so your mother will be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal. 34Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his home at Gibeah of Saul. 35Samuel never went to see Saul again until the day of his death, for Samuel mourned over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening oti shalach YHWH ('me the LORD sent') places the pronoun oti ('me') in emphatic first position — Samuel is asserting his prophetic credentials before delivering a divine command. The verb limshochakha ('to anoint you') recalls the private anointing of 1 Samuel 10:1. The phrase al-ammo al-Yisra'el ('over his people, over Israel') uses double specification: the people belong to God first, and Israel is their name. The imperative shema' ('hear, listen, obey') is the same root that will appear in verse 22 as the chapter's theological climax. Samuel front-loads the key verb: everything depends on hearing.

2. The messenger formula koh amar YHWH ('thus says the LORD') marks this as direct prophetic oracle — Samuel speaks as God's mouthpiece. The title tseva'ot ('of armies/hosts') encompasses both heavenly and earthly forces; its use here militarizes the context. The verb paqadti from p-q-d ('to visit, attend to, call to account, muster') carries judicial force — God has reviewed the case and reached a verdict. The phrase asher-sam lo baderekh ('who set [an ambush] for him on the road') refers to Amalek's attack during the Exodus journey. The participle implies premeditated aggression: Amalek chose to attack Israel on the vulnerable march from Egypt.

3. The verb vehachramtem from ch-r-m ('devote to destruction, place under the ban') is the Hiphil imperative plural — the entire army is commanded to execute cherem. This is the same root used for the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6:17-21). The phrase lo tachmo alav ('do not show him pity') uses ch-m-l ('to spare, have compassion'), preemptively forbidding exactly what Saul will do. The merism me'ish ad-ishah me'olel ve'ad-yoneq ('from man to woman, from child to nursing infant') covers the entire human population. The livestock list (mishor ve'ad-seh migamal ve'ad-chamor) covers the entire economic wealth of a pastoral-nomadic society.

4. The verb vayeshamma' ('he summoned, he caused to hear') is the Piel of sh-m-' — Saul 'makes the people hear' the call to war. Telaim is likely in the southern Negev, near Amalekite territory. The separate count of Judah from the rest of Israel (as in 11:8) again reflects the political distinction between the southern and northern tribes. The numbers (200,000 foot soldiers plus 10,000 from Judah) are large; as with other biblical military censuses, elef may indicate 'military unit/clan' rather than the literal number 1,000. The verb vayyifqedem ('he mustered them') from p-q-d echoes verse 2, where God uses the same root to 'call Amalek to account.'

5. The phrase ir Amaleq ('city of Amalek') likely refers to the principal settlement or capital of the Amalekite confederation. The verb vayyarev ('he set an ambush') from '-r-v shows tactical planning — Saul conceals forces in the nachal ('wadi, dry riverbed, seasonal streambed'), which is characteristic of Negev terrain and provides natural cover for concealed troops. The irony is sharp: Amalek ambushed Israel on the road from Egypt (v2), and now Saul ambushes Amalek. The same verb root ('-r-v) connects the two actions.

6. The triple imperative lekhu suru redu ('go, turn aside, go down') conveys urgency — Saul wants the Kenites out before the attack begins. The verb pen-osifkha ('lest I gather you up / sweep you away') from '-s-p warns of collateral destruction. The word chesed ('loyal kindness, covenant faithfulness') is one of the richest terms in Hebrew — it denotes not mere kindness but obligation-based loyalty within a relationship. The Kenites' chesed toward Israel during the Exodus creates an enduring claim on Israel's protection. The verb vayyasar ('he withdrew') shows the Kenites comply — the separation of innocent from guilty is accomplished before the battle.

7. The geographical markers describe a vast sweep of territory. Havilah is in the Arabian interior (possibly eastern Arabia or northern Yemen); Shur is the wilderness region east of Egypt's border (the Sinai). The phrase bo'akha Shur ('as you approach Shur') uses the standard directional idiom. The phrase asher al-penei Mitsrayim ('which is on the face of / opposite Egypt') locates Shur on Egypt's eastern frontier. This merism — from Havilah to Shur — indicates that Saul's campaign covered the entire range of Amalekite territory. The military victory is comprehensive; Saul's failure lies not in the battle but in its aftermath.

8. The verb vayyitpos ('he captured, he seized') implies taking prisoner rather than killing. The adjective chai ('alive') is emphatic — the text stresses that Agag was not killed. The title melekh Amaleq ('king of Amalek') identifies Agag as the royal figure whose survival most directly violates cherem. The phrase hecherim lefi-charev ('devoted to destruction by the mouth/edge of the sword') combines the cherem root (ch-r-m) with the standard expression for death by sword. The contrast between chai for the king and hecherim for the people is the structural hinge of the narrative.

9. The verb vayachmo ('he showed pity, he spared') from ch-m-l directly violates the prohibition lo tachmo of verse 3. The word meitav ('the best, the choicest') from y-t-v emphasizes that Saul retained only premium goods. The word mishneim is debated — possibly 'second-born' animals (fattened for quality) or 'well-fed' livestock. The karim ('fattened lambs') are choice sacrificial-quality animals. The phrase lo avu hacharimam ('they were unwilling to devote them to destruction') reveals volition — this is not accidental oversight but deliberate refusal. The contrast terms nimvezah ('despised, contemptible') and nameis ('melting away, wasting, worthless') describe the rejected dregs. The chapter's moral calculus is razor-sharp: Saul destroyed trash and called it obedience.

10. The prophetic reception formula vayehi devar-YHWH el-Shemu'el ('the word of the LORD came to Samuel') marks a direct divine communication. This is the same formula used throughout the prophetic literature (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea) to introduce divine speech. Samuel will receive God's verdict on Saul's actions before confronting Saul himself. The verse is brief — a narrative hinge shifting the scene from the battlefield to the prophetic chamber.

11. The verb nichamti from n-ch-m is the theological crux of the chapter. It appears here (v11), is denied of God in verse 29, and reaffirmed in verse 35 — creating an unresolved tension the text does not harmonize. The root can mean 'regret, relent, change one's mind, be grieved, be consoled.' The phrase shav me'acharai ('he turned back from after me') uses the language of covenant defection — Saul has abandoned the path of following God. The phrase devarai lo heqim ('my words he has not carried out') uses q-w-m in the Hiphil ('to establish, fulfill, carry out'). The verb vayyichar ('it burned/grieved') for Samuel uses the same root as anger (ch-r-h) but here expresses anguished distress. The phrase vayyiz'aq el-YHWH kol-hallailah ('he cried out to the LORD all night') shows sustained, desperate intercession.

12. The verb vayyashkem ('he rose early') shows Samuel's urgency — he has been awake all night and moves at first light. The phrase matsiv lo yad ('setting up a hand/monument for himself') is telling: yad as 'monument' appears in 2 Samuel 18:18 for Absalom's memorial pillar. The reflexive lo ('for himself') is the narrator's implicit critique — Saul commemorates himself. Carmel (hakkarmelah) is a town in the Judean highlands (modern Khirbet el-Kirmil), not the northern Mount Carmel. Gilgal is the site of Saul's kingship ceremony (11:15) and will now become the site of his kingship's undoing — a savage geographical irony.

13. The greeting barukh attah laYHWH ('blessed are you by the LORD') is a standard blessing formula, but in context it functions as deflection — Saul leads with piety. The phrase haqimoti et-devar YHWH ('I have carried out the LORD's word') uses the Hiphil of q-w-m ('to cause to stand, to establish, to fulfill'). This is precisely the verb God denied of Saul in verse 11 (devarai lo heqim). The contradiction between God's assessment and Saul's self-assessment could not be sharper. Saul does not say 'most of' or 'largely' — he claims complete fulfillment.

14. The phrase qol-hatson hazzeh be'oznai ('this sound of sheep in my ears') makes the evidence sensory and immediate — Samuel is not citing a report but hearing living proof. The word qol ('voice, sound') is the same word used in verse 1 for the 'voice' of God's words (qol divrei YHWH). Samuel's ears should contain God's voice; instead they contain sheep sounds. The verb shomea' ('hearing') is a participle of sh-m-' — the chapter's governing verb. The question is rhetorical: Samuel knows exactly what the sounds mean. He is forcing Saul to account for the discrepancy between his claim and the audible evidence.

15. The subject shift from 'I have carried out' (v13, first person singular) to 'they brought them' (hevi'um, third person plural) is a transparent attempt to transfer responsibility. The verb chamal ('showed pity, spared') is the same prohibited verb from verse 3 and described in verse 9. The phrase lema'an zevoach laYHWH Elohekha ('in order to sacrifice to the LORD your God') wraps disobedience in liturgical language. The pronoun Elohekha ('your God') rather than Elohai ('my God') or Elohenu ('our God') creates theological distance — Saul treats God as Samuel's deity rather than his own sovereign. The phrase ve'et-hayyoter hecheramnu ('and the rest we devoted to destruction') quietly admits that cherem was applied only to what remained after the best was removed.

16. The imperative heref ('stop, cease, let go') cuts Saul off — Samuel has heard enough of his excuses. The phrase et asher dibber YHWH elai hallailah ('what the LORD spoke to me last night') refers to the revelation of verse 11. Samuel has been carrying this word all night, agonizing over it, and now delivers it. Saul's response dabber ('speak') is a single word — perhaps confident ignorance, perhaps growing dread. The brevity of both speakers creates taut narrative tension.

17. The phrase qaton attah be'einekha ('small in your own eyes') recalls 9:21 and 10:22 (Saul hiding among the baggage). The rhetorical question halo' ('is it not the case that...?') expects affirmation — Saul cannot deny his humble origins. The phrase rosh shivtei Yisra'el ('head of the tribes of Israel') identifies Saul's position as representative of the entire nation. The verb vayyimshachakha ('the LORD anointed you') repeats the claim of verse 1 — the anointing came from God, and God's authority over the anointed one is absolute.

18. The phrase vayyishlachakha YHWH baderekh ('the LORD sent you on a road/mission') uses the same verb as verse 1 (shalach, 'send') — Samuel recapitulates the commission. The designation hachatta'im ('the sinners') applies a moral category to the Amalekites — they are not merely enemies but offenders against God. The phrase ad-kallotam otam ('until you finish them off, until you consume them') from k-l-h ('to complete, finish, consume') demands total completion. Samuel is quoting back to Saul what God's command actually required — not the selective version Saul carried out, but the exhaustive one.

19. The interrogative lammah ('why?') demands explanation. The phrase lo-shamata beqol YHWH ('you did not obey the voice of the LORD') is the chapter's central indictment, using the verb sh-m-' that Samuel introduced in verse 1. The verb vatta'at from '-y-t ('to swoop, pounce, rush greedily') appears also in 14:32, where the people 'pounced' on spoil after Saul's foolish oath — a recurring pattern of undisciplined greed. The phrase hara' be'einei YHWH ('the evil in the eyes of the LORD') is the Deuteronomistic judgment formula applied to Israel's worst kings.

20. The emphatic asher shamati ('indeed I obeyed') uses the relative pronoun asher as an emphatic particle — Saul is insisting, not conceding. The phrase va'elekh baderekh asher-shelachani YHWH ('I went on the road/mission the LORD sent me on') echoes verse 18 word for word, claiming complete compliance. The verb va'avi ('I brought') from b-w-' in the Hiphil ('to bring, to lead') treats Agag as acquired goods — something brought back from the campaign. The phrase ve'et-Amaleq hecheramti ('I devoted the Amalekites to destruction') is first person singular — Saul now claims personal credit for the cherem he actually carried out, even as he disclaims responsibility for the cherem he didn't.

21. The phrase reshit hacherem ('the first/best of the devoted things') is deeply problematic theologically. Reshit normally describes premium offerings (reshit bikkurim, 'first of the first-fruits,' Exodus 23:19), but hacherem ('the devoted things') are not eligible for sacrifice — they are already claimed by God for destruction. Saul treats cherem as interchangeable with sacrificial offerings, which is a fundamental misunderstanding of the categories. The repeated Elohekha ('your God') again distances Saul from covenant relationship with God. The location baGilgal ('at Gilgal') is where Saul's kingship was renewed (11:15) — the site of his coronation feast will now become the site of his condemnation.

22. The noun chefets ('delight, desire, pleasure') asks what God actually wants — not what humans assume God wants. The pair olot uzvachim ('burnt offerings and sacrifices') covers the two major categories of offering. The infinitive absolute shemoa' ('to obey/hear') functions as a verbal noun — obedience as a concept, a way of life. The adjective tov ('good, better') establishes the comparison: obedience is tov ('better') than sacrifice. The verb lehaqshiv from q-sh-v ('to attend, to listen attentively, to heed') adds nuance — this is not just hearing but careful, focused attention. The chelev eilim ('fat of rams') refers to the suet surrounding the kidneys and liver, the choicest sacrificial portion reserved for God alone (Leviticus 3:3-4, 3:16). Samuel's point: even the fat — the part that is entirely God's — is less important to God than a listening heart.

23. The noun meri ('rebellion, defiance') from m-r-h characterizes willful disobedience against known commands. The noun qesem ('divination') refers to pagan techniques for discerning or manipulating the divine will — strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10. Samuel's equation is not metaphorical but categorical: rebellion against God's word and divination against God's sovereignty are the same sin — both attempt to impose human will on the divine realm. The noun haftsar ('defiance, insistence, pushiness') from p-ts-r describes aggressive stubbornness. Terafim ('household gods, idol figurines') are condemned throughout the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 31:19, Judges 17:5, 2 Kings 23:24). The verb ma'as ('reject, refuse, despise') creates the wordplay: ma'asta (you rejected) vayyima'askha (he rejected you). The preposition mimmelekh ('from being king') specifies what is lost — not Saul's life, but his dynasty and kingship.

24. The confession chatati ('I have sinned') uses ch-t-' ('to miss the mark, to sin'). The verb avarti ('I violated, I crossed over') from '-v-r means to transgress a boundary — he crossed a line God drew. The phrase pi-YHWH ('the mouth/command of the LORD') personifies God's command as speech from God's mouth. The phrase ve'et-devarekha ('and your words') acknowledges that Samuel's instructions carried divine authority. The verb yareti ('I feared') from y-r-' admits the wrong kind of fear — Saul feared the people rather than God. The phrase va'eshma' beqolam ('I obeyed their voice') uses the same shama' + qol construction that should have been directed at God (v1: shema' leqol divrei YHWH). Saul obeyed the wrong voice.

25. The imperative sa na' ('please carry, please bear') asks Samuel to lift the sin from Saul — literally to 'carry' (nasa') his transgression. The plea veshuv immi ('return with me') reveals Saul's deeper concern: he wants Samuel's public presence as prophetic endorsement. The phrase ve'eshtachaveh laYHWH ('so I may worship the LORD') uses the Hishtaphel of sh-ch-h ('to bow down, prostrate oneself'). Saul's request is ambiguous — does he want genuine worship, or does he want the appearance of prophetic approval? The fact that his concern shifts immediately to public image (v30) suggests the latter.

26. The declaration lo ashuv immakh ('I will not return with you') uses the same verb shuv ('return') from Saul's plea in verse 25. The ma'as wordplay is repeated with fuller specification: miheyot melekh al-Yisra'el ('from being king over Israel') rather than just mimmelekh (v23). The rejection is now explicitly over all Israel — Saul's authority over God's people is revoked. The repetition of the full formula (you rejected the LORD rejected) emphasizes the irreversibility of the divine decision.

27. The verb vayyissov ('he turned') from s-v-v indicates Samuel physically rotating to walk away. The verb vayyachazek ('he grasped, he seized') from ch-z-q indicates forceful gripping — Saul is not gently touching but clutching. The kenaf me'ilo ('the edge/corner of his robe') refers to the hem or decorative border of the outer garment. The me'il is a significant garment — it is the robe Samuel's mother made for him yearly (2:19). The verb vayyiqqara' ('it tore') from q-r-' provides the word Samuel will use in his interpretation. The ambiguity of the subject (whose robe?) has generated centuries of commentary; the narrative logic favors Samuel's robe tearing in Saul's hand.

28. The verb qara' ('to tear, to rip') verbally links the torn garment to the torn kingdom — the physical act becomes a sign-act (ot). The phrase mamlekut Yisra'el ('kingdom of Israel') is the political entity itself, not just the throne. The preposition me'alekha ('from upon you') images the kingdom as a garment worn by the king — God is stripping it off. The time marker hayyom ('today') makes the verdict present and immediate. The phrase lere'akha hattov mimmekka ('to your neighbor, the better one than you') introduces the unnamed successor. The word re'a can mean 'companion, friend, fellow, neighbor' — it is deliberately unspecific, prolonging the mystery of identity.

29. The title Netsach Yisra'el ('the Enduring One / Glory / Permanence of Israel') is a hapax as a divine title — it appears only here. The root n-ts-ch relates to perpetuity, victory, and endurance. The verb lo yeshaqer ('does not lie') from sh-q-r affirms divine truthfulness — God's word is reliable. The verb lo yinnachem ('does not relent') from n-ch-m is the Niphal ('he does not cause himself to relent'), directly contradicting the Niphal nichamti of verse 11 ('I regret'). The phrase ki lo adam hu lehinnachem ('for he is not a human being, that he should relent') grounds the assertion in ontology — divine and human responses are categorically different. The theological puzzle of nacham affirmed (v11) and denied (v29) of God within 18 verses has generated vast rabbinic, patristic, and modern commentary.

30. The repeated chatati ('I have sinned') is verbally identical to verse 24, but the context shifts its meaning — this time it is followed not by repentance but by a request for political face-saving. The imperative kabbedeni ('honor me') from k-v-d ('to be heavy, to honor') asks Samuel to give him public weight/dignity. The phrase neged ziqnei ammi ('before the elders of my people') and veneged Yisra'el ('before Israel') specifies two audiences: the political leadership and the general populace. Saul wants to avoid both audiences learning of his rejection. The persistent Elohekha ('your God') rather than Elohai ('my God') is now devastating — after being told God has rejected him, Saul still speaks of God as belonging to Samuel's sphere, not his own.

31. The verb vayyashav ('he turned back, he returned') from sh-w-v reverses Samuel's earlier refusal (lo ashuv immakh, v26). The phrase acharei Sha'ul ('after Saul') positions Samuel as following Saul — a reversal of the proper prophetic relationship where the king follows God's prophet. The verb vayyishtachu ('he bowed down, he worshiped') from sh-ch-h is the Hishtaphel indicating prostration. Saul worships — but worship after disobedience, as the chapter has established, is not what God desires.

32. The imperative haggishu ('bring near') from n-g-sh commands Agag's presentation — this is judicial language, bringing the accused before the judge. The word ma'adannot is a crux interpretum. It may derive from '-d-n ('to be delicate, to be pampered') yielding 'pleasantly, cheerfully'; from m-'-d-n related to 'bonds, fetters'; or be an adverbial form meaning 'haltingly, falteringly.' The LXX reads tremon ('trembling'). Context favors either 'in fetters' (a prisoner presentation) or 'cheerfully' (false confidence). Agag's statement akhen sar mar-hammavet uses akhen ('surely, truly') as an emphatic particle, sar ('has turned aside, departed') from s-w-r, and mar-hammavet ('the bitterness of death'). The phrase may also be read as a question: 'Has the bitterness of death truly passed?' — expressing hope rather than certainty.

33. The verb shikkelah ('made childless, bereaved') from sh-k-l is a devastating word in Hebrew — it describes the specific grief of a parent who has lost children. The structure ka'asher ... ken ('as ... so') establishes lex talionis (proportional justice). The phrase tishkal minnashim immekha ('your mother will be childless among women') makes the punishment personal and genealogical — Agag's line ends here. The verb vayeshassef from sh-s-f ('to hew, to hack, to cleave') appears only here and in uncertain form — it describes violent dismemberment. The phrase lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') marks this as a sacral execution, the completion of the cherem that Saul failed to carry out. Gilgal, the site of Israel's first Passover in the land (Joshua 5:10) and Saul's kingship renewal (11:15), now hosts the execution that seals Saul's rejection.

34. Ramah (haRamatah, with directional heh) is Samuel's home base (7:17, 8:4). Gibeah of Saul (Giv'at Sha'ul) is identified as Saul's beit ('house/home') — still his hometown, not a royal capital. The verb alah ('went up') for Saul indicates ascending elevation — Gibeah sits on a hill. The parallel construction (Samuel went to X, Saul went to Y) creates a visual of two figures walking apart, a narrative image of permanent separation.

35. The verb lo-yasaf ('he did not again, he never again') from y-s-f with the negative indicates permanent cessation. The phrase lir'ot et-Sha'ul ('to see Saul') means purposeful visit — Samuel did not seek Saul out. The phrase ad-yom moto ('until the day of his death') creates ambiguity: 'his' could refer to Samuel or Saul. Given that Samuel and Saul do meet again in 19:24 (at Naioth in Ramah, though that encounter is not initiated by Samuel) and in 28:11-19 (posthumously, at En-dor), the verse likely means Samuel never again sought Saul out in an official prophetic capacity. The verb hit'abel from '-v-l ('to mourn') in the Hitpael describes prolonged, active mourning — the kind displayed for the dead. The final clause vaYHWH nicham ('and the LORD regretted') uses the same Niphal of n-ch-m as verse 11 (nichamti), forming an inclusio around the chapter. The narrator gives the last word to divine grief — not divine anger, not divine punishment, but divine sorrow.

16

Summary: *The LORD rejects Saul and sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king. After passing over seven older brothers, Samuel anoints David — the youngest, a shepherd — and the Spirit of the LORD rushes upon him from that day forward. Simultaneously, the Spirit departs from Saul and a harmful spirit from the LORD torments him. Saul's servants recommend a skilled musician; David is summoned, enters Saul's household as armor-bearer and harpist, and whenever the harmful spirit comes, David plays and Saul finds relief. The future king enters the present king's service, and neither knows the full weight of what has begun.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter stages the most important theological pivot in the entire monarchy narrative: the transfer of the Spirit. In a single literary movement, the ruach YHWH ('Spirit of the LORD') rushes upon David (v13) and departs from Saul (v14). The Spirit is not a reward for good behavior — David has done nothing yet. It is sovereign election, the same kind of unearned choosing that marked Israel itself. The anointing scene at Bethlehem contains the theological center of gravity: 'The LORD does not see as a human sees — a person looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart' (v7). This is not a proverb about inner beauty. It is a direct rebuke of the criteria that produced Saul, who was chosen in part because he stood a head taller than everyone (9:2, 10:23). God is explicitly repudiating his own people's selection logic. The irony deepens when David is finally brought in and described as admoni ('ruddy'), with beautiful eyes and good appearance (v12) — he is physically attractive too, but that is not why he is chosen. The chapter also introduces one of Scripture's most disturbing theological claims: a ruach ra'ah me'et YHWH ('harmful spirit from the LORD') afflicts Saul. The narrator does not soften this. The spirit is explicitly 'from the LORD.' Whatever theological framework one brings to this — divine permission, judicial consequence, the dark side of sovereignty — the text refuses to let God off the hook.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between this chapter's introduction of David to Saul and the next chapter's (1 Samuel 17) creates one of the most discussed tensions in Samuel scholarship. In 16:14-23, David enters Saul's service, becomes his armor-bearer, and Saul 'loved him greatly' (v21). Yet in 17:55-58, after David kills Goliath, Saul asks Abner 'whose son is this youth?' as though he has never met him. The Septuagint actually omits large portions of chapter 17 (including 17:55-58), suggesting the Greek translators were aware of the tension and resolved it by excision. The Masoretic Text preserves both accounts, leaving the tension visible. Harmonization attempts range from the plausible (Saul is asking about David's family lineage for military-exemption purposes, not his personal identity) to the strained (Saul's mental instability caused memory loss). Source-critical scholars typically assign 16:14-23 and 17:1-58 to different literary traditions about David's introduction to the court. The verb vatitslach ('rushed upon') used for the Spirit coming on David in v13 is the same verb used for the Spirit coming on Saul in 10:6 and 11:6 — the narrator uses identical language to mark the transfer of divine favor from one king to the next.*

Connections: *The Bethlehem anointing connects backward and forward across the entire biblical narrative. Backward: Ruth ends with a genealogy tracing Perez to David through Jesse of Bethlehem (Ruth 4:17-22). This chapter picks up exactly where Ruth left off — same town, same family, the promise embedded in Ruth's genealogy now fulfilled. Forward: Micah 5:2 will prophesy that a future ruler will come 'from Bethlehem Ephrathah,' and Matthew 2:1-6 will cite this prophecy at Jesus' birth. The shepherd motif is equally layered: David is taken from tending sheep to shepherd Israel (2 Samuel 5:2, 7:8, Psalm 78:70-72), and the image of the shepherd-king becomes central to messianic expectation (Ezekiel 34:23, John 10:11). The phrase 'the LORD looks at the heart' (el-halevav) establishes a criterion that will haunt David's own story — his heart will prove both magnificent (2 Samuel 7) and catastrophically flawed (2 Samuel 11), yet he remains 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). The harmful spirit from the LORD anticipates the 'lying spirit' God sends in 1 Kings 22:19-23, where the divine council explicitly dispatches a deceptive spirit — another text that refuses to separate God from the darker instruments of his sovereignty.*

[1]The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and go — I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, because I have chosen a king for myself from among his sons." [2]Sa

muel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." The LORD said, "Take a young cow with you and say, 'I have come to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.'" 3"Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You will anoint for me the one I point out to you." 4Samuel did what the LORD instructed and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the town came trembling to meet him and asked, "Do you come in peace?" 5He said, "In peace. I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6When they arrived, he saw Eliab and thought, "Surely this one standing before the LORD is his anointed." 7But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or how tall he stands, because I have rejected him. For the LORD does not see as a human sees — a person looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 8Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass before Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." 9Jesse then had Shammah pass before him, but Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." 10Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." 11Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all your sons?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest — he is out tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him and bring him here. We will not sit down to eat until he arrives." 12So Jesse sent for him and brought him in. He was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. The LORD said, "Rise — anoint him. This is the one." 13Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. Then Samuel set out and went to Ramah. 14Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. 15Saul's servants said to him, "Look — a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you." 16"Let our lord give the order, and your servants here before you will search for a man skilled at playing the lyre. When the harmful spirit from God comes upon you, he will play and you will feel better." 17Saul said to his servants, "Find me someone who plays well and bring him to me." 18One of the young servants spoke up and said, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilled at playing, a brave and capable warrior, articulate in speech, a man of fine appearance — and the LORD is with him." 19Saul sent messengers to Jesse with the message: "Send me your son David, the one who is with the sheep." 20Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat, and sent them with his son David to Saul. 21David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul loved him deeply, and David became his armor-bearer. 22Saul sent word to Jesse: "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my eyes." 23Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take the lyre and play. Saul would find relief and feel better, and the harmful spirit would leave him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb me'astiv ('I have rejected him') uses the root m-'-s, the same word used in 15:23 and 15:26 for Saul's rejection — this is a completed divine verdict, not a process still underway. The phrase mimmelokh al-Yisra'el ('from reigning over Israel') specifies that the rejection is functional, not personal — Saul is rejected as king, though he remains alive and on the throne. Malle qarnekha shemen ('fill your horn with oil') refers to the ram's horn flask used for sacred anointing oil; this is the same instrument Samuel used to anoint Saul (10:1, though there a flask/pakh was used — the horn here may signal greater permanence). The phrase Beit-halLachmi ('the Bethlehemite') identifies Jesse by his town — Bethlehem, literally 'house of bread,' in the tribal territory of Judah. The verb ra'iti ('I have seen/chosen') carries the sense of divine selection through seeing: God has surveyed and chosen.

2. Samuel's fear is striking — the prophet who anointed Saul and pronounced divine judgment on him (chapter 15) is now afraid of him. The verb vaharagani ('he will kill me') is direct and unhedged: Samuel genuinely believes Saul would murder him for anointing a rival. God's response is not to dismiss the danger but to provide cover: eglat baqar tiqqach beyadekha ('take a heifer/young cow in your hand'). This is not a lie — Samuel will actually sacrifice — but it is a deliberate concealment of his primary mission. The verb lizbo'ach ('to sacrifice') provides legitimate reason for a prophetic visit to a town. The text presents God himself authorizing strategic concealment, a detail that has generated extensive discussion in Jewish and Christian interpretation.

3. The verb qara'ta ('you will call/invite') means to summon Jesse as a participant in the sacrificial meal — a normal social-religious function that arouses no suspicion. The phrase anokhi odi'akha ('I myself will make known to you') uses the emphatic first-person pronoun anokhi, stressing that God will personally direct the selection — Samuel is not to choose on his own. The verb umashachta ('you will anoint') introduces the key action of the chapter: mashach, to smear with oil as an act of consecration and divine appointment. The phrase li ('for me') makes the anointing explicitly for God's purposes, not for Israel's request — a contrast with Saul's anointing, which responded to the people's demand for a king (8:5-6).

4. The verb vayyecherdu ('they trembled') from the root ch-r-d describes physical trembling from fear or alarm. The elders of Bethlehem are terrified by Samuel's arrival — a prophet's unannounced visit to a small town could mean divine judgment. Samuel's reputation as the one who pronounced doom on Saul's dynasty and personally executed Agag (15:33) precedes him. Their question shalom bo'ekha ('is your coming peace?') is literally 'peace is

your coming?' — an anxious inquiry about whether he brings blessing or catastrophe. The same root ch-r-d describes Isaac's trembling when he realized he had blessed the wrong son (Genesis 27:33).

5. Samuel's answer shalom ('peace') directly answers the elders' fear. The command hitqaddesh ('consecrate yourselves') requires ritual purification — washing, abstaining from sexual contact, and other preparations for approaching the sacred. The Hitpael verb form indicates reflexive action: they must purify themselves. Samuel then personally consecrates (vayyqaddesh) Jesse and his sons using the Piel intensive, indicating a more active, direct consecration by the prophet himself. The separate consecration of Jesse's family singles them out from the rest of the town — Samuel is creating the conditions for the private anointing within the public sacrificial gathering.

6. The verb vayyar ('he saw') begins the theme of seeing that dominates this passage — Samuel sees Eliab and immediately draws a conclusion based on appearance. The name Eliab means 'my God is father.' Samuel's internal declaration akh neged YHWH meshicho ('surely before the LORD is his anointed') reveals that the prophet himself is making the same mistake the people made with Saul — judging by external appearance. The word meshicho ('his anointed') uses the same root mashach that God just commanded Samuel to perform, but Samuel is jumping ahead of divine instruction, selecting by sight rather than waiting for God's direction.

7. The verb tabbet ('look at, gaze at') from n-b-t implies focused, evaluative looking — not a casual glance but the kind of assessment one makes when sizing up a candidate. Mar'ehu ('his appearance') and govah qomato ('the height of his stature') are the two criteria Samuel is using, both external. The verb me'astihu ('I have rejected him') uses the same root m-'-s applied to Saul in verse 1 — Eliab is rejected by the same verb. The word la'einayim ('at the eyes,' meaning 'at what is visible, the outward appearance') uses the dual form of ayin ('eye'). The word lallevav ('at the heart') uses the form levav rather than the shorter lev — both mean 'heart' in the sense of the inner person, the seat of will and moral orientation. The contrast is not between superficiality and depth but between human cognitive limitations and divine omniscience.

8. The verb vayya'avirehu ('he made him pass before') uses the Hiphil of '-v-r, suggesting a formal presentation — Jesse is parading his sons before the prophet like candidates being reviewed. The name Abinadab means 'my father is generous/noble.' Samuel's declaration gam-bazeh lo-vachar YHWH ('also in this one the LORD has not chosen') uses the verb bachar ('to choose, to elect'), the standard term for divine election. The word gam ('also, even') links this rejection to Eliab's — the same verdict, the same divine refusal. Samuel has now learned to wait for God's indication rather than jump to his own conclusion.

9. The name Shammah (Shammah) may derive from the root sh-m-m ('to be desolate, astonished'). The repetitive formula gam-bazeh lo-vachar YHWH ('the LORD has not chosen this one either') builds narrative tension through its very monotony — son after son is rejected, and the reader begins to wonder whether any of Jesse's sons will be selected. The three-fold rejection of named sons (Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah) before the unnamed four creates a sevenfold refusal that heightens the drama of David's eventual selection.

10. The phrase shiv'at banav ('seven of his sons') summarizes the parade of candidates. There is a text-critical question here: if Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah are three of the seven, then four additional sons passed unnamed. Yet 1 Chronicles 2:13-16 lists only seven sons of Jesse total (with David as the seventh), while this passage implies eight (seven rejected plus David). The discrepancy may reflect different traditions about Jesse's family, or Chronicles may count differently. Samuel's declaration lo-vachar YHWH ba'elleh ('the LORD has not chosen among these') uses the preposition be- with the demonstrative 'elleh ('these'), sweeping all seven into a single rejection.

11. The verb hatammu ('are they finished/complete?') from t-m-m asks whether all the young men have been presented. The word hanne'arim ('the youths/young men') is a general term for sons of military or marriageable age. Jesse's answer od sha'ar haqqatan ('there still remains the smallest/youngest') uses sha'ar ('to remain, be left over') — David is literally the leftover son. The participle ro'eh batson ('tending the sheep') establishes David's occupation as a shepherd, which becomes theologically loaded throughout his story. Samuel's command lo-nassov ('we will not go around' or 'we will not recline [at the meal]') may mean either 'we will not sit in a circle for the sacrificial meal' or 'we will not proceed' — either way, everything stops until David arrives.

12. The adjective admoni ('ruddy, reddish') describes a reddish complexion or reddish hair — the same word describes Esau (Genesis 25:25). The phrase yefeh einayim ('beautiful of eyes') and tov ro'i ('good of appearance, handsome to look at') describe David's physical attractiveness. The irony is potent: after God has just declared that he does not look at outward appearance (v7), the narrator lavishes attention on David's looks. The text does not resolve this tension — David is both handsome and chosen for his heart. God's command qum meshachehu ('arise, anoint him') uses the imperative with urgency. The phrase ki-zeh hu ('for this is he') is strikingly brief and absolute — no explanation, no criteria listed, just divine identification.

13. The phrase qeren hashemen ('the horn of oil') refers to the ram's horn container holding the sacred anointing oil. The verb vayyimshach ('he anointed') is the Qal of mashach — the act that gives David the status of mashiach ('anointed one'). The phrase beqerev echav ('in the midst of his brothers') means the anointing was witnessed by the family, though its full significance may not have been understood by them. The verb vatitslach ('rushed upon') from ts-l-ch describes violent, sudden onset of the Spirit — the same word used for the Spirit coming on Samson (Judges 14:6) and on Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 11:6). The phrase mehayyom hahu vama'lah ('from that day and upward') indicates permanent duration — unlike the episodic Spirit-empowerment of the judges. Samuel's departure to Ramah (haRamatah, with directional he) closes the anointing scene abruptly.

14. The verb sarah ('departed, turned aside') from s-w-r indicates the Spirit's active withdrawal — it did not fade but left. The preposition me'im ('from with') suggests the Spirit had been dwelling alongside Saul and has now removed itself. The verb bi'attattu ('terrified/tormented him') from the root b-'-t appears in the Piel intensive, indicating repeated or intense action — this is ongoing torment, not a single episode. The phrase ruach ra'ah ('evil/harmful spirit') uses ra'ah, which can mean morally evil, harmful, injurious, or calamitous. The phrase me'et YHWH ('from the LORD') uses the preposition me'et indicating origin or source — the spirit comes from God's own presence or by God's own sending. The Septuagint translates

this as pneuma poneron para kuriou ('an evil spirit from the Lord'), preserving the divine source without softening it.

15. The servants use ruach Elohim ra'ah ('a harmful spirit of God') rather than ruach YHWH ra'ah — switching from the covenant name YHWH (used by the narrator in v14) to the generic Elohim ('God'). This may reflect the servants' outsider perspective: they observe the phenomenon but use the general term for deity rather than Israel's covenant name. The participle meva'ittekha ('is terrifying you') from b-'-t in the Piel indicates ongoing, visible symptoms — the servants can see that Saul is being tormented. They diagnose the cause as divine, which presupposes a worldview where spiritual affliction is recognized as coming from God. Their willingness to name it openly to the king suggests the symptoms are severe and undeniable.

16. The phrase yode'a menaggen bakkinnor ('one who knows how to play the lyre') describes musical competence. The kinnor is a stringed instrument — not a harp in the modern sense but a lyre, a smaller instrument held in the arms and plucked. The verb menaggen ('to play a stringed instrument') from n-g-n appears throughout the David narratives. The servants' proposal assumes that music can counteract spiritual affliction — a belief attested in ancient Near Eastern therapeutic texts. The phrase vetov lakh ('and it will be good for you') promises relief, using the simple adjective tov ('good') for wellbeing. The servants' prescription — music as therapy for divine affliction — creates the narrative mechanism by which David enters Saul's court.

17. The verb re'u ('see, look for') from r-'-h is ironic given the chapter's emphasis on seeing: Saul tells his servants to 'see' a musician for him, while God has told Samuel that divine seeing operates on entirely different criteria (v7). The participle metiv lenaggen ('one who excels at playing') uses the Hiphil of y-t-v ('to make good, to do well') with the infinitive of n-g-n ('to play') — literally 'one who makes playing good,' i.e., a skilled musician. Saul's command is simple and direct, with no awareness that the musician who will be brought is the very person anointed to replace him.

18. The phrase gibbor chayil ('mighty man of valor') is a military-social title denoting both fighting ability and social standing. The phrase ish milchamah ('man of war') indicates combat experience or readiness — surprising for a youth but possibly reflecting David's known courage. Nevon davar ('discerning of word/matter') can mean either 'prudent in affairs/matters' or 'articulate in speech' — both senses may be intended. Ish to'ar ('man of form') describes physical attractiveness. The climactic phrase vaYHWH immo ('and the LORD is with him') is the narrator's theological assessment placed on a servant's lips — the most important credential, saved for last. This phrase will become a refrain in David's story (18:12, 14, 28).

19. Saul sends mal'akhim ('messengers') — a formal, royal summons, not a casual request. The identification asher batson ('who is with the sheep') reduces David to his current occupation: the shepherd boy. This is how Saul understands David — a talented musician who tends sheep. The dramatic irony is severe: the king is summoning his own replacement, identifying him by the very occupation (shepherd) that will become the metaphor for ideal kingship in Israel. David is named by name here for the first time in Saul's mouth.

20. Jesse sends gifts with David — a donkey-load of bread (chamor lechem, literally 'a donkey of bread,' meaning a donkey's load), a skin of wine (no'd yayin), and a young goat (gedi izzim). These are tribute gifts appropriate from a subject to a king: sustenance provisions that acknowledge Saul's authority and express gratitude for the honor of the summons. The quantity is modest — Jesse is not wealthy. The gifts also function as the social protocol for placing one's son in royal service: you do not send your son empty-handed to the king.

21. The phrase vayya'amod lefanav ('he stood before him') is the standard idiom for entering someone's service or standing in attendance — it indicates a formal relationship of service, not a casual visit. The verb vayye'ehavehu ('he loved him') from '-h-v with the adverb me'od ('greatly, deeply') describes intense personal affection. This love — Saul's genuine attachment to David — makes the later hatred and jealousy all the more tragic. The phrase nose' kelim ('bearer of weapons/equipment') designates David as Saul's personal armor-bearer, a position of close physical proximity and trust. The armor-bearer carried the king's weapons and fought alongside him. David's first role in Saul's household is thus both intimate and military.

22. The phrase ya'amod-na David lefanai ('let David stand before me') is a formal request to retain David permanently in royal service — Saul is asking Jesse's permission to keep his son at court. The phrase matsa chen be'einai ('he has found favor in my eyes') is a standard idiom for gaining someone's approval and goodwill. The same phrase is used of Noah before God (Genesis 6:8), of Joseph before Potiphar (Genesis 39:4), and of Ruth before Boaz (Ruth 2:10). Saul's use of it here indicates genuine warmth and satisfaction with David. The irony is layered: David has found favor in Saul's eyes, but God has already looked past eyes to the heart (v7).

23. The construction vehayah biheyot ('and it would happen when') indicates repeated, habitual action — this was a regular occurrence, not a one-time event. The phrase ruach Elohim ('spirit of God') appears here without ra'ah ('harmful'), though the context makes clear this is the tormenting spirit. David takes et-hakkinnor ('the lyre') and veniggen beyado ('played with his hand'). The verb veravach ('he found relief') from r-v-ch means literally 'it became wide/spacious for him' — the opposite of the constriction of anguish. It describes a psychological opening, a release of pressure. The phrase vetov lo ('and it was good for him') echoes the servants' prediction in verse 16. The closing phrase vesarah me'alav ruach hara'ah ('and the harmful spirit turned aside from upon him') uses the same verb sarah ('departed') from verse 14, creating a literary bracket: the Spirit of the LORD sarah from Saul, and now the harmful spirit sarah from Saul when David plays.

17

Summary: *The Philistines and Israelites gather for battle in the Valley of Elah, but the contest narrows to a single challenge: Goliath, a massive Philistine warrior, demands a representative combat — one man against one man. For forty days Israel's army cowers in fear. Young David, a shepherd sent by his father to bring food to his brothers, hears the giant's taunts and is outraged that an uncircumcised Philistine dares defy the battle lines of the living God. Refusing Saul's armor, David goes out with a staff, five smooth stones, and a sling. He declares that the battle belongs to the LORD and that God will deliver Goliath into his hand — not by sword or spear but by the name of the LORD of Armies. A single stone from David's sling strikes Goliath in the forehead and the giant falls face-down. David takes Goliath's own sword and cuts off his head. The Philistines flee, and Israel pursues them to the gates of Ekron.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the longest chapter in 1 Samuel and one of the most narratively detailed battle accounts in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew text constructs the scene with extraordinary literary precision. Goliath is introduced as ish ha-benayim — literally 'a man of the between,' the one who stands in the no-man's-land between the two armies. This term appears only here in the Hebrew Bible and designates a champion fighter who represents his entire nation. The narrative deliberately slows down to catalogue Goliath's armor piece by piece (helmet, coat of mail, greaves, javelin, spear) using weights and measurements, creating a sense of overwhelming material power. David's speech in verses 45-47 is the theological center of the entire chapter — arguably of the entire David narrative. He reframes the contest from a military clash to a demonstration of divine sovereignty: 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies.' The phrase shem YHWH Tseva'ot ('the name of the LORD of Armies') reduces all of Goliath's catalogued weaponry to irrelevance. The chapter also features a striking textual variant: the Masoretic Text gives Goliath's height as six cubits and a span (approximately 9 feet 9 inches), while the Septuagint and a Dead Sea Scroll fragment (4QSam-a) read four cubits and a span (approximately 6 feet 9 inches). Both traditions are ancient, and the discrepancy raises important questions about the transmission of the text.*

Translation Friction: *The chapter presents several well-known difficulties. First, the height variant: the MT reads shesh ammot va-zaret ('six cubits and a span') while the LXX and 4QSam-a read 'four cubits and a span.' The shorter reading may be older, and the taller figure may represent a later scribal amplification — or the MT may preserve the original and the shorter reading may be a rationalization. We render the MT reading but note the variant. Second, the end of the chapter (verses 55-58) has Saul asking whose son David is, which seems to contradict chapter 16 where Saul already knows David as his personal musician and armor-bearer. Various explanations exist: Saul may be asking about David's family status for the promised reward (marriage into the royal family requires knowing the father's house), or these may represent different literary sources woven together. We render the text as it stands and note the tension. Third, the verb charaf ('to defy, to taunt, to reproach') recurs throughout the chapter and is difficult to capture with a single English word — it carries overtones of shaming, exposing to disgrace, and verbal assault. We vary the rendering based on context while noting the Hebrew consistency.*

Connections: *The champion-combat motif (representative warfare where one fighter decides the outcome for both armies) appears in ancient Near Eastern literature and has parallels in the Iliad and Mesopotamian texts, but in the Hebrew Bible it is unique to this passage. David's declaration that God 'does not save by sword and spear' (verse 47) echoes the theology of holy war found in Deuteronomy 20:1-4 and anticipates the repeated theme in Samuel-Kings that military hardware is not the basis of divine deliverance (see also 2 Kings 6:16-17). The Valley of Elah (emeq ha-elah, 'valley of the terebinth') becomes a geographical marker in Israel's memory — it is the place where God's power was demonstrated through human weakness. David's selection of five smooth stones from the wadi has generated extensive commentary; some connect the five stones to Goliath and his four brothers mentioned in 2 Samuel 21:15-22. The phrase 'the battle belongs to the LORD' (la-YHWH ha-milchamah, verse 47) will echo through Israel's military theology and appears in modified form in 2 Chronicles 20:15 ('the battle is not yours but God's'). David bringing Goliath's head to Jerusalem (verse 54) is geographically anachronistic — Jerusalem is still Jebusite at this point (it falls to David in 2 Samuel 5) — which may indicate either editorial updating or David storing it there later.*

1The Philistines gathered their forces for war. They assembled at Sokoh, which belongs to Judah, and camped between
Sokoh and Azekah, at Ephes-dammim. 2Saul and the men of Israel gathered and camped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up
their battle lines to face the Philistines. 3The Philistines stood on the hill on one side, and Israel stood on the hill on the other
side, with the valley between them. 4A man-of-the-between came out from the Philistine camp — his name was Goliath, from
Gath. His height was six cubits and a span. 5He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore a coat of scaled armor. The
weight of the armor coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6He had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze javelin slung
between his shoulders. 7The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the iron head of his spear weighed six hundred
shekels. A shield-bearer walked ahead of him. 8He stood and shouted to the battle lines of Israel, saying to them, "Why do
you come out to form a battle line? Am I not the Philistine, and you — servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let
him come down to me. 9If he can fight me and strike me down, then we will become your servants. But if I overpower him
and strike him down, then you will become our servants and serve us." 10The Philistine said, "I have taunted the battle lines
of Israel this day! Give me a man so we can fight each other!" 11When Saul and all Israel heard these words from the
Philistine, they were shattered and deeply afraid. 12Now David was the son of an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah
named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul, the man was old, advanced in years among men. 13Jesse's three oldest
sons had gone to follow Saul into the war. The names of the three sons who went to the war were Eliab the firstborn,
Abinadab his second, and Shammah the third. 14David was the youngest. The three oldest had followed Saul. 15David would
go back and forth from attending Saul to shepherding his father's flock at Bethlehem. 16The Philistine came forward morning
and evening and took his stand for forty days. 17Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten
loaves for your brothers, and hurry to the camp to your brothers. 18Bring these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of the
thousand. Check on your brothers' welfare and bring back a token from them." 19Saul and they and all the men of Israel were
in the Valley of Elah, facing the Philistines in battle. 20David rose early in the morning, left the flock with a watchman,
loaded up, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He reached the encampment just as the army was going out to the battle
line, shouting the war cry. 21Israel and the Philistines drew up battle line facing battle line. 22David left his supplies with the
baggage keeper and ran to the battle line. He went and greeted his brothers, asking about their welfare. 23While he was
speaking with them, the man-of-the-between was coming up — Goliath the Philistine, from Gath — out of the Philistine
battle lines. He spoke the same words as before, and David heard. 24Every man of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from
his presence and were deeply afraid. 25The men of Israel said, "Do you see this man who keeps coming up? He comes up to
taunt Israel. The man who strikes him down — the king will make him very rich, will give him his daughter, and will make
his father's house tax-free in Israel." 26David spoke to the men standing near him, saying, "What will be done for the man
who strikes down this Philistine and removes the disgrace from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he
should taunt the battle lines of the living God?" 27The people answered him the same way, saying, "This is what will be done
for the man who strikes him down." 28Eliab his oldest brother heard him speaking to the men, and Eliab's anger burned
against David. He said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I
know your arrogance and the wickedness of your heart — you came down to watch the battle!" 29David said, "What have I
done now? Can't I even ask a question?" 30He turned away from him to someone else and asked the same thing, and the
people gave him the same answer as before. 31When the words David had spoken were heard, they reported them to Saul,
and he sent for him. 32David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fall on account of him. Your servant will go and fight this
Philistine." 33Saul said to David, "You cannot go against this Philistine to fight him. You are just a boy, and he has been a
man of war since his youth." 34David said to Saul, "Your servant has been shepherding his father's flock. When a lion came —
or a bear — and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35I went out after it, struck it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth.
When it rose against me, I grabbed it by the jaw and struck it dead. 36Your servant has struck down both the lion and the
bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them — because he has taunted the battle lines of the living God." 3
7David said, "The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear — he will rescue me from the
hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you." 38Saul dressed David in his own garments,
placed a bronze helmet on his head, and put a coat of armor on him. 39David strapped the sword over the garments and tried

to walk, but he could not — he had never tested them. David said to Saul, "I cannot go in these. I have not tested them." And David removed them. 40He took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's pouch — in the bag — with his sling in his hand. Then he approached the Philistine. 41The Philistine advanced, coming closer and closer to David, with the shield-bearer ahead of him. 42The Philistine looked and saw David, and he despised him — for he was just a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44The Philistine said to David, "Come here to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field." 45David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies — the God of the battle lines of Israel, whom you have taunted. 46This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand. I will strike you down and cut your head from your body. I will give the corpses of the Philistine camp this day to the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth — so that all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, 47and all this assembly will know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear. For the battle belongs to the LORD, and he will give you into our hands." 48When the Philistine rose and advanced to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49David reached his hand into the bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face-down to the ground. 50David overpowered the Philistine with the sling and the stone — he struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in David's hand. 51David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword, drew it from its sheath, finished him off, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. 52The men of Israel and Judah rose up, shouted the war cry, and pursued the Philistines all the way to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Philistine dead fell along the road to Shaaraim, all the way to Gath and to Ekron. 53The Israelites returned from their hot pursuit of the Philistines and plundered their camp. 54David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his weapons in his own tent. 55When Saul saw David going out to face the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Whose son is this young man, Abner?" Abner said, "As your life endures, O king, I do not know." 56The king said, "Find out whose son this young man is." 57When David returned from striking down the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul — with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" David answered, "The son of your servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb va-ya'asfu ('they gathered') is repeated twice in this verse — first for the gathering of the army camps (machaneihem), then for the assembly at the specific location. Sokoh (Sokho) was a fortified town in the Shephelah, the low hill country between the coastal plain and the Judean highlands. The name Ephes-dammim (efes dammim) means 'boundary of blood' or 'end of blood' — an ominous place name that foreshadows the violence to come. The Philistine advance into Judean territory indicates an aggressive incursion, not a border skirmish.

2. The Valley of Elah (emeq ha-elah) means 'the valley of the terebinth tree,' named for the large oaks or terebinths that grew there. The verb va-ya'arkhu ('they arranged, drew up') comes from the root arekh, which means to set in order or arrange — a military term for forming ranks. The same root gives us ma'arakhah ('battle line, array'), which will become a key word in this chapter. The geography places the two armies on opposing ridges with the valley between them — a natural setting for the champion combat that follows.

3. The Hebrew draws the scene with geometric precision: omedim el ha-har mi-zeh ('standing toward the hill from this side') is repeated for both armies, with ve-ha-gay beineihem ('and the valley between them') as the dividing line. The word gay ('valley, ravine') is distinct from emeq ('broad valley') used in verse 2 — the gay is the narrow ravine or wadi at the bottom between the two ridges. This topography creates a natural arena: neither side wants to descend into the valley to attack uphill. The stalemate demands a different kind of resolution.

4. The term ish ha-benayim appears only here and in verse 23 in the Hebrew Bible. Standard translations render it 'champion,' which loses the spatial and conceptual force of the Hebrew. The benayim ('between') is the same word used in verse 3 for the valley 'between them' (beineihem). Goliath is literally the man who inhabits the gap between the two armies. We render it with a hyphenated phrase to preserve the Hebrew's strangeness.

4. Goliath's height in the Masoretic Text is shesh ammot va-zaret ('six cubits and a span'), approximately 9 feet 9 inches using the standard cubit of about 18 inches plus a span of about 9 inches. However, the Septuagint (LXX) and the Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4QSam-a read 'four cubits and a span' (approximately 6 feet 9 inches). The shorter reading may be the earlier tradition — a man of 6'9" would still be extraordinarily tall in the ancient world and would not require supernatural explanation. The taller reading may reflect later amplification to heighten the miracle. We follow the MT but note the variant as textually significant.

5. The armor catalogue begins here and extends through verse 7, building an overwhelming picture of military hardware. The shiryon qasqassim ('armor of scales') describes overlapping metal plates sewn onto a garment, like fish scales — the word qasqassim is the same word used for fish scales in Leviticus 11:9. Five thousand shekels of bronze equals approximately 125 pounds (57 kg). The narrator is not simply describing equipment; he is constructing a portrait of material power that will be rendered irrelevant by a shepherd's sling.

6. The mitschat nechoshet ('bronze greaves') are shin guards — protective armor for the lower legs. The kidon nechoshet ('bronze javelin') carried bein ketefav ('between his shoulders') was slung across his back. The word kidon is distinct from chanit ('spear') mentioned in the next verse; it refers to a shorter throwing weapon or scimitar-type javelin. The repetition of nechoshet ('bronze') in every piece of equipment (helmet, armor, greaves, javelin) creates a literary effect — Goliath is encased in metal from head to foot.

7. The comparison ki-menor orgim ('like a weaver's beam') refers to the horizontal bar of a loom — a thick, heavy wooden rod. The spearhead alone weighed six hundred shekels of iron, approximately 15 pounds (7 kg). The shift from bronze (nechoshet) to iron (barzel) for the spearhead is significant: iron was the superior military technology of the Philistines, who controlled iron-working (1 Samuel 13:19-22). The shield-bearer (nosei ha-tsinnah) carried the large body-shield (tsinnah), distinct from the smaller magen. Goliath enters the scene with a personal entourage — he does not even carry his own shield.

8. Goliath's opening taunt is carefully constructed. He calls himself ha-Pelishti ('the Philistine') — with the definite article, as if he alone embodies the entire nation. He reduces Israel to avadim le-Sha'ul ('servants of Saul'), implying they are slaves rather than warriors. The command beru lakhem ish ('choose for yourselves a man') issues the formal challenge of representative combat. The verb yered ('let him come down') reflects the topography — the Israelites are on the ridge and would have to descend into the valley to face him.

9. The terms of the challenge are presented in a perfect chiastic structure: if he kills me, we serve you / if I kill him, you serve us. The verb hikani ('strike me') and hikkitiv ('strike him') use the same root nakah ('to strike'). The stakes are national servitude — avadim ('servants, slaves'). Goliath frames the combat as a winner-take-all contest that decides the political fate of both peoples. This was a recognized form of warfare in the ancient Near East, designed to avoid the mass casualties of a full battle.

10. The verb cherafti ('I have taunted, defied') is from the root charaf, which carries a weight far heavier than simple challenge — it means to expose to shame, to reproach, to strip of honor. When Goliath charaf the battle lines of Israel, he is not merely challenging them to fight; he is publicly shaming them, declaring them unworthy of their God and their national identity. This verb will recur throughout the chapter (vv. 25, 26, 36, 45) and becomes the theological trigger for David's response: the shame of Israel's God is at stake.

11. The verb va-yechatu ('they were shattered, dismayed') comes from the root chatat, which means to be broken, shattered, terrified. It is stronger than ordinary fear — it describes a collapse of morale, a breaking of the will. Paired with va-yir'u me'od ('and they feared greatly'), the verse presents Israel's response as both psychological collapse (chatat) and visceral terror (yare'). Saul is named specifically — the tallest man in Israel (9:2), the king chosen for battle, is as paralyzed as the rest.

12. The narrative reintroduces David with a formal genealogical notice, as if the reader has not yet met him — a feature that has led many scholars to see chapter 17 as drawing from a different source than chapter 16. The term Efrati ('Ephrathite') here refers to the clan of Ephrath associated with Bethlehem (see Ruth 4:11, Micah 5:1), not to the tribe of Ephraim as in 1:1. Jesse is described as zaken ba ba-anashim ('old, coming among men'), an idiom meaning advanced in age. The number eight sons conflicts with 1 Chronicles 2:13-16, which lists seven — a minor textual discrepancy.

13. The narrative carefully names the three brothers who are at the front. Eliab (Eli'av, 'my God is father') is the firstborn whom Samuel initially thought was God's chosen in 16:6. Abinadab (Avinadav, 'my father is generous') and Shammah (Shammah, possibly 'desolation' or 'astonishment') are second and third. The repetition of 'three' — sheloshet benei Yishai ha-gedolim ('the three great/eldest sons of Jesse') — emphasizes that all the fighting-age sons are already at the battle. David, the youngest, is conspicuously absent from the military camp.

14. The word ha-qatan ('the small one, the youngest') defines David's position: he is the runt, the afterthought, the one left behind. The contrast between the three gedolim ('great ones, eldest') who follow the king and the one qatan who stays home is deliberate — the narrative is setting up the reversal where the smallest and least likely will accomplish what the warriors cannot.

15. The phrase holekh va-shav me'al Sha'ul ('going and returning from upon Saul') describes a pattern of movement — David oscillates between two worlds, the royal court and the pastoral field. The verb lir'ot ('to shepherd') places David back in his primary role: he is a shepherd, not a soldier. This verse bridges the tension between chapter 16 (where David serves Saul) and the narrative here (where he seems unknown) — the text suggests David's court service was intermittent, not permanent.

16. The verb va-yityatsev ('he stationed himself, took his stand') conveys deliberate, defiant positioning — Goliath plants himself in the open as a provocation. The phrase hashkem ve-ha'arev ('early and late,' literally 'the making-early and the making-evening') means he came at both ends of the day, twice daily. The number forty (arba'im) is loaded in Hebrew narrative — it is the number of testing (forty days of flood, forty years in the wilderness, forty days on Sinai). Goliath's forty-day stand is a period of testing for Israel's faith.

17. Jesse's instructions are mundane — a father sending food to his sons at the front. The qali ('roasted grain') was parched wheat or barley, a standard field ration. An ephah is approximately 22 liters (about 3/5 of a bushel). The verb haretz ('hurry, run') conveys urgency. The ordinary domesticity of this errand — grain and bread for brothers — sets up the extraordinary confrontation that follows. God's providence operates through a lunch delivery.

18. The charitsei he-chalav ('cuts of milk') are cheese — literally 'sliced milk products.' The ten cheeses are not for the brothers but for the sar ha-elef ('commander of the thousand'), likely a gift to maintain the officer's goodwill toward Jesse's sons. The verb tifqod ('you shall attend to, check on') means to visit and assess — Jesse wants a report on his sons' condition. The arubbatam ('their pledge, their token') is obscure; it may refer to a sign or proof of their well-being, or possibly something they had pledged or left as security.

19. The participle nilchamim ('fighting') is ironic — the narrative has just told us that for forty days no actual fighting has taken place. The Hebrew may indicate their posture (drawn up for battle) rather than active combat. The phrase 'Saul and they' (ve-Sha'ul ve-hemmah) has an oddly disjointed quality, as if the narrator is listing participants in a conflict that is all stance and no substance.

20. The verb va-yitosh ('he abandoned, left') is a strong word — David does not gently hand off the sheep but drops them with a guard and goes. The timing is providential: he arrives at ha-ma'galah ('the wagon circle, the encampment') precisely as the army is marching out to form ranks. The verb here'u ('they shouted') is the battle cry — the terua'h, the war shout that was both a military signal and a liturgical act (see Numbers 10:9). The army shouts but does not fight.

21. The Hebrew is compact and vivid: ma'arakhah liqra't ma'arakhah ('array to meet array, line facing line'). The repetition of ma'arakhah creates a visual mirror — two armies standing as reflections of each other across the valley. The verb va-ta'arokh ('they arranged') comes from the same root as ma'arakhah, reinforcing the sense of ordered military formation.

22. David deposits the kelim ('vessels, supplies, equipment') with the shomer ha-kelim ('keeper of the equipment') — a designated supply guard. Then he runs (va-yarots) — the same urgency Jesse commanded in verse 17. The verb va-yish'al ('he asked') is from the root sha'al ('to ask'), the wordplay root that connects to both Samuel and Saul throughout 1 Samuel. He asks le-shalom ('concerning peace/welfare'), fulfilling his father's instruction from verse 18.

23. The timing is again providential: ve-hu medabber immam ('while he was speaking with them') — at the precise moment David is present, Goliath emerges. The verb oleh ('coming up, ascending') suggests Goliath is climbing from the valley floor toward the Israelite position. The narrator repeats the full identification — ish ha-benayim, Goliath the Philistine, from Gath — as if reintroducing him for David's benefit. The phrase va-yishma David ('and David heard') is the turning point of the chapter: what Israel had heard with terror (v. 11), David hears with something else entirely.

24. The verb va-yanusu ('they fled') is stark — trained soldiers run away at the sight of one man. The phrase mi-panav ('from his face, from his presence') indicates they cannot even bear to be near him. The narrator says kol ish Yisra'el ('every man of Israel') — the fear is universal. This sets up the contrast with David, who alone does not flee and does not fear. The verse functions as a lens through which to measure David's response.

25. The soldiers' speech reveals the triple reward Saul has offered: osher gadol ('great wealth'), marriage to the king's daughter (et bitto yitten lo, 'his daughter he will give him'), and tax exemption for the family (beit aviv ya'aseh chofshi, 'his father's house he will make free'). The word chofshi ('free') denotes freedom from royal obligations — corvée labor, military levies, and taxes. The verb lecharef ('to taunt, to defy') appears again — the soldiers correctly identify Goliath's purpose. They know the problem but cannot act on it. The rewards are extraordinary, yet no one steps forward.

26. David's question reframes the entire situation. The soldiers focused on the reward (v. 25); David focuses on the disgrace (cherpah) and the identity of the challenger. His use of arel ('uncircumcised') is a covenant term — circumcision marks membership in God's people (Genesis 17), and Goliath's uncircumcision places him outside the covenant and therefore outside the sphere of divine protection. The phrase ma'arkhot Elohim chayyim ('battle lines of the living God') is David's interpretive key: these are not merely Israel's battle lines but God's. To taunt them is to taunt God.

26. The term Elohim chayyim ('living God') appears relatively rarely in the Hebrew Bible and always in contexts of confrontation with human presumption or pagan power (see Deuteronomy 5:26, Joshua 3:10, 2 Kings 19:4). The 'living' God is the one who acts — in contrast to idols who have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see (Psalm 115:4-7).

27. The people repeat the promised reward — ka-davar ha-zeh ('according to this word') refers back to the triple reward of verse 25. Their answer confirms the offer but also underlines that no one has yet claimed it. The verb yakkenu ('who strikes him') uses the same root nakah that appeared in Goliath's own challenge (v. 9). Everyone talks about striking; no one acts.

28. Eliab's anger (va-yichar af, 'his nose burned') erupts immediately. His accusations are three: David has abandoned his responsibilities (the sheep), he is driven by zedon ('arrogance, presumption, insolence'), and he has a ra lev ('wicked heart'). The phrase me'at ha-tson ha-hennah ('those few sheep over there') is dripping with contempt — Eliab minimizes David's role to make him seem insignificant. The irony is sharp: Eliab, who is afraid to face Goliath, accuses David of coming merely to spectate. Eliab's resentment may also echo 16:6-13, where he was passed over and David was chosen.

28. The accusation of zedon ('arrogance') is the same word used for willful, high-handed sin in Numbers 15:30 and Deuteronomy 17:12. Eliab is not just calling David proud — he is accusing him of rebellious presumption against proper authority.

29. David's response is brief and composed: meh asiti attah ('what have I done now?'). The phrase halo davar hu is ambiguous and has been rendered many ways. It could mean 'Is it not just a word?' (I was merely speaking), 'Is there not a matter/cause?' (is there not reason for this?), or 'Is it not a thing?' (isn't this worth talking about?). The root davar means both 'word' and 'matter.' We render it as a question about David's right to speak, since Eliab's accusation was about David talking to the men.

30. The verb va-yissov ('he turned') shows David physically rotating away from Eliab's anger and repeating his question to others. He is not deterred by his brother's rebuke. The phrase ka-davar ha-zeh ('according to this word') and ka-davar ha-rishon ('according to the first word') indicate that David persists and the crowd consistently confirms the reward. David is not asking for information — he is building momentum.

31. David's words travel through the camp by oral report — va-yishma'u ha-devarim ('the words were heard'), using a passive construction that suggests the news spread organically. The verb va-yaggidu ('they reported, they told') indicates formal communication to the king. Saul's response — va-yiqqachehu ('he took him, he sent for him') — is immediate. David's theology has reached the ear of the king.

32. David's declaration is direct and bold: al yippol lev adam alav ('let not a man's heart fall upon him'). The verb nippol ('fall') is the same root that will describe Goliath falling (v. 49) — the word that now describes Israel's collapsing courage will soon describe the giant's collapse. David calls himself avdekha ('your servant'), adopting the formal posture of a subject before the king. The contrast between the young shepherd volunteering and the entire army cowering is the narrative's sharpest edge.

33. Saul's objection is logical: ki na'ar attah ('for you are a youth') versus ve-hu ish milchamah minne'urav ('and he is a man of war from his youth'). The word na'ar can mean boy, youth, or young man — it implies inexperience and low status. The irony is that Goliath has been a professional warrior since he himself was a na'ar, while David is still in that stage. Saul measures by military calculus: age, training, experience. David will measure by a different standard entirely.

34. David's resume is pastoral, not military. The phrase ro'eh hayah avdekha le-aviv ba-tson ('your servant has been a shepherd for his father among the flock') establishes his credentials through experience in the wild, not in the barracks. The Hebrew u-va ha-ari ve-et ha-dov ('and the lion came and the bear') uses the definite article — 'the lion' and 'the bear' — suggesting specific, remembered encounters, not hypothetical ones. The verb nasa ('carried off') indicates the predator snatching a seh ('sheep or goat, a small animal') from the flock.

35. The verbs come in rapid sequence: yatsati ('I went out'), hikkitiv ('I struck it'), hitsalti ('I rescued'), hechezaqti ('I seized'), hikkitiv ('I struck it'), hamittiv ('I killed it'). This is not boasting but a recitation of facts. The word zeqano ('its beard/jaw') when applied to a lion likely means the mane or the jaw area — the most dangerous place to grab a predator. David's willingness to pursue, strike, and kill a lion or bear bare-handed establishes a pattern: he does not calculate odds, he acts on responsibility. The sheep were his charge; he defended them.

36. David draws a direct theological line from predator to Philistine: the lion and the bear were threats to his flock; Goliath is a threat to God's flock. The phrase ke-achad mehem ('like one of them') equates the human giant with the animal predators — in David's framework, Goliath is not a superhuman threat but another beast menacing the sheep. The reason is stated explicitly: ki cheref ma'arkhot Elohim chayyim ('because he has taunted the battle lines of the living God'). This is the second time David uses this exact phrase (see v. 26), establishing it as his theological thesis.

37. David's logic is not reckless courage but theological reasoning: the same God (hu, 'he' — emphatic pronoun) who delivered from the lion and the bear will deliver from the Philistine. The verb hitsil ('rescue, deliver') is repeated three times — past deliverance is the ground for present confidence. The shift from mi-yad ha-ari ('from the paw of the lion,' literally 'from the hand of') to mi-yad ha-Pelishti ('from the hand of this Philistine') makes the parallel explicit: animal paw and human hand are equally powerless against God.

37. Saul's response — lekh va-YHWH yihyeh immakh ('go, and may the LORD be with you') — is both a commission and a blessing, but it also reveals Saul's abdication. The king who should fight for Israel sends a boy, with a prayer instead of a strategy.

38. The verb va-yalbbesh ('he clothed, he dressed') is significant — Saul is not merely equipping David but re-clothing him, imposing his own identity (maddav, 'his garments/uniform') on the boy. The qova nechoshet ('bronze helmet') and shiryon ('armor coat') echo the same equipment Goliath wears (vv. 5-6). Saul's solution is to make David a miniature version of Goliath — to fight the enemy's way. The theological point is that David must reject the king's armor to fight in God's way.

39. The verb va-yo'el ('he attempted, tried') indicates an actual physical attempt — David tried to move in Saul's armor and found he could not function. The reason given is lo nissah ('he had not tested/tried them'). The repetition — lo nissah in the narrator's voice, then lo nissiti in David's — underscores that this is not about the armor being bad but about it being untested and foreign. The verb va-yesirem ('he removed them') is decisive. David strips off the conventional military solution because it does not belong to him. He will fight with what he knows.

40. The inventory of David's equipment is deliberately contrasted with Goliath's arsenal (vv. 5-7): a maqqel ('staff' — a shepherd's walking stick), chamishah challuqei avanim ('five smooth stones' — waterworn, rounded by the stream), a keli ha-ro'im ('shepherd's vessel/pouch'), a yalqut ('bag, wallet'), and a qela ('sling'). The five smooth stones from the nachal ('wadi, stream bed') have been shaped not by human craft but by water and time. The sling was a lethal weapon in ancient warfare — Judges 20:16 records Benjaminite slingers who could hit a hair's width target — but in this narrative it reads as pastoral equipment pressed into military service.

40. The number five has generated much discussion. Some connect it to Goliath and his four brothers (2 Samuel 21:15-22); others see it as simply practical preparedness. The verb va-yivchar ('he chose') implies careful selection — David does not grab random rocks but selects specific stones, as a warrior would select arrows.

41. The participle construction holekh ve-qarev ('going and coming near') conveys continuous, steady advance — Goliath keeps closing the distance. The shield-bearer (nosei ha-tsinnah) walks before him, carrying the large defensive shield. The scene is visually imposing: a giant, his personal shield-carrier, and the full weight of Philistine military technology bearing down on a boy with a stick and stones.

42. The verb va-yivzehu ('he despised him') is from bazah ('to despise, to hold in contempt'). Goliath's contempt has a specific basis: ki hayah na'ar ('because he was a youth'), ve-admoni ('and ruddy/reddish'), im yefeh mar'eh ('with a handsome appearance'). David looks like a beautiful boy, not a warrior. The word admoni ('ruddy, reddish') was used to describe David at his anointing (16:12) — his physical beauty, which marked him as God's chosen, now provokes the enemy's scorn. What God sees as chosen, Goliath sees as contemptible.

43. Goliath's question ha-kelev anokhi ('Am I a dog?') is an expression of outrage — being treated as an animal is the deepest insult to a warrior's honor. He sees the maqqelot ('sticks, staffs') and interprets David's approach as an insult: you bring a dog-beating stick to face a champion? The verb va-yeqallel ('he cursed') is from qalal ('to make light of, to curse') — Goliath invokes his own gods (be-elohav, 'by his gods') to place a curse on David. The Philistine deity would likely be Dagon (see 1 Samuel 5:2). The scene sets up the clash of divine names: Goliath curses by his gods, David will come in the name of the LORD of Armies.

44. Goliath's threat follows ancient Near Eastern battle rhetoric: to leave an enemy's body unburied, exposed to scavengers, was the ultimate degradation. The phrase le-of ha-shamayim u-le-behemot ha-sadeh ('to the birds of the sky and to the beasts of the field') appears in covenant curse language (Deuteronomy 28:26, Jeremiah 7:33). Goliath unwittingly speaks in covenantal terms, invoking a curse that will boomerang: it is the Philistine dead, not David, who will be left exposed (v. 46).

45. The three weapons — cherev ('sword'), chanit ('spear'), kidon ('javelin') — constitute the full armament of a heavy infantry warrior. Against this David sets a single phrase: be-shem YHWH Tseva'ot ('in the name of the LORD of Armies'). The word shem ('name') in Hebrew is not merely a label but the full reality, character, and authority of the one named. To come 'in the name of' someone is to come bearing their authority and power. David is not invoking magic; he is declaring allegiance and trust.

45. The title YHWH Tseva'ot ('LORD of Armies') was introduced in 1:3 at the beginning of the book. Its appearance here, at the moment of Israel's greatest military crisis, completes a narrative arc: the God first named in the context of a barren woman's prayer now fights through a shepherd boy against a giant. The 'armies' (tseva'ot) of God stand against the army of the Philistines.

46. David turns Goliath's own threat (v. 44) back on him with devastating escalation. Goliath threatened David's flesh to the birds; David promises the peger machaneh Pelishtim ('corpses of the Philistine camp') — not just Goliath but the entire army. The verb yesaggerkha ('he will deliver you, shut you up') uses the root sagar ('to close, to deliver'), the same verb used in 1:5-6 for God closing Hannah's womb. God closes and God delivers — the same sovereign hand.

46. The purpose clause ve-yede'u kol ha-arets ki yesh Elohim le-Yisra'el ('so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel') expands the scope from personal combat to universal witness. The battle is not about David's glory but about God's reputation among the nations. The word yesh ('there is') is an assertion of existence and presence — there is a God, a real and active God, belonging to Israel.

47. The sentence ki la-YHWH ha-milchamah ('for the battle belongs to the LORD') is one of the most important theological statements in the Hebrew Bible. It summarizes the doctrine of holy war: God is the true warrior, and human instruments are secondary. This principle appears in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:3, 'the LORD is a man of war'), in Deuteronomy's war regulations (20:1-4), and will echo in 2 Chronicles 20:15 ('the battle is not yours but God's').

47. The shift from singular (v. 46, 'I will strike you') to plural (etkhem, 'you' plural; yadenu, 'our hands') in this verse is significant — David speaks as the representative of all Israel. His singular combat is for the benefit of the collective. The 'our' in 'our hands' includes the whole Israelite army.

48. The contrast in speed is telling: the Philistine qam va-yelekh va-yiqrav ('rose and went and drew near') — a measured, heavy advance. David va-yemaher va-yarots ('hurried and ran') — explosive speed toward the enemy. The verb va-yarots ('he ran') describes David sprinting directly at the giant. While Israel ran away from Goliath (v. 24, va-yanusu), David runs toward him. The narrator uses the same root (ruts, 'to run') for both movements, creating an exact reversal.

49. The sequence of four verbs without any conjunction except va- ('and') creates a staccato rhythm that mirrors the speed of the action. The entire combat — from David reaching into his bag to Goliath hitting the ground — is narrated in a single verse. After forty days of standoff and an elaborate verbal exchange, the actual fight takes seconds.

49. The mitscho ('his forehead') is mentioned twice — the narrator emphasizes the precision of the strike. The forehead is the gap in Goliath's armor, the one vulnerability in his otherwise total coverage. Ancient slingers could achieve velocities of over 100 mph with lead or stone projectiles; a smooth stone from a skilled slinger was a lethal weapon, not a toy.

50. This verse is the narrator's summary and theological commentary. The verb va-yechezaq ('he overpowered, prevailed') from the root chazaq ('to be strong') describes David's victory in terms of strength — but the strength was exerted through a sling and a stone, not through conventional weapons. The final clause is devastating in its simplicity: ve-cherev ein be-yad David ('and a sword — there was none in the hand of David'). The narrator drives home the point: no sword. The weapon Goliath wielded, the weapon Saul offered, the weapon every soldier carried — David had none of it. The victory confirms David's theology from verse 47: the LORD does not save by sword and spear.

51. David uses Goliath's own sword (charbo, 'his sword') to complete the kill and sever the head. The verb va-yemottehu ('he finished him off, he put him to death') indicates Goliath was not yet dead from the stone but was incapacitated — David's sword stroke was the killing blow. The irony is complete: Goliath is killed by his own weapon. The phrase va-yikhrot bah et rosho ('he cut off his head with it') is graphic and intentional — the removal of the head is both a military act (proof of kill) and a symbolic reversal of power.

51. The Philistine response is immediate: va-yanusu ('they fled'). The word gibboram ('their champion, their mighty one') comes from gibbor ('mighty warrior, hero'). When the gibbor falls, the army's morale collapses. The representative combat has worked exactly as designed — the loss of the one means the loss of all.

52. The army that had fled (v. 24, va-yanusu) now rises (va-yaqumu), shouts (va-yari'u), and pursues (va-yirdefu). The reversal is complete. The pursuit extends to the Philistine heartland — Gath (Goliath's own city) and Ekron (a major Philistine center). The word challelei ('slain, pierced') indicates

heavy Philistine casualties along the pursuit route. The mention of both 'Israel and Judah' (anshei Yisra'el viYehudah) may reflect the later political division or may simply indicate tribal units fighting together. Shaaraim means 'double gates' — the topography of the Elah valley region.

53. The verb mi-deloq ('from pursuing hotly') uses a rare word that implies burning, eager chase — not a casual follow-up but an energetic rout. The verb va-yashosu ('they plundered') indicates a thorough stripping of the abandoned Philistine camp. The army that had cowered for forty days now takes the enemy's supplies, weapons, and equipment. The plundering of the camp is the final proof that the Philistine army has been completely broken.

54. This verse raises a well-known geographical difficulty: Jerusalem was still a Jebusite city at this time (it will not be captured by David until 2 Samuel 5:6-9). Several explanations have been proposed: the verse may be an editorial addition written from the perspective of a later time when Jerusalem was the capital; David may have brought the head there later after taking the city; or there may have been an Israelite presence near Jerusalem that the text does not elaborate. The kelav ('his weapons/equipment') — Goliath's captured arms — David places in his own tent (oholo), keeping them as trophies. Goliath's sword will later appear in the sanctuary at Nob (21:9).

55. This passage (vv. 55-58) has long troubled interpreters because Saul appears not to know David, despite having made him his personal musician and armor-bearer in chapter 16. The question ben mi zeh ha-na'ar ('whose son is this youth?') may not be about David's identity but about his family's status — Saul promised his daughter to the champion (v. 25), so he needs to know the father's household for the marriage alliance. Abner's oath chei nafshekha ha-melekh ('as your soul/life endures, O king') is a strong asseveration — he genuinely does not know. Alternatively, the two chapters may preserve parallel traditions about how David entered Saul's service.

56. The word ha-elem ('the young man, the adolescent') is a different term from na'ar used earlier. It comes from the root alam ('to be hidden, to be vigorous') and may emphasize youth and obscurity. Saul's command she'al attah ('inquire, you') uses the root sha'al — the same wordplay root that has threaded through the entire book. The king whose name derives from sha'al now asks about the boy who will replace him.

57. The image is vivid and unsettling: David stands before the king holding a severed head. The phrase ve-rosh ha-Pelishti be-yado ('and the head of the Philistine in his hand') is placed at the end of the sentence for maximum impact. The verb me-hakkot ('from striking') uses the hiphil infinitive of nakah — the same root that has described every blow in the chapter. Abner fulfills Saul's command by bringing David directly to the throne.

58. The chapter ends not with triumph but with a question and answer about identity — ben mi attah ha-na'ar ('whose son are you, young man?'). Saul asks the question that will dominate the rest of the book: who is David? The answer — ben avdekha Yishai beit ha-Lachmi ('the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite') — places David in the humblest possible frame. He is the son of a servant, from a small town. Yet this son of a servant has just done what the king and all his army could not. The phrase beit ha-Lachmi ('the Bethlehemite') connects David to Bethlehem — the town whose name means 'house of bread' and which will become, in Israel's prophetic tradition, the birthplace of the future messianic king (Micah 5:1).

18

Summary: *After David's victory over Goliath, Jonathan — Saul's own son and heir to the throne — forms a covenant bond with David so deep that the text says Jonathan's soul was 'bound' (niqsherah) to David's soul. Jonathan strips himself of his royal robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt and gives them to David — a symbolic abdication of his claim to the throne. David succeeds in every military mission Saul assigns him, earning the admiration of the people and Saul's own servants. But when the women of Israel greet the returning army with the song 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands,' Saul's jealousy ignites into murderous rage. An evil spirit from God overwhelms Saul, and he hurls a spear at David twice while David plays the lyre. Saul removes David from his presence by appointing him commander over a thousand — ostensibly a promotion, actually an exile to the front lines. Saul offers his older daughter Merab as a wife, hoping David will die in battle against the Philistines, but ultimately gives her to another man. When Saul learns that his younger daughter Michal loves David, he sees another opportunity to use marriage as a death trap, demanding a bride-price of one hundred Philistine foreskins. David delivers two hundred, and Saul is forced to give Michal as David's wife. The chapter closes with Saul recognizing that the LORD is with David and that Michal loves him, and Saul becomes David's permanent enemy.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most extraordinary covenantal acts in the Hebrew Bible. Jonathan's giving of his robe (me'il), military equipment, sword, bow, and belt to David is not a casual gift — it is a voluntary renunciation of royal succession. The me'il is the same word used for the priestly robe and for the robe Samuel wore that Saul tore in chapter 15, symbolizing the kingdom being torn from him. Jonathan, who has every human reason to view David as a rival, instead recognizes what God is doing and aligns himself with it at total personal cost. The verb niqsherah ('was bound, was knit') describing Jonathan's soul-attachment to David is the same root (q-sh-r) used elsewhere for conspiracies and binding agreements — this is not mere*

friendship but a covenantal fusion of identity. Equally remarkable is the narrator's repeated use of sakal ('to act wisely, to prosper') for David — appearing in verses 5, 14, 15, and 30. The word carries a double meaning: David succeeds because he is wise, and he is wise because God is with him. Saul's tragedy is that he can see God's hand on David clearly (verse 28) and rather than submitting to it, he opposes it — making himself an enemy not just of David but of God's purpose.

Translation Friction: *The chapter raises uncomfortable questions about divine agency and human suffering. In verse 10, an 'evil spirit from God' (ruach elohim ra'ah) overwhelms Saul and he attempts to murder David. The text does not soften this — the spirit is explicitly 'from God.' How does this square with the God who patiently warned the people through Samuel in chapter 8? The theological tension is that Saul's madness is both a divine judgment and a psychological deterioration — the spirit exploits what is already in Saul's heart. Saul's jealousy in verse 8 precedes the evil spirit in verse 10; the spirit amplifies what Saul has chosen but did not create it. There is also tension in Saul's manipulation of his daughters. He uses Merab as bait (verse 17), then reneges and gives her to Adriel. He uses Michal's genuine love for David (verse 20) as another trap. The text does not condemn this explicitly — the narrator simply reports it — but the reader is meant to feel the horror of a father weaponizing his own children. The contrast with Jonathan, who freely gives away his royal inheritance, makes Saul's grasping all the more grotesque.*

Connections: *Jonathan's covenant with David in verses 1-4 connects forward to 2 Samuel 1:26, where David will lament Jonathan's death saying 'your love (ahavah) was more wonderful to me than the love of women,' and to 2 Samuel 9, where David will honor the covenant by caring for Jonathan's crippled son Mephibosheth. The verb niqsherah ('was bound') uses the same root as Genesis 44:30, where Jacob's soul is 'bound up' (qeshurah) with Benjamin's — both describe a love so deep that the death of one would mean the death of the other. The women's song in verse 7 ('Saul has struck his thousands, David his ten thousands') will be remembered and repeated in 1 Samuel 21:11 and 29:5, becoming a political liability that follows David into exile. Saul's spear-throwing in verse 11 inaugurates a pattern that continues through chapters 19 and 20, and the spear itself becomes a symbol of Saul's kingship — he is always pictured with his spear (19:9, 22:6, 26:7), while David refuses to use the spear even when he has the chance to kill Saul with it (26:11). The bride-price of foreskins (verse 25) connects to the broader theme of Philistine uncircumcision — the mark that separates covenant people from non-covenant people — which David invoked in his challenge to Goliath (17:26, 36).*

1When David had finished speaking to Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound to David's soul, and Jonathan loved him as his
own life. 2Saul took him into his service that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3Jonathan and David cut
a covenant, because Jonathan loved him as his own life. 4Jonathan stripped off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David
— along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt. 5David went out on every mission Saul assigned him and
acted with skill. Saul placed him over the fighting men, and it was pleasing in the eyes of all the people — and even in the
eyes of Saul's own officials. 6As the army returned — after David had struck down the Philistine — women came out from all
the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to welcome King Saul, with tambourines, celebration, and three-stringed
instruments. 7The women sang out to one another as they celebrated: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his
ten thousands!" 8Saul burned with anger. The song was wrong in his eyes, and he said, "They credit David with ten
thousands and credit me with only thousands — what is left for him but the kingdom itself?" 9Saul watched David with
suspicion from that day on. 10The next day, a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved inside the house while
David played the lyre with his hand as he did every day — and a spear was in Saul's hand. 11Saul hurled the spear, thinking,
"I will pin David to the wall." But David dodged away from him — twice. 12Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was
with David — and had turned away from Saul. 13So Saul removed David from his presence and appointed him commander
over a thousand. David went out and came back at the head of the troops. 14David acted with wisdom in everything he did,
and the LORD was with him. 15When Saul saw that David acted with extraordinary skill, he dreaded him. 16But all Israel and
Judah loved David, because he led them in battle and brought them home safely. 17Saul said to David, "Here is my older
daughter Merab — I will give her to you as a wife. Just be a warrior of valor for me and fight the LORD's battles." For Saul
was thinking, "My hand should not be against him; let the Philistines' hand be against him instead." 18David said to Saul,
"Who am I, and what is my family — my father's clan in Israel — that I should become the king's son-in-law?" 19But when the
time came to give Merab, Saul's daughter, to David, she was given instead to Adriel the Meholathite as his wife. 20Now

Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When this was reported to Saul, it pleased him. 21Saul thought, "I will give her to him, and she will become a trap for him, and the Philistines' hand will be against him." So Saul said to David, "Today, through the second daughter, you can become my son-in-law." 22Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look — the king is delighted with you, and all his servants are devoted to you. Now become the king's son-in-law.'" 23Saul's servants spoke these words directly to David, and David said, "Does it seem like a small thing to you — becoming the king's son-in-law? I am a poor man, of no standing." 24Saul's servants reported back to him, saying, "These are the words David spoke." 25Saul said, "Tell David this: 'The king wants no bride-price — only one hundred Philistine foreskins, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'" But Saul's calculation was to make David fall at the hands of the Philistines. 26When his servants relayed these terms to David, the idea pleased David — to become the king's son-in-law. And the allotted time had not yet passed. 27David set out with his men and struck down two hundred Philistines. David brought their foreskins and presented the full count to the king, in order to become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him his daughter Michal as a wife. 28Saul saw and understood that the LORD was with David, and that Michal his daughter loved him. 29Saul's fear of David only deepened, and Saul became David's enemy for the rest of his days. 30Whenever the Philistine commanders marched out to battle, David acted with greater skill than all of Saul's other officers — and his reputation became very great.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase niqsherah benephesh David ('was bound to the soul of David') uses the Niphal (passive/reflexive) stem, suggesting this happened to Jonathan — it was not a calculated decision but an overwhelming recognition. The timing is critical: this occurs immediately after David spoke with Saul following the Goliath victory. Jonathan heard David's words and saw in him something that seized his entire being. The preposition be- ('in, with') rather than el ('to') or im ('with') suggests interpenetration — Jonathan's soul was bound in David's soul, not merely alongside it.
2. The verb vayiqqachehu ('he took him') indicates Saul's appropriation of David into the royal household — the same verb used for taking a wife, taking possession, or conscripting into service. The phrase velo netano lashuv beit aviv ('he did not give him to return to his father's house') marks a permanent transfer of David's social location. David is no longer Jesse's son tending sheep; he belongs to the court. Ironically, Saul's act of taking David into his household plants the very rival he will spend the rest of his life trying to expel. The phrase beit aviv ('his father's house') carries weight in a culture where identity was defined by patrilineal household — Saul is, in effect, transferring David's primary allegiance from Jesse's house to Saul's.
3. The phrase vayikhrot berit ('cut a covenant') uses the root k-r-t, which always implies a solemn, binding agreement with consequences for violation. The same phrase describes God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:18), the Sinai covenant (Exodus 34:10), and Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:15). Jonathan is placing his relationship with David on the same level as the most sacred bonds in Israel's history. The causal clause be'ahavato oto ('because of his loving him') makes love the foundation of the covenant — an extraordinary reversal of the usual order, where covenant creates obligation and obligation produces loyalty. Here, love comes first and covenant formalizes what love has already established.
4. The me'il (robe) is specifically a garment of rank — worn by priests (Exodus 28:31), by Samuel (1 Samuel 2:19), and by royalty. When Jonathan removes his me'il and gives it to David, the political symbolism would have been unmistakable to ancient readers. The word maddav is debated — it likely refers to military garments or a tunic worn under armor. The sequence from robe to belt moves from the outermost symbol of identity to the most personal piece of a warrior's equipment. The repeated ve'ad ('and even to, up to') emphasizes that Jonathan held nothing back — he gave everything, down to the last item. This is the Hebrew narrative's way of saying Jonathan made a total transfer of royal identity to David.
5. The verb yaskil (from sakal, 'to act wisely, to prosper, to have insight') is the chapter's signature word for David. It carries a double sense: David was both shrewd in his conduct and successful in his outcomes. The Hiphil form implies causative success — David 'caused things to go well.' Saul's response of placing David over the anshei hamilchamah ('men of war') is both recognition and, as the chapter unfolds, strategic positioning — keeping the rising star at the front where battle might solve Saul's problem. The phrase vayyitav be'einei kol ha'am ('it was good in the eyes of all the people') is politically devastating for Saul — universal popularity is the one thing a jealous king cannot tolerate. The addition of vegam be'einei avdei Sha'ul ('and also in the eyes of Saul's servants') means David has won over even the king's inner circle.
6. The phrase mehakkot et haPlishti ('from striking the Philistine') uses the singular — this refers to Goliath specifically, placing the scene after the events of chapter 17. The verb vatteṣe'nah ('they came out') uses the feminine plural, emphasizing this is a women's celebration — a known cultural pattern in ancient Israel where women greeted returning warriors with song and dance (cf. Exodus 15:20, Miriam after the Red Sea; Judges 11:34, Jephthah's daughter). The word mecholot ('dances, dancing') suggests circular or processional dancing. The word shalishim is debated — traditionally rendered 'three-stringed instruments' or 'triangles,' but possibly 'officers of the third rank' or simply a type of musical instrument. The celebration is directed liqrat Sha'ul hamelekh ('to meet King Saul') — the women intend to honor Saul, which makes the content of their song all the more devastating to him.
7. The verb vatta'anenah ('they answered, sang responsively') indicates antiphonal singing — two groups of women singing back and forth. The word hamśachaqot ('the ones playing, celebrating, making merry') comes from the root ś-ch-q, which can mean play, laugh, celebrate, or mock — an ambiguity that Saul will interpret in the worst possible direction. The song itself uses standard Hebrew poetic parallelism: Saul/David, thousands/ten

thousands (alaphav/rivevotav). In normal poetic convention, the second line intensifies the first without necessarily being a literal comparison — it is a formulaic way of saying 'great victory.' But Saul hears it as a ranking. The word revavah ('ten thousand, myriad') is the standard poetic intensification of eleph ('thousand'), but to a man already insecure on his throne, poetry becomes political threat.

8. The verb vayyichar ('it burned') describes the kindling of anger — the same word used for God's anger throughout the Torah. Saul's rage is immediate and visceral, a fire that ignites at the sound of the song. The phrase vayyera be'einav haddavar hazzeh ('this thing was evil in his eyes') echoes the identical phrase used when Samuel was displeased by the people's demand for a king (8:6) — Saul's reaction to David mirrors Samuel's reaction to Saul's own appointment. The word melukhah ('kingdom, kingship, royal power') reveals Saul's deepest fear: he interprets a folk song as a political succession plan. The phrase ve'od lo akh hammelukhah ('and still for him is only the kingdom') shows Saul has leaped from poetic hyperbole to political conspiracy in a single breath. His jealousy is prophetically accurate — David will indeed receive the kingdom — but his response to the truth is rage rather than surrender.

9. The verb oyen ('eyeing, watching suspiciously') comes from the root '-y-n, related to ayin ('eye'). This is not neutral observation but hostile surveillance — the watchful stare of a predator tracking prey. The phrase mehayom hahu vahal'ah ('from that day and onward') marks a permanent shift in Saul's posture toward David. Before this verse, Saul loved David (16:21) and kept him in his household (18:2). After this verse, every interaction between Saul and David is poisoned by suspicion and fear. The brevity of the verse — just eight Hebrew words — mirrors the suddenness of the transformation. One song rewrites the entire relationship.

10. The verb vatitslach ('rushed upon, came mightily upon') is the same verb used when the Spirit of God empowered Saul for battle (11:6) and Samson for feats of strength (Judges 14:6) — the same divine power that once enabled Saul now torments him. The phrase ruach Elohim ra'ah ('an evil/harmful spirit of God') attributes the spirit's origin to God without making God the author of evil — the theological tension is deliberate. The verb vayitnabe ('he prophesied') is deeply ironic: the same word described Saul's ecstatic behavior when the Spirit first came upon him (10:10-11), and people asked 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' Now the ecstasy has curdled into madness, and the same verb describes raving. David's playing (menaggein beyado, 'making music with his hand') is therapeutic — he was originally brought to Saul for this purpose (16:23). The final clause — vehachanit beyad Sha'ul ('and the spear was in Saul's hand') — is ominous narrative foreshadowing. The spear is simply there, waiting.

11. The verb vayyatel ('he hurled') describes a violent throwing motion. The inner speech vayomer ('he said/thought') reveals Saul's murderous intent: akkeh veDavid uvaqir ('I will strike through David and into the wall') — the preposition be- on both David and the wall suggests pinning him like an insect. This is not a warning throw but an assassination attempt. The verb vayyissov ('he turned aside, evaded') describes David's evasion — the root s-b-b means to go around or turn, suggesting David dodged laterally rather than retreating. The word pa'amayim ('twice') means Saul threw the spear two times, and David escaped both. The repetition transforms this from a moment of madness into a sustained attempt at murder. The man who was brought to soothe the king's troubled spirit now must dodge the king's spear.

12. The verb vayyira ('he feared') marks a critical shift: Saul has moved from jealousy (v8) to suspicion (v9) to murderous rage (v11) and now to fear (v12). The king is afraid of his own servant. The reason the narrator gives is theological, not military: ki hayah YHWH immo ('because the LORD was with him'). The phrase YHWH immo ('the LORD with him') is the covenant formula of divine presence — the same assurance God gave to Jacob (Genesis 28:15), Joseph (Genesis 39:2,21), and Joshua (Joshua 1:5). The devastating contrast — ume'im Sha'ul sar ('and from Saul he had departed') — uses the verb sur ('to turn aside, depart, remove'). God's presence, which once rushed upon Saul (11:6), has now turned away. Saul can see God's presence on David precisely because he can feel its absence from himself.

13. The verb vayesirehu ('he removed him') uses the same root s-u-r ('to turn aside, remove') that described God's departure from Saul in verse 12 — Saul removes David just as God removed himself from Saul, creating a bitter verbal echo. The appointment as sar-eleph ('commander of a thousand') looks like a promotion but functions as an exile from the royal court to the battlefield. Saul wants David in harm's way. The phrase vayyetse vayyavo lifnei ha'am ('he went out and came in before the people') is a military leadership formula — 'going out and coming in' means leading troops in campaign and returning safely. The phrase lifnei ha'am ('before the people') means David was visibly leading from the front, which only increased his popularity — the opposite of what Saul intended.

14. The participle maskil (from sakal) reappears here as a comprehensive assessment: lekhol-derakhav maskil ('in all his ways acting wisely/prospering'). The phrase covers every domain — military, social, political, personal. David's sakal is total and visible. The concluding clause vaYHWH immo ('and the LORD was with him') provides the theological explanation for the human observation. David's wisdom is not self-generated; it flows from divine presence. This verse functions as the narrator's thesis statement for the entire chapter: David succeeds because God is with him, and God's presence manifests as comprehensive wisdom. The simplicity of the Hebrew — just eight words — creates a stark contrast with the complexity of Saul's scheming that surrounds it.

15. The verb vayyar ('he saw') followed by asher hu maskil me'od ('that he was exceedingly wise/successful') means Saul's fear was based on clear-eyed observation, not paranoia. Saul could see the reality of David's competence and divine favor. The verb vayyagor ('he dreaded, was in dread of') is stronger than the vayyira ('he feared') of verse 12. The root g-u-r means to dread, to be terrified, to shrink back in fear — it describes a visceral, ongoing terror rather than a momentary fright. Saul has progressed from fear to dread. The irony is that David's maskil — the very quality that makes him an effective servant of Saul's kingdom — is what terrifies Saul. The better David serves, the more Saul fears him. Competence itself has become a threat.

16. The phrase vekhol-Yisra'el viYhudah ('all Israel and Judah') is striking because it distinguishes the northern tribes from Judah — a political division that will not formally exist until after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12). The narrator either writes from a later perspective or signals an existing tribal consciousness that predates the official split. The verb ohev ('loving') is the same root as Jonathan's ahavah for David — the entire nation shares

Jonathan's response. The reason given — ki hu yotse vava lifneihem ('because he was going out and coming in before them') — is the military leadership formula from verse 13. David is a leader who shares the danger with his people, and this earns their love. The contrast with Saul is implicit: Saul stays in the house with his spear while David goes out with the troops.

17. Saul's offer of Merab (biti hagedolah, 'my great/elder daughter') may fulfill the promise made in 17:25, where the king offered his daughter to whoever killed Goliath — though Saul now attaches new conditions. The phrase heyeh-li leven-chayil ('be for me a son of valor') is ironic: ben-chayil is exactly what David already is, but Saul frames it as a future requirement to justify sending David into more battles. The phrase milchamot YHWH ('the LORD's battles') is especially cynical — Saul invokes divine warfare as a pretext for engineering David's death. The narrator then breaks the fourth wall with ki Sha'ul amar ('for Saul said/thought'), revealing the inner calculation: al-tehi yadi vo ('let not my hand be on him') — Saul wants plausible deniability. He wants the Philistines to do his killing for him. The yad ('hand') of the Philistines is contrasted with the yad of Saul — he is transferring the murder weapon from his own hand (which already failed with the spear) to the enemy's.

18. David's response mi anokhi ('who am I?') echoes Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:11) and Gideon's call narrative (Judges 6:15) — the conventional response of the humble when called to something beyond their station. The phrase umi chayyai ('and what is my life/family') is debated: chayyai could mean 'my life' (what is my life worth?) or 'my living relatives, my clan.' The clarifying phrase mishpachat avi ('my father's clan') suggests the social dimension: David is saying his family's rank does not merit royal marriage. The word chatan ('son-in-law, bridegroom') creates a kinship bond — becoming the king's chatan means entering the royal family. David's humility may be genuine or diplomatic or both — it is the appropriate response in a culture where self-promotion would be offensive.

19. The phrase be'et tet ('at the time of giving') marks the moment when the promise should have been fulfilled. The passive nittanah ('she was given') obscures the agent — the text does not say 'Saul gave her' but 'she was given,' perhaps reflecting the narrative's subtle distancing from Saul's broken word. Adriel the Meholathite (haMecholati) is from Abel-Meholah, a town in the Jordan valley associated with Elisha's home (1 Kings 19:16). This broken promise sets up a later tragedy: Merab's five sons by Adriel will be handed over to the Gibeonites and executed in 2 Samuel 21:8-9. Saul's political manipulation of his daughter's marriage will have lethal consequences for his grandsons. The verse is a single sentence of devastating narrative economy — a promise made, a promise broken, a life redirected, all in one line.

20. The statement vatte'ehav Mikhal bat-Sha'ul et-David ('Michal daughter of Saul loved David') is remarkable because it is one of the very few places in the Hebrew Bible where a woman is the stated subject of the verb 'to love' (ahav) directed toward a man. The narrator gives Michal her own agency and emotional voice. The phrase vayyiggidu leSha'ul ('they reported to Saul') indicates court informants — the royal household is a place of surveillance and intelligence. The phrase vayyishar haddavar be'einav ('the thing was straight/pleasing in his eyes') uses the root y-sh-r ('straight, right, upright') — ironically, the word for moral uprightness is used to describe Saul's pleasure at finding a new opportunity for treachery. Saul is pleased not because his daughter is happy but because her love gives him another weapon against David.

21. The word moqesh ('snare, trap') is hunting vocabulary — it refers to a bird trap or animal snare. Saul views his own daughter as a device for catching prey. The phrase utehi-vo yad-Pelishtim ('and the hand of the Philistines will be upon him') repeats the same scheme from verse 17 — the Philistines are Saul's proxy assassins. The phrase bishtayim titchatten bi hayyom ('with two/the second you will become my son-in-law today') is ambiguous: bishtayim could mean 'by the second (daughter)' — i.e., through Michal after the Merab arrangement failed — or 'a second time' — another chance at the royal marriage. The verb titchatten (Hitpael of ch-t-n) is reflexive: 'you will make yourself a son-in-law to me.' Saul frames the offer as David's opportunity, disguising his trap as generosity.

22. The adverb ballat ('in secret, privately, in a whisper') reveals the manipulative nature of Saul's approach — this is not a public offer but a covert campaign of persuasion. Saul stages the proposal to come from servants rather than himself, creating the appearance of organic encouragement rather than royal pressure. The phrase chafets bekha hammelekh ('the king delights in you') uses chafets, a word of genuine pleasure and desire — Saul instructs his servants to lie, attributing to himself an affection he does not feel. The addition of vekhol-avadav ahevukha ('and all his servants love you') piles on social pressure — you are loved by everyone, so why hesitate? The entire verse is a masterclass in manipulation: private approach, false warmth, peer pressure, and the framing of a trap as an honor.

23. The phrase be'oznei David ('in the ears of David') means they spoke directly and privately to him, fulfilling Saul's instruction for a covert approach. David's response uses the Niphal of q-l-l: haneqallah ('is it considered light/trivial?') — does becoming royal kin seem easy or insignificant to you? The self-description ish rash veniqleh ('a poor man and of low esteem') uses rash ('poor, impoverished') and niqleh (Niphal of q-l-l, 'lightly esteemed, insignificant'). David emphasizes his economic inability to pay a bride-price worthy of royalty. In ancient Israelite marriage, the groom's family paid a mohar (bride-price) to the bride's family — David's poverty would make a royal bride-price impossible. Whether this is genuine humility, social convention, or strategic positioning (inviting Saul to name alternative terms), it opens the door for Saul's lethal counteroffer.

24. This brief verse functions as a narrative hinge — the servants are intermediaries shuttling between Saul and David, maintaining the fiction of distance. The phrase kaddevarim ha'elleh dibber David ('according to these words David spoke') indicates they relayed David's response verbatim. The verse reveals the court's architecture of communication: Saul does not speak directly to David about the marriage but operates through layers of intermediaries. This indirection serves Saul's purposes — it maintains deniability and creates the appearance of David pursuing the marriage rather than being lured into it.

25. The phrase ein chefets lammelekh bemohar ('the king has no desire for a bride-price') waives the standard mohar — the financial payment from groom to bride's father. Instead, Saul demands me'ah orlot Pelishtim ('one hundred foreskins of Philistines'). The orlah ('foreskin') is the mark of non-covenant identity — Philistines were 'uncircumcised' (arelim), and collecting foreskins meant killing the enemy and taking proof. This demand requires David to engage in close combat with one hundred Philistine warriors — a near-certain death sentence. The phrase lehinnaqem be'oyvei

hammelekh ('to take vengeance on the king's enemies') cloaks personal murder-by-proxy in the language of national warfare. The narrator again reveals Saul's inner calculation: veSha'ul chashav lehappil et-David beyad-Pelishtim ('Saul was reckoning to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines'). The verb chashav ('to reckon, calculate, plan') presents Saul as a cold strategist, and hippil ('to cause to fall') means he wanted David dead.

26. The phrase vayyishar haddavar be'einei David ('the thing was straight/pleasing in David's eyes') uses the same expression applied to Saul in verse 20 — both men find the arrangement pleasing, but for entirely different reasons. David sees an opportunity for honor and marriage; Saul sees a death trap. The phrase velo male'u hayyamim ('the days were not fulfilled/completed') indicates a deadline had been set for the bride-price, and David acted before it expired. This detail emphasizes David's eagerness and confidence — he did not need the full allotted time. It also heightens the narrative tension: Saul expected David to die in the attempt, but David moved quickly and decisively.

27. David delivers matayim ish ('two hundred men') — double the required one hundred. The doubling is not accidental; it is a statement of overwhelming competence and, perhaps, a pointed echo of the women's song that credited David with 'ten thousands' against Saul's 'thousands.' David doubles the bride-price just as the women doubled his kill count. The verb vaymalle'um ('they filled them up, completed the full number') uses the same root m-l-' as verse 26's 'the days were not fulfilled' — David fills the count before the days are filled. The phrase vayyitten-lo Sha'ul et-Mikhal bitto le'ishah ('Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife') is terse and forced — Saul is trapped by his own scheme. He set the price hoping David would die; David paid double, and Saul must honor the deal. The verb vayyitten ('he gave') is the same word used for the broken promise about Merab (verse 19) — this time Saul cannot renege.

28. The paired verbs vayyar vayyeda ('he saw and he knew') indicate both empirical observation and deep understanding — Saul is not guessing but perceiving with certainty. The clause ki YHWH im-David ('that the LORD was with David') repeats the narrator's own assessment from verses 12 and 14, but now Saul himself has arrived at the same conclusion. The addition of uMikhal bat-Sha'ul ahevathu ('and Michal daughter of Saul loved him') adds personal devastation to Saul's political crisis — not only is God with David, but Saul's own daughter has given her loyalty to his rival. The verb ahevathu ('she loved him') echoes the same ahavah vocabulary used for Jonathan in verse 1. Both of Saul's children love David more than they love their father's interests. Saul is losing everything — divine favor, popular support, military prestige, and now his own family.

29. The verb vayyosef ('he added, continued, increased') with lero ('to fear') indicates Saul's fear is escalating — each verse has pushed it higher: jealousy (v8), suspicion (v9), fear (v12), dread (v15), and now intensified, permanent fear. The phrase vayyehi Sha'ul oyev et-David kol-hayyamim ('Saul was an enemy of David all the days') is the narrator's final verdict on the relationship. The word oyev ('enemy') is the standard term for a military or national adversary — Saul, the king of Israel, has become David's enemy in the same way the Philistines are Israel's enemies. The phrase kol-hayyamim ('all the days') means this enmity is permanent and total. There will be no reconciliation. The chapter that began with Jonathan's covenant love ends with Saul's covenant hatred — the father and son have taken opposite positions toward the same man.

30. The final verse returns to the chapter's key verb: sakhal David ('David acted wisely/prospered'). The comparative mikkol avdei Sha'ul ('more than all of Saul's servants') positions David as the most capable officer in the army — not just competent but preeminent. The phrase vayyiqar shemo me'od ('his name became very precious/honored') uses the verb y-q-r ('to be precious, honored, rare'). David's shem ('name') — his reputation, public identity, renown — has become yaqar ('precious, weighty, valuable'). This closes the chapter by circling back to the women's song: the very popularity Saul feared has only grown. The narrator's final word on the chapter is David's ascending glory, implicitly contrasted with Saul's descending spiral. The chapter opened with covenant love and closes with covenant skill — Jonathan's berit and David's sakal are both gifts from God, and both are things Saul cannot defeat.

19

Summary: *Saul openly commands his servants and Jonathan to kill David. Jonathan intercedes, persuading his father to swear an oath sparing David's life. But after David's next military victory, the evil spirit returns and Saul hurls a spear at David in his own house. Michal, David's wife, helps him escape through a window and deceives Saul's messengers using household idols (terafim) arranged in David's bed. David flees to Samuel at Ramah, where the two of them settle in Naioth. Saul sends three waves of messengers to capture David, but each group falls into prophetic frenzy upon arriving. Finally Saul goes himself — and the Spirit of God seizes him too, stripping him of his royal garments as he lies naked and prophesying all day and all night before Samuel. The chapter closes with the proverb resurfacing: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is structured as a cascading failure of royal power. Saul issues a direct kill order (verse 1), but every instrument of his authority — his son, his daughter, his messengers, and finally his own body — is turned against him. The narrative architecture is precise: Jonathan subverts the order through persuasion (verses 1-7), Michal subverts it through deception (verses 11-17), and God subverts it through overwhelming prophetic seizure (verses 18-24). The terafim scene in verse 13 is one of the most vivid domestic tableaux in the Hebrew Bible — Michal stuffs a household idol into David's bed with a goat-hair pillow, creating a decoy that buys David time to*

flee. The narrator neither condemns nor commends her possession of terafim; the idol simply serves the escape. The final scene, where Saul strips naked and lies prophesying before Samuel, is a deliberate inversion of his anointing in chapter 10. There, the Spirit clothed Saul with prophetic authority as he entered kingship; here, the same Spirit strips him bare as he chases the man who will replace him. The repeated question 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' (verse 24, echoing 10:11-12) now carries an entirely different valence — not wonder at Saul's elevation but shock at his humiliation.

Translation Friction: *The terafim in verse 13 present an immediate translation challenge. The word refers to household idols or cultic figurines, yet Michal — David's wife, Saul's daughter — apparently keeps one in the house and it is large enough to simulate a human body in bed. The text shows no interest in condemning this; the narrator reports it without editorial comment, leaving translators to decide how much interpretive weight to place on the idol's presence. We render terafim as 'household idol' and note its significance without forcing a moral judgment the text itself does not make. The prophetic frenzy in verses 20-24 also presents difficulty: the verb hitnabbe (Hithpael of naba) can mean 'prophesied' in the sense of ecstatic behavior, not necessarily delivering intelligible oracles. Saul's naked prophesying looks more like involuntary divine seizure than voluntary worship. The phrase ruach Elohim ('Spirit of God') is used for both creative empowerment (as with the judges) and overwhelming compulsion (as here) — the same Spirit that once empowered Saul now immobilizes him. Translators must resist the temptation to sanitize this scene; the text intends the reader to see the king of Israel lying helpless and exposed.*

Connections: *The spear-throwing in verse 10 echoes the first attempt in 18:10-11 and will recur in 20:33 (aimed at Jonathan) — the spear becomes Saul's signature weapon of failed violence, always missing its target. Michal's window escape parallels Rahab lowering the spies through her window in Joshua 2:15 and anticipates Paul's basket escape in Acts 9:25 — each time, a person under death threat is saved through an opening in a wall. The terafim recall Rachel stealing Laban's household gods (Genesis 31:19, 34-35), another story where a woman uses deception involving idols to protect someone from a pursuing patriarch. The prophetic frenzy at Naioth connects to the band of prophets Saul encountered in 10:5-13 after his anointing. The stripping of Saul's garments prefigures David cutting the corner of Saul's robe in chapter 24 — in both cases, the loss of royal clothing symbolizes the transfer of kingdom authority. The phrase 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' forming a bookend with 10:12 creates an inclusio around Saul's decline: the same words mark both the beginning and the end of his credibility.*

1 Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. 2 But Jonathan son of Saul was deeply devoted to
David. Jonathan warned David, saying, "My father Saul is seeking to kill you. Be on your guard in the morning — stay in a
hidden place and conceal yourself. 3 I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are hiding, and I will
speak to my father about you. Whatever I learn, I will tell you." 4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to
him, "The king must not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you — and because what he has
done has been very good for you. 5 He put his life in his hands and struck down the Philistine, and the LORD accomplished a
great deliverance for all Israel. You saw it — you rejoiced! Why then would you sin against innocent blood by putting David
to death for no reason?" 6 Saul listened to Jonathan's voice, and Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he will not be put to death."
7 Jonathan called David and told him everything. Then Jonathan brought David to Saul, and David served in his presence as
before. 8 War broke out again, and David went out and fought the Philistines and struck them with a massive blow, and they
fled before him. 9 An evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul while he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand,
and David was playing the lyre. 10 Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but David pulled away from Saul's
presence. The spear struck the wall, and David fled and escaped that night. 11 Saul sent agents to David's house to watch it
and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow
you will be dead." 12 Michal lowered David through the window, and he went out, fled, and escaped. 13 Michal took the
household idol and laid it in the bed. She placed a tangle of goat hair at its head and covered the whole thing with a garment.
14 When Saul sent agents to seize David, she said, "He is ill." 15 Saul sent the agents back to see David for themselves, saying,
"Bring him to me in the bed itself, so I can kill him." 16 The agents came in, and there in the bed was the household idol, with
the goat-hair tangle at its head. 17 Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this and let my enemy go, so that he

escaped?" Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go — why should I have to kill you?'" 18David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah. He told him everything Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went and stayed at Naioth. 19I t was reported to Saul: "David is at Naioth in Ramah." 20Saul sent agents to seize David. But when they saw the band of prophets prophesying with Samuel standing over them as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's agents, and they too fell into prophetic frenzy. 21When this was reported to Saul, he sent a second group of agents — and they too fell into prophetic frenzy. Saul sent yet a third group — and they too fell into prophetic frenzy. 22Then Saul himself went to Ramah. He came to the great cistern at Secu and asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" Someone answered, "At Naioth in Ramah." 23He went toward Naioth in Ramah, and the Spirit of God came upon even him. He walked along prophesying until he arrived at Naioth in Ramah. 24He too stripped off his garments and prophesied before Samuel. He fell down and lay exposed all that day and all that night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb dibbēr ('spoke') with the infinitive lehamit ('to kill') presents the assassination order as casual royal speech — Saul issues the command as though it were ordinary court business. The verb hamit (Hiphil of mut) means 'to cause death,' the technical term for judicial or military execution. By addressing both Jonathan and 'all his servants,' Saul makes this a public decree, not a private conspiracy. The narrative tension is immediate: Jonathan, David's covenant brother (chapter 18:1-4), is the first person named as recipient of the kill order.
2. The phrase hishamer na babboqer ('take care in the morning') suggests that the danger will be most acute at daybreak, when Saul's agents would be dispatched. The word seter ('hidden place, secret spot') often refers to a place of divine shelter in the Psalms (Psalm 27:5, 31:20), though here it is a practical hiding location. Jonathan positions himself as the intermediary — he will test his father's mood and relay the outcome.
3. Jonathan's plan places him physically between David and Saul — he will stand 'beside his father' (leyad avi) in the same field where David hides. The spatial arrangement is a physical expression of his mediating role. The verb adabber bekha ('I will speak about you') uses the same verb (dibber) that Saul used in verse 1 when issuing the kill order. Jonathan will use speech to undo what Saul's speech commanded. The phrase ra'iti mah ('I will see what') indicates that Jonathan does not yet know whether his intervention will succeed — he is genuinely testing his father's resolve.
4. Jonathan addresses Saul as 'the king' (hammelekh) rather than 'my father,' adopting formal court language to give his plea institutional weight. The accusative construction al yecheta hammelekh be-David ('let the king not sin against David') treats the murder plot as a covenant violation by the king himself — a remarkably bold statement from son to father, from subject to sovereign.
5. The phrase dam naqi ('innocent blood') is a legal category in Deuteronomic law (Deuteronomy 19:10, 13; 21:8-9). Shedding innocent blood defiles the land and brings guilt upon the community. Jonathan is warning Saul that killing David would trigger the blood-guilt provisions of the covenant — the same provisions that protect against unjust execution. The verb techeta ('you would sin') makes Saul the subject of the sin for the third time in two verses, driving home Jonathan's point.
6. The oath formula chay YHWH ('as the LORD lives') is the most solemn oath available in Israelite culture — invoking God's own life as the guarantee. The passive im yumat ('he will not be killed') distances Saul from the killing while appearing to grant clemency. The narrator's terseness here — no inner thoughts, no qualifying clauses — allows the reader to wonder how sincere Saul's oath truly is. The verb shama ('listened') echoes Jonathan's role as persuader, but the oath's brevity contrasts sharply with Jonathan's lengthy argument, hinting that Saul's compliance may be shallow.
7. The phrase ke'etmol shilshom ('as yesterday and the day before') is a Hebrew idiom meaning 'as in former times' or 'as previously.' The repetition of Jonathan's name three times in a single verse — 'Jonathan called,' 'Jonathan told him,' 'Jonathan brought' — emphasizes that Jonathan is the active agent of reconciliation at every stage. The verb vayyhi lefanav ('he was before him') indicates David resumed his position as court musician and attendant. The restoration appears complete, but the reader already suspects it will not last.
8. The phrase vattosep hammilchamah lihyot ('the war continued to be') uses the verb yasaf ('to add, to do again') — war keeps returning as the background condition of Saul's reign. David's victory is described with makkah gedolah ('a great striking'), the same phrase used for decisive battlefield victories throughout the Deuteronomistic History. The irony is sharp: David's very success — the quality Jonathan cited to save his life — reignites Saul's jealousy. Each Philistine victory makes David more popular and Saul more threatened.
9. The narrator sets the scene with deliberate visual contrast: king and musician, spear and lyre, seated authority and kneeling servant. David was originally summoned to play music to soothe Saul's tormented spirit (16:14-23). The same remedy that once brought relief now provides proximity for murder. The phrase ruach ra'ah ('evil spirit') here likely means 'harmful spirit' or 'spirit of distress' rather than morally evil — the Hebrew ra'ah encompasses harm, disaster, and malice.
10. The verb vayevaqesh ('he sought') indicates intention rather than immediate action — Saul aimed to pin (lehakkot) David to the wall (baqqir), a verb that means to strike through and fasten. The image is of David impaled like a trophy. The verb vayyiptar ('he slipped away, pulled free') suggests David dodged at the last moment. The spear embedding in the wall — vayyakh et hachanit baqqir — is a vivid detail that emphasizes both Saul's violent force and his utter failure to hit his target. David's escape into the night (ballaylah hahu, 'that night') marks the beginning of his fugitive life. From this point forward, David will not safely return to Saul's court.

11. Saul sends mal'akhim ('messengers, agents') — the same word used for angels and divine messengers, here repurposed as instruments of assassination. The infinitives leshomro velahamiento ('to guard him and to kill him') reveal a two-stage plan: surveillance through the night, execution at dawn. Michal's warning — im einkha memallet et nafshekha hallaylah ('if you do not save your life tonight') — is blunt and urgent. The word mumat ('you are a dead man,' Hophal participle of mut) presents David's death as a certainty unless he acts immediately. Michal, Saul's own daughter, now becomes the third member of Saul's family to work against his plan to kill David.

12. The verb vattored ('she lowered') indicates that the house had an upper story or was built into a wall — Michal physically lowers David, suggesting he could not simply walk out the door because Saul's agents were watching the entrance. The triple verb sequence vayyēlekh vayyivrach vayyimmalet ('he went, he fled, he escaped') creates an accelerating rhythm of flight. Each verb intensifies the previous one: departure, then panicked running, then successful evasion. This window escape places Michal in the tradition of Rahab (Joshua 2:15), who also lowered men through a window to save them from a king's agents.

13. The terafim present several unresolved questions. Why does Michal have a human-sized idol in the house? Is this a Canaanite religious object, a decorative figure, or something with apotropaic (protective) function? The text offers no explanation and passes no judgment — it is simply a useful prop in an emergency. Rachel also possessed terafim (Genesis 31:19), and they appear in Judges 17:5 and 2 Kings 23:24 in contexts ranging from household religion to condemned idolatry. The narrator's silence here is deliberate: the story is about Michal's resourcefulness, not her theology.

13. The word kevir appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, making its precise meaning uncertain. The traditional rendering 'pillow of goat hair' is plausible — goat hair was used for weaving coarse fabrics (Exodus 35:26) and could simulate the appearance of human hair on a bed pillow. Whatever its exact form, the goat hair serves as a visual stand-in for David's head.

14. Michal's lie — choleh hu ('he is sick') — is a masterpiece of economy. Two words buy David critical hours of escape time. The agents apparently accept this without entering the house, suggesting that either Michal's status as the king's daughter gives her authority, or that illness was taken seriously enough to delay the arrest. The verb laqachat ('to take, seize') is the same verb used for taking prisoners or capturing — Saul's agents are not there for a conversation.

15. Saul's command ha'alu oto vammittah elai lahamito ('bring him up in the bed to me to kill him') reveals both his paranoia and his cruelty — he does not care if David is sick; he wants the bed carried to him with David in it. The phrase lahamito ('to kill him') is stated openly, not concealed. Saul has dropped all pretense. The irony is that when the agents finally approach the bed, they will find not David but a goat-hair-covered idol — the king's agents will carry an idol to the king.

16. The particle ve-hinneh ('and look!') conveys the agents' shock at the discovery — the narrative camera enters the room with them and registers their surprise. The careful arrangement Michal constructed in verse 13 is now exposed. The narrator's repetition of the same elements — terafim, mittah, kevir ha'izzim — from the setup scene creates a moment of dark comedy: the feared warrior David has been replaced by a household idol wearing a goat-hair wig.

17. Saul's rage at Michal reveals his isolation: his son, his daughter, and his servants have all failed to carry out his orders. The phrase vateshalechi et oyvi ('you sent my enemy away') uses the Piel of shalach ('to send'), implying active assistance rather than passive negligence. Saul sees Michal as a co-conspirator. Michal's lie — claiming David threatened her — mirrors Rachel's deception of Laban in Genesis 31:35, where Rachel also lied to her father to protect stolen household objects. Both daughters deceive their fathers using domestic items and fabricated excuses.

18. David's flight to Samuel is theologically significant: the fugitive king-elect seeks refuge with the prophet who anointed him. The verb vayyagged ('he told') suggests a full account — David lays out the entire history of Saul's persecution. The location Naioth (navyot) is related to the word naveh ('dwelling, pasture') and may refer to a prophetic settlement or compound near Ramah where Samuel's school of prophets was based. The Targum renders it 'house of study.' David positions himself within the prophetic community — the very community that anointed him and that Saul cannot control.

19. The passive vayyuggad ('it was told') leaves the informant unnamed — Saul has a network of loyalists who track David's movements. The report is terse: hinneh David be-Nayot ba-Ramah ('David is at Naioth in Ramah'). The hinneh ('look, here') conveys urgency, as though the informant is presenting actionable intelligence. Saul now knows exactly where David is, and what follows will be a systematic attempt to extract him from prophetic sanctuary.

20. The phrase omed nitsav ('standing, stationed') uses two verbs of standing to emphasize Samuel's commanding presence. He is not merely present but presiding — the prophetic company operates under his authority. The ruach Elohim ('Spirit of God') in this context functions as a protective force: it does not inspire the agents to deliver oracles but incapacitates them for their original mission. The word gam hemmah ('they too, even they') emphasizes the surprise — Saul's own enforcement arm has been absorbed into the prophetic community.

21. The threefold repetition — three groups of agents, each neutralized by the Spirit — follows a folktale pattern common in Hebrew narrative (compare Elijah and the three captains in 2 Kings 1:9-14). The repetition serves both literary and theological purposes: it demonstrates that this is not a one-time fluke but a systematic divine blockade. The verb vayyosep ('he added, he did again') shows Saul's stubborn persistence — each failure only intensifies his determination. The phrase gam hemmah ('they too') tolls like a refrain, each repetition further humiliating Saul's authority. His agents, sent to capture a fugitive, become involuntary worshippers instead.

22. The phrase gam hu ('he himself, even he') signals the narrative climax — the king who sent wave after wave of agents now goes personally. The bor haggadol ('great cistern') at Secu serves as a geographic marker, locating Saul's journey on a specific route. That Saul must ask for directions — eifoh Shemu'el ve-David ('where are Samuel and David?') — is subtly humiliating: the king of Israel is wandering the countryside searching for a prophet

and a fugitive. He names Samuel first, suggesting he views the prophet as the greater problem. The respondent's answer places both men at Naioth, where the Spirit has already defeated three groups of Saul's agents.

23. The verb vayyitnabbe (Hithpael of naba) describes involuntary ecstatic behavior, as in verses 20-21. The infinitive absolute construction halokh vayyitnabbe ('going along and prophesying') creates a picture of Saul stumbling forward in a prophetic trance, unable to arrest either his movement or his utterance. The narrative deliberately mirrors Saul's first prophetic experience in chapter 10, but with inverted meaning: there, the Spirit confirmed his kingship; here, it prevents him from exercising it.

24. The word arom is rendered 'exposed' rather than strictly 'naked' because the Hebrew term can indicate either full nudity or being stripped to a basic loincloth. In either case, the point is the same: the king has been reduced to a state incompatible with royal dignity. A king without his robes is a king without his authority — the garments are not merely clothing but signs of office.

24. The phrase lifnei Shemu'el ('before Samuel') is the chapter's final irony: Saul lies helpless at the feet of the very prophet who anointed him and who has already anointed his replacement. Samuel does not speak in this scene — he does not need to. The Spirit has said everything. The closing proverb — 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' — creates an inclusio with 10:11-12. In chapter 10 the question expressed astonishment that an unknown farmer could receive the Spirit; in chapter 19 it expresses astonishment that a reigning king could be reduced to a prophesying heap on the ground. Same words, opposite meanings — a literary device that encapsulates Saul's entire tragic arc.

20

Summary: *David flees from Samuel's compound at Naioth and confronts Jonathan with a desperate question: why is your father trying to kill me? Jonathan cannot believe it. The two men devise a test — David will be absent from the New Moon feast, and Jonathan will gauge Saul's reaction. They renew their covenant, binding not only themselves but their descendants. At the feast, Saul's rage explodes against Jonathan for protecting David. Jonathan goes to the field, shoots the arrow signal, and the two friends embrace in grief before parting. David goes into permanent exile; Jonathan returns to the city.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the emotional center of the David-Jonathan narrative, and it is structured around three covenants that escalate in scope. In verse 8, Jonathan invokes the existing covenant (berit) between them. In verse 16, Jonathan cuts a new covenant with the house of David — extending the bond beyond two individuals to two dynasties. In verse 42, both men swear by the LORD that the covenant holds 'between my descendants and your descendants forever.' The chapter transforms personal friendship into a political-theological commitment that will outlast both men. The arrow signal (verses 20-22, 35-40) is an elaborate espionage device, but its narrative function is to create a moment where the two friends must communicate without words — the opposite of the direct, intimate speech that fills the rest of the chapter. The New Moon feast provides the setting, and Saul's escalating fury across three days reveals how deeply David's absence threatens the king's sense of control. Jonathan's loyalty is tested from both sides: his father demands filial obedience, his covenant partner demands faithfulness. He chooses covenant over bloodline.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 30 contains one of the most offensive insults in the Hebrew Bible: Saul calls Jonathan ben-na'avat ha-mardut, which KJV renders 'thou son of the perverse rebellious woman.' The phrase is difficult because na'avat is a rare form — possibly from 'avah ('to twist, pervert') with a feminine ending, meaning something like 'son of a twisted rebellious woman.' It attacks Jonathan's mother to shame Jonathan, a tactic with deep cultural force in the ancient Near East. We render it to preserve the maternal insult and the shame-rage dynamic without sanitizing or amplifying. In verse 3, David swears ki-khe-fesa' beyni uveyn ha-mavet ('there is barely a step between me and death') — the word pesa' ('step') is concrete and physical, measuring the gap between life and death as a single stride. In verse 30, Saul also accuses Jonathan of choosing David le-boshtekha u-le-boshet ervat immekha ('to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness'). The word ervah ('nakedness, exposure') suggests sexual dishonor; Saul is accusing Jonathan of a loyalty so perverse it shames his own mother's body. We translate with maximum clarity about what Saul is actually saying.*

Connections: *The Jonathan-David covenant echoes the covenant-cutting pattern established in Genesis 15 (God's covenant with Abraham) and Genesis 31:44-54 (Jacob and Laban). The phrase 'the LORD be between me and you' (verse 42) mirrors Genesis 31:49, the Mizpah benediction. Jonathan's request that David show chesed ('faithful love') to his house (verses 14-15) will be fulfilled in 2 Samuel 9, when David seeks out Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and*

restores his grandfather's land. The New Moon feast (chodesh) connects to Numbers 28:11-15, where the first day of each month required special sacrifices — Saul's feast is a royal observance of this calendar marker. David's hiding at the stone Ezel (verse 19) will be echoed by his later fugitive movements in the Judean wilderness. Jonathan's arrow signal anticipates the coded communications that will characterize David's years on the run.

1David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came to Jonathan. He said, "What have I done? What is my guilt? What is my offense
against your father, that he is hunting my life?" 2Jonathan said to him, "Never! You will not die. My father does nothing —
whether large or small — without uncovering it to my ear. Why would my father hide this from me? It is not true." 3David
swore again and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, so he has said to himself, 'Jonathan
must not know about this, or he will be devastated.' But as the LORD lives, and as your own life endures — there is barely a
step between me and death." 4Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want — I will do it for you." 5David said to Jonathan,
"Tomorrow is the New Moon, and I am expected to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, and I will hide in the open country
until the evening of the third day. 6If your father misses me at all, say: 'David urgently asked my permission to run to
Bethlehem, his hometown, because the whole clan has a yearly sacrifice there.' 7If he says, 'Good' — then your servant is safe.
But if he flares with anger, know that he has fully decided on harm." 8Show faithful love to your servant, because you
brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself — why would you
hand me over to your father?" 9Jonathan said, "Never! If I learn for certain that my father has decided to bring harm against
you, would I not tell you?" 10David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" 11Jonathan said
to David, "Come, let us go out to the open country." And the two of them went out to the open country. 12Jonathan said to
David, "By the LORD, the God of Israel — when I have sounded out my father by this time tomorrow or the day after, if
things look favorable for David and I do not send word to you and uncover it to your ear — 13— then may the LORD do thus
to Jonathan and even more! But if my father intends harm against you, I will uncover it to your ear and send you away so
you can go in safety. May the LORD be with you as he was with my father." 14"And if I am still alive — will you not show me
the faithful love of the LORD, so that I do not die? 15And do not ever cut off your faithful love from my household — not even
when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." 16So Jonathan cut a covenant with the
house of David: "May the LORD call it to account from the hand of David's enemies." 17Jonathan again made David swear by
his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life. 18Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the New Moon, and
you will be missed because your seat will be empty. 19On the third day go down quickly and come to the place where you hid
on the day of the incident, and wait beside the stone Ezel. 20I will shoot three arrows to the side, as if aiming at a target. 21Th
en I will send a boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say clearly to the boy, 'The arrows are on this side of you — pick them
up,' then come out, because it is safe for you and there is nothing wrong, as the LORD lives. 22But if I say to the young man,
'The arrows are beyond you' — then go, because the LORD has sent you away. 23As for the matter we have spoken of, you and
I — the LORD stands between me and you forever." 24David hid in the open country. When the New Moon came, the king sat
down at the meal to eat. 25The king sat in his seat as usual — the seat by the wall. Jonathan stood, and Abner sat at Saul's
side. But David's place was empty. 26Saul said nothing that day, because he thought, "Something must have happened to him
— he is not ritually pure. He must be unclean." 27On the second day after the New Moon, David's place was still empty. Saul
said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" 28Jonathan answered
Saul, "David urgently asked my permission to go to Bethlehem. 29He said, 'Let me go, please, because our clan has a sacrifice
in the city, and my brother has ordered me to be there. So now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me slip away and see
my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table." 30Saul's anger blazed against Jonathan. He said to him, "You
son of a twisted, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse — to your own shame and to the
shame of your mother's nakedness? 31For as long as the son of Jesse is alive on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will
be established. Now send for him and bring him to me, because he is a dead man." 32Jonathan answered Saul his father and
said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" 33Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down. Then
Jonathan knew that his father was fully determined to kill David. 34Jonathan rose from the table burning with anger. He did

not eat any food on that second day of the New Moon, because he was grieved for David and because his father had humiliated him. 35In the morning, Jonathan went out to the open country at the time appointed with David, and a small boy was with him. 36He said to his boy, "Run — find the arrows I am about to shoot." The boy ran, and Jonathan shot an arrow past him. 37When the boy reached the place where Jonathan's arrow had landed, Jonathan called out after the boy, "Isn't the arrow beyond you — farther out?" 38Jonathan called after the boy, "Hurry! Be quick! Do not stop!" Jonathan's boy gathered the arrows and came back to his master. 39The boy knew nothing at all. Only Jonathan and David knew what was happening. 40Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy who served him and said, "Go, take these back to the city." 41As soon as the boy was gone, David rose from beside the south side and fell on his face to the ground. He bowed three times. Then they kissed each other and wept together, until David wept uncontrollably. 42Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety. What the two of us have sworn in the name of the LORD stands firm: 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" Then David got up and left, and Jonathan went back into the city.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. David's three questions — meh asiti, meh avoni, u-meh chattati — escalate from general action ('what have I done?') to moral failing ('what is my guilt?') to covenant violation ('what is my offense?'). The word avon denotes guilt or iniquity in its moral weight, while chattat specifically means 'sin' in the sense of missing a mark or violating a standard. David is not merely asking what happened; he is insisting that he has violated no law, no moral code, and no covenant obligation.

1. The verb mevaqesh ('he is seeking') paired with nafshi ('my life/soul') is a fixed Hebrew expression for intent to kill — Saul is not searching for David's presence but for his death. David has just fled from the prophetic protection at Naioth (19:18-24), where even Saul fell into prophetic ecstasy. That supernatural intervention has not changed Saul's underlying intent.

2. Jonathan's opening word chalilah is an oath-like expression of strong denial — literally 'far be it' or 'profane the thought.' It carries the force of 'God forbid' without explicitly invoking the divine name. His certainty rests on his assumption that Saul shares everything with him: lo ya'aseh avi davar gadol o davar qatan ('my father does not do a thing great or small'). The idiom 'uncover the ear' (yigleh et ozni) means to reveal something privately — literally peeling back the covering over the ear to whisper a secret.

2. Jonathan's confidence is genuine but mistaken. Saul has already attempted to kill David multiple times (18:10-11, 19:1, 19:10) and explicitly ordered Jonathan himself to kill David (19:1). Jonathan successfully intervened once (19:4-6), but Saul's subsequent attempts show that the king's intent has not changed. Jonathan's denial reflects the impossible position of a son who loves both his father and his friend.

3. The double oath formula chai YHWH ve-chey nafshekha ('as the LORD lives and as your soul/life lives') is the strongest available assurance — David swears by God and by Jonathan himself. This formula appears repeatedly in the David narratives and always marks a moment of utmost seriousness.

3. The word pesa' ('step') appears only here and in a handful of other passages. Its concreteness is the point: David is not speaking metaphorically about danger. He is saying that death is literally one step away. The vivid physicality of the image — a single human stride — makes the abstract threat immediate and bodily.

4. Jonathan's response is total commitment compressed into a single sentence. The phrase mah tomar nafshekha ('what does your soul say?') asks not merely for David's wish but for the deepest expression of his inner being — nafesh here means the whole person, not just desire. Jonathan's ve-e'eseh-llakh ('and I will do it for you') is an unconditional pledge with no qualifications. This is the turning point where Jonathan stops defending his father and begins acting as David's ally.

5. The phrase hinneh chodesh machar ('tomorrow is the New Moon') establishes the calendar setting. The chodesh was the first day of the lunar month, marked by special sacrifices (Numbers 28:11-15) and communal feasting. The royal household observed it as a formal banquet where assigned seats mattered — absence would be noticed and interpreted.

5. David's plan involves three days of absence. The phrase ad ha-erev ha-shelishit ('until the evening of the third day') gives the test a defined timeframe. David will hide ba-sadeh ('in the field/open country') — the same word used for the place where Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:8) and where Esau hunted (Genesis 25:27). The sadeh is the space outside the city, beyond the reach of walls and social order.

6. The phrase paqod yifqedeni ('he will surely miss/notice me') uses the infinitive absolute of paqad — a verb meaning 'to attend to, visit, notice, muster.' Saul will not merely notice David's absence; he will actively register it as significant. David's cover story involves a zebach ha-yamim ('sacrifice of the days,' meaning annual sacrifice) for his entire mishpachah ('clan, extended family') at Bethlehem. This is plausible — clan sacrifices were real events — but it is a deliberate deception. The text does not moralize about the lie; it presents it as survival strategy.

6. The verb laruts ('to run') rather than lalekhet ('to walk/go') conveys urgency — David's story is that the summons from Bethlehem was pressing enough to override his royal obligation.

7. The test is binary. If Saul says tov ('good'), then shalom le-avdekha ('peace to your servant') — David is safe. But if charoh yechareh lo ('he burns with burning,' another infinitive absolute construction for emphasis), then kaletah ha-ra'ah me'immo ('the evil is completed/determined from him'). The verb kaletah comes from kalah, meaning 'to be complete, to be finished, to be determined' — the evil is not a passing mood but a settled resolution.

David is asking Jonathan to read Saul's reaction as a diagnostic of fixed intent versus temporary suspicion.

8. The word chesed is the chapter's theological anchor. It denotes the faithful, loyal love that covenant partners owe each other — not as sentiment but as binding obligation. When David says 'show chesed,' he is calling in a covenantal debt, not asking for a favor. The prepositional phrase al avdekha ('upon your servant') positions David as the vulnerable party who is owed protection.

8. The phrase berit YHWH ('covenant of the LORD') elevates the Jonathan-David covenant above a personal agreement. God is the witness and guarantor. David's willingness to die at Jonathan's hand rather than Saul's is both a test of loyalty and a theological statement: covenant justice is preferable to royal caprice.

9. Jonathan's chalilah lakh ('far be it from you') mirrors his earlier chalilah in verse 2, but this time it carries a different force. In verse 2 he denied that Saul intended evil; here he promises that if evil is confirmed, he will not withhold the information. Jonathan is shifting from denial to readiness — he is beginning to accept the possibility that David may be right.

9. The rhetorical question ve-lo otah aggid lakh ('would I not tell it to you?') expects a strong affirmative. Jonathan is binding himself to transparency. The verb nagad ('to declare, tell, report') is the standard term for official communication in covenant contexts.

10. David's question is practical and urgent: mi yaggid li ('who will report to me?'). Even if Jonathan learns the truth, the intelligence must reach David in the field. The word qashah ('harshly, roughly') describes a severe or hard response — David anticipates that Saul's reaction might be violent enough that Jonathan himself could be in danger and unable to deliver the message. This prompts the arrow-signal plan in the verses that follow.

11. The move to the sadeh ('field, open country') takes the conversation out of earshot — away from the royal compound where walls have ears. The narrator's repetition of ha-sadeh twice in one verse emphasizes the shift of setting. The phrase shenehem ('the two of them') highlights their solidarity; they move as a pair into the exposed landscape where their private covenant talk can happen without surveillance.

12. Jonathan begins a formal oath invoking YHWH Elohei Yisra'el ('the LORD, the God of Israel') — the full covenantal title. The verb echqor ('I will sound out, investigate') comes from chaqar, meaning to search deeply, to probe, to investigate thoroughly. Jonathan is promising a genuine intelligence operation, not a casual observation. The phrase galiti et oznekha ('I will uncover your ear') repeats the idiom from verse 2 — the same intimacy Jonathan assumed his father showed him, he now promises to show David.

13. The self-curse formula is deliberately vague — koh ('thus') gestures toward an unspecified punishment too terrible to name. The phrase ve-koh yosif ('and may he add more') intensifies the curse beyond the unnamed first portion. This is the most solemn form of oath available.

13. Jonathan's blessing — 'may the LORD be with you as he was with my father' — is the chapter's most politically loaded sentence. It implicitly acknowledges that God's presence has departed from Saul and now rests on David. Jonathan the crown prince is pronouncing a transfer of divine legitimacy to the man who will replace his father on the throne. The word ka'asher ('as, in the same way') draws a direct equivalence between Saul's early anointing and David's current calling.

14. The syntax of this verse is difficult in Hebrew, with the negative particles creating a tangled conditional. Jonathan is asking David to extend chesed YHWH ('the faithful love of the LORD') to him — not ordinary kindness but the kind of loyal protection that God himself shows to covenant partners. The phrase ve-lo amut ('so that I do not die') reveals Jonathan's awareness that when David becomes king, Jonathan's life will be in danger. Ancient Near Eastern succession typically involved killing all potential rival claimants. Jonathan is asking David to break that pattern.

15. The scope of Jonathan's request is remarkable. He is not asking for a temporary favor but for a permanent policy: ad olam ('forever, to perpetuity'). The mention of 'cutting off enemies from the face of the earth' uses the language of total military victory — the same vocabulary applied to God's destruction of the wicked (Genesis 6-7). Jonathan foresees a world in which David has won completely and every rival is gone. In that world, only David's chesed will stand between Jonathan's family and annihilation.

15. This verse will be directly fulfilled in 2 Samuel 9, when David actively seeks out Jonathan's surviving son Mephibosheth and restores the house of Saul's land to him, declaring 'I will surely show you chesed for Jonathan your father's sake.'

16. The phrase 'cut a covenant with the house of David' is extraordinary because at this point David has no house — he is a fugitive. Jonathan is covenanting with a dynasty that exists only in prophetic anticipation. The language mirrors the Davidic covenant that God will establish in 2 Samuel 7, where YHWH promises to build David a 'house' (dynasty). Jonathan's covenant thus runs parallel to God's own future commitment.

16. The verb biqqesh ('to seek, to require, to call to account') when applied to God means divine reckoning. God will demand an accounting from anyone who breaks this covenant — the enforcement mechanism is not human justice but divine judgment.

17. The verse is saturated with the language of love: be-ahavato oto ('by his love for him') and ki ahavat nafsho ahevo ('because the love of his own life/soul he loved him'). The word ahavah ('love') appears in both its noun and verb forms. The phrase ahavat nafsho ('the love of his soul/life') means Jonathan loved David with the same intensity that a person loves their own existence — this is total identification, not merely affection. The verb lehashbia ('to make swear') means Jonathan administered an oath to David, binding David to the same covenantal commitments. The love is the motive; the oath is the binding mechanism.

18. Jonathan confirms the plan's timing: machar chodesh ('tomorrow is the New Moon'). The verb nifqadta ('you will be missed/noticed') is the Niphal (passive) form of paqad — David will be attended to, his absence will be registered. The phrase ki yippaqed moshavekha ('because your seat will be noticed empty') makes clear that the royal New Moon feast had assigned seating. David's empty chair will be a visible, conspicuous absence that demands explanation.

19. The phrase ve-shilashta tered me'od ('on the third day descend greatly/quickly') uses the verb shillesh ('to do on the third day') and me'od ('very, exceedingly') as an adverb of speed — Jonathan wants David to move fast. The reference to 'the day of the incident' (yom ha-ma'aseh) points to a previous meeting at this location, likely the events of chapter 19. The stone Ezel (ha-even ha-azel) may mean 'the stone of departure' or 'the stone that goes' — from the root azal ('to go away, to depart'). The name is fitting for a landmark that will mark David's permanent departure from Saul's court.

20. Jonathan introduces the arrow signal. The phrase sheloshet ha-chitsim ('three arrows') and the verb oreh ('I will shoot') set up the coded communication system. The word tsiddah ('to the side') indicates direction, and le-mattarah ('at a target') provides the cover story — Jonathan will appear to be practicing archery. The entire plan is an intelligence operation disguised as a routine training exercise.

21. The na'ar ('boy, attendant, servant') is an unwitting participant — he will not know he is carrying a coded message. The key signal for safety: ha-chitsim mimmekha va-hennah ('the arrows are on this side of you and toward here') — meaning the arrows fell short, close by. If the arrows are nearby, David can come out safely. Jonathan seals this with chai YHWH ('as the LORD lives'), the same oath formula David used in verse 3.

22. The danger signal: ha-chitsim mimmekha va-hal'ah ('the arrows are beyond you and farther') — meaning the arrows overshot, far away. The command lekh ('go!') doubles as both instruction to the boy and a warning to David. Most strikingly, Jonathan frames David's flight as divine action: ki shillachakha YHWH ('because the LORD has sent you away'). David's departure is not merely an escape from Saul; it is a divine commission. The verb shillach with God as subject carries the weight of prophetic sending.

23. Jonathan closes the oath with the definitive covenant formula: hinneh YHWH beyni u-veynekha ad olam ('the LORD is between me and you forever'). The preposition beyn ('between') positions God as the mediator, witness, and enforcer standing in the space between the two covenant partners. The phrase ad olam ('forever, to perpetuity') removes any time limit. This covenant does not expire when circumstances change, when one party gains power, or when the other dies. It is permanent because its guarantor is permanent.

24. The narrative shifts from dialogue to action: vayyissater David ba-sadeh ('and David hid himself in the field'). The verb nistar (Niphal of satar, 'to hide') conveys deliberate concealment. The scene then cuts to the royal feast: vayyeshev ha-melekh el ha-lechem le-ekhol ('and the king sat down at the bread/food to eat'). The word lechem means both 'bread' and 'food' more generally — this is the formal New Moon banquet, not a casual meal.

25. The seating arrangement reveals court hierarchy: Saul takes the seat by the wall (moshav ha-qir) — the protected position with his back guarded. Abner, the army commander, sits at Saul's side (mi-tsad Sha'ul). The phrase vayyaqom Yehonatan ('and Jonathan arose/stood') is puzzling — some read it as Jonathan standing to yield the seat beside Saul to Abner, others as Jonathan taking a different position. The Greek (LXX) reads 'Jonathan sat opposite' rather than 'arose.' The critical detail is the final clause: vayyippaqed meqom David ('and David's place was noticed empty'). The verb paqad appears again — the empty seat registers as a presence through its very absence.

26. Saul's internal reasoning (ki amar, 'because he said [to himself]') provides a plausible explanation for David's absence: miqreh hu ('it is an accident/occurrence') — something unexpected happened, and bilti tahor hu ki lo tahor ('he is not pure, for he is not clean'). The word tahor ('pure, clean') refers to ritual purity required for participation in sacred meals. Contact with a corpse, bodily discharge, or other sources of impurity (Leviticus 11-15) would disqualify someone from eating the sacrificial food. The repetition — bilti tahor... ki lo tahor — suggests Saul is convincing himself. On day one, he accepts the innocuous explanation.

27. The second day shatters Saul's ritual-purity theory — most impurities lasted only until evening (Leviticus 15:5-8), so a two-day absence demands a different explanation. Saul's question uses the patronymic ben Yishai ('son of Jesse') rather than David's name — a distancing gesture that reduces David to his family origin and strips him of the personal identity Saul once honored. The phrase gam temol gam ha-yom ('both yesterday and today') emphasizes the pattern: this is no accident.

28. Jonathan deploys the cover story exactly as David scripted it in verse 6. The infinitive absolute nish'ol nish'al ('he urgently asked, he emphatically requested') mirrors David's original phrasing precisely. The phrase me'immadi ('from me, from my presence') positions Jonathan as the authority who granted the leave — a subtle assertion of his own standing in the court hierarchy.

29. Jonathan embellishes David's script slightly — adding the detail that David's brother (achi) commanded his presence, which strengthens the cover story by making it about family obligation, not personal choice. The verb immaltah ('let me slip away, let me escape') is telling — it comes from malat, which means 'to escape, to deliver oneself.' Even in the fabricated speech, the vocabulary of flight bleeds through. The phrase shulchan ha-melekh ('the king's table') names the specific obligation David has violated: the royal table carries political and social weight far beyond a meal.

30. The maternal insult is culturally devastating. In the honor-shame matrix of the ancient Near East, attacking a man's mother was the deepest form of personal assault. The phrase strikes at Jonathan's identity, legitimacy, and family loyalty simultaneously. Saul is not merely angry; he is attempting to shame Jonathan into breaking the covenant with David.

30. The word boshet ('shame') will later be used as a substitute for 'Baal' in Israelite names (Ish-bosheth for Ish-baal in 2 Samuel 2:8). Its appearance here in connection with ervah ('nakedness') creates a cluster of shame-vocabulary that reveals Saul's view of Jonathan's choice: it is not merely politically wrong but morally obscene.

31. Saul names the political reality that drives his rage: lo tikkon attah u-malkhutekha ('you will not be established — you or your kingship'). The verb tikkon (from kun, 'to be firm, established, secure') is the same word used in God's promise to establish David's throne forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Saul perceives that David's survival means the end of his dynasty. The phrase ben mavet hu ('he is a son of death') is an idiom meaning 'he deserves to die' or 'he is marked for death' — it is a death sentence pronounced by the king.

31. Saul again uses ben Yishai ('son of Jesse') rather than David's name, three times in this exchange (verses 27, 30, 31). The patronymic is deliberate: Saul reduces David to his father's son, stripping him of the name and identity that Israel has come to honor.

32. Jonathan's response echoes David's own words from verse 1 — meh asah ('what has he done?') mirrors David's meh asiti ('what have I done?'). The verb yumat ('he shall be put to death') is the Hophal (causative passive) of mut — it refers to judicial execution, not casual killing. Jonathan is demanding legal grounds for a death sentence. By asking lammah ('why?'), Jonathan challenges his father to provide evidence that would justify execution under Israelite law. It is a brave and dangerous question to ask a king in a rage.

33. Saul answers Jonathan's legal question with a spear. The verb vayyatel ('he hurled') describes a violent throw — the same action Saul directed at David twice before (18:11, 19:10). Now he turns the weapon on his own son. The spear (chanit) is Saul's characteristic weapon throughout 1 Samuel, functioning almost as an extension of his disordered will. The clause vayyeda' Yehonatan ki khalah hi me'im aviv le-hamit et David ('and Jonathan knew that it was a completed thing from his father to kill David') uses the same word kaletah ('completed, determined') from verse 7 — the very word David predicted. Jonathan now has his answer: the test is over. The 'completed' evil David feared has been confirmed by the spear that nearly killed Jonathan himself.

34. Jonathan's departure from the table ba-chori af ('in burning anger') mirrors Saul's anger in verse 30 — father and son now share the same emotional intensity but directed in opposite directions. Jonathan's refusal to eat (lo akhal lechem) echoes Hannah's grief in 1:7 — not eating is the body's expression of grief too deep for words. The narrator provides two reasons: ki ne'etsav el David ('because he was grieved for David') and ki hikhlimo aviv ('because his father had shamed him'). The verb ne'etsav (from atsav, 'to grieve, to be pained') is the same word David used in verse 3 when predicting Jonathan would be devastated. The verb hikhlimo ('he had shamed/humiliated him') comes from kalam, meaning to wound through public disgrace.

35. The phrase le-mo'ed David ('at the appointed time of David') uses mo'ed — the same word used for the appointed festivals and the Tabernacle ('tent of meeting'). The scheduled rendezvous carries the weight of a sacred appointment. The na'ar qaton ('small boy') is deliberately chosen — young enough to be unaware of the signal's meaning. Jonathan has engineered the communication so that only he and David understand what is happening.

36. The boy runs first, then Jonathan shoots — the arrow flies over the running boy and lands beyond him. The verb le-ha'aviro ('to make it pass beyond him') uses the Hiphil (causative) of avar, meaning Jonathan deliberately overshot. The signal is being transmitted: the arrow beyond means danger. The word chets (singular 'arrow') appears here though three arrows were mentioned in verse 20 — the singular may indicate the signal arrow that carries the coded message.

37. Jonathan delivers the danger signal: halo ha-chetsi mimmekha va-hal'ah ('is not the arrow beyond you and farther?'). These are the exact words from the prearranged code in verse 22. The boy hears an instruction about archery; David, hiding nearby, hears a death sentence confirmed. The double meaning is the chapter's most dramatic moment of dramatic irony — the same words carry two completely different messages depending on who is listening.

38. Jonathan adds urgency beyond the prearranged signal: meherah chushah al ta'amod ('hurry, be quick, do not stand still'). Three rapid commands — each one escalating the pace. These words serve double duty: they move the boy along so he does not linger near David's hiding place, and they communicate to David that the danger is immediate and flight must be swift. The boy gathers the arrows (ha-chitsim, plural — returning to the three arrows of verse 20) and returns to Jonathan with no awareness of what he has just participated in.

39. The narrator makes the dramatic irony explicit: ve-ha-na'ar lo yada' me'umah ('and the boy did not know anything'). The word me'umah ('anything, at all') is emphatic — the boy's ignorance is total. The contrast is sharp: akh Yehonatan ve-David yade'u et ha-davar ('only Jonathan and David knew the matter'). The verb yada' ('to know') connects to the chapter's opening, where Jonathan insisted he would know if Saul intended evil (verse 2). Now knowledge has been confirmed, transmitted, and received — and a boy who carried the message remains completely in the dark.

40. Jonathan hands over his kelav ('his equipment, his weapons') — the bow and arrows that served as the signal apparatus. The verb lekh havi ha-'ir ('go, bring them to the city') dismisses the boy and creates the privacy needed for what comes next. By surrendering his weapons, Jonathan is also symbolically disarming himself — he enters the farewell unarmed, vulnerable, stripped of the tools of the signal plan that has now served its purpose.

41. The phrase ad David higdil is ambiguous — it could mean 'until David wept more' or 'until David could take no more.' Most interpreters read it as David's grief exceeding Jonathan's in intensity. The verb gadal ('to be great, to grow') in the Hiphil means 'to make great, to exceed.' David, the one being sent into exile, grieves more than Jonathan, the one returning to the palace. This asymmetry reflects their different futures: Jonathan goes back to a doomed dynasty; David goes forward into suffering that will eventually become kingship.

41. The combination of formal prostration followed by mutual kissing and weeping moves from protocol to raw emotion. The three bows acknowledge Jonathan's rank and sacrifice; the tears acknowledge the human cost of what is happening.

42. The covenant formula in this verse is the chapter's theological climax. It mirrors Genesis 31:49 (the Mizpah benediction between Jacob and Laban: 'the LORD watch between me and you') but exceeds it by including descendants. This is a dynastic covenant — not merely a pact between two friends but a permanent treaty between two houses, guaranteed by the divine name.

42. The final narrative detail — 'David got up and left, and Jonathan went into the city' — is devastating in its simplicity. No further speech, no lingering. The two men go in opposite directions. David will spend the next decade as a fugitive; Jonathan will die with his father on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:2). They will never see each other again. The covenant they sealed in this chapter will be fulfilled posthumously when David shows chesed to

Jonathan's son Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9).

21

Summary: *David, newly fugitive from Saul's court, arrives at the priestly city of Nob alone and desperate. He deceives the priest Ahimelech to obtain consecrated bread and Goliath's sword, is spotted by Saul's chief herdsman Doeg the Edomite, then flees south to the Philistine city of Gath — where he must feign madness to escape King Achish alive.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is a masterclass in desperation theology. David, the anointed king-in-waiting, is reduced to lying to a priest, eating bread reserved for God's table, and scratching at door frames while drool runs down his beard. The text makes no effort to sanitize him. Yet Jesus himself reaches back to this chapter in Matthew 12:3-4 and Mark 2:25-26, citing David's eating of the bread of the Presence as a precedent for human need overriding ceremonial regulation — making this one of the few Old Testament narratives that Jesus explicitly interprets. The showbread episode also sets a trap: Doeg the Edomite witnesses everything at Nob, and his silent presence in verse 8 is a ticking bomb that will detonate in chapter 22 with the massacre of an entire priestly city. The chapter's architecture moves David through three stages of descent — from priest's sanctuary to enemy armory to madman's disguise — each one stripping away another layer of dignity from the man God chose.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew versification of this chapter differs from the English. WLC verse 1 corresponds to the end of KJV 20:42 or stands as a separate transitional verse; WLC verses 2-16 map to KJV 21:1-15. We follow the WLC versification as primary. The word lechem ha-panim ('bread of the Presence,' literally 'bread of the face') in verse 7 is theologically loaded — it is bread that exists 'before the face' of God, not merely decorative temple furniture. Rendering it as 'showbread' (following the KJV tradition) would obscure the relational theology embedded in the term: this bread symbolizes the perpetual covenant between God and Israel, set before God's presence. We render it as 'bread of the Presence' and explain the Hebrew construction in the notes. David's feigned madness before Achish (verses 14-16) uses the verb shinnah ('he changed, disguised'), the same root as the superscription of Psalm 34, which tradition links to this episode — though Psalm 34's heading names 'Abimelech' rather than Achish, a discrepancy scholars have long debated.*

Connections: *Jesus' citation of this episode in Matthew 12:3-4 and Mark 2:25-26 makes this chapter a hinge between Testaments — the principle that covenant mercy outweighs ceremonial restriction becomes a cornerstone of New Testament ethics. The bread of the Presence itself connects backward to Leviticus 24:5-9, where its weekly preparation is prescribed, and forward to the Last Supper tradition, where Jesus identifies bread with his own body. Goliath's sword reappearing here (verse 10) creates a narrative loop with 1 Samuel 17 — the weapon David refused to use is now the only weapon available to him in his flight from Israel's king. Doeg the Edomite, silently watching in verse 8, connects forward to the slaughter at Nob (22:18-19) and backward to the Edomite-Israelite tension that runs from Genesis 25 through Obadiah. David's madness performance before Achish connects to the Psalm 34 superscription and to the broader wisdom tradition's interest in the boundary between wisdom and folly — David survives by becoming what the wise despise.*

1David rose and left, and Jonathan went back into the city. 2David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech came out trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" 3David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and told me, 'No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on or what I have ordered you to do.' As for my men, I have directed them to meet me at a certain place." 4Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread — or whatever you can find." 5The priest answered David, "There is no ordinary bread on hand — only consecrated bread, if your men have kept themselves from women." 6David answered the priest, "Women have certainly been kept from us for the past three days. Whenever I set out, my men's bodies are consecrated — even on an ordinary mission. How much more so today, when the bread will be made holy by being carried in their packs?" 7So the priest gave him consecrated bread, because there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence — the loaves that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced with warm bread on the day they were taken away.

8Now a man from Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD — his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen. 9David said to Ahimelech, "Is there a spear or a sword here that you could give me? I did not bring my own sword or any of my weapons, because the king's mission was urgent." 10The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah — it is here, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want to take it, take it, because there is no other weapon here besides it." David said, "There is nothing like it. Give it to me." 11David set out and fled that day from Saul, and he went to Achish, king of Gath. 12The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David, the king of the land? Is this not the one they sang about in their dances: 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten-thousands'?" 13David took these words to heart and became very afraid of Achish, king of Gath. 14He disguised his behavior in their presence and acted like a madman while in their custody — scratching on the doors of the gate and letting his saliva run down into his beard. 15Achish said to his servants, "Look — you can see the man is out of his mind. Why did you bring him to me? 16Am I so short of madmen that you had to bring this one to rave in front of me? Should this man be allowed into my house?"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This transitional verse completes the farewell scene of chapter 20. The WLC places it as 21:1, while English Bibles typically attach it to 20:42 or number it differently. The stark brevity — two clauses, two men moving in opposite directions — captures the finality of the parting. The verb vayyaqom vayyeilakh ('he rose and went') is the standard departure formula, but its placement between the weeping embrace of 20:41 and David's arrival at Nob makes the silence between these movements deafening. Jonathan returns to the city (ha-ir, likely Gibeah, Saul's capital); David walks into the wilderness. Their paths will rarely cross again.

2. The verb vayyecherad ('he trembled') signals genuine fear, not mere surprise. The root charad describes the shaking response to something alarming — a priest trembling at the sight of David tells the reader something is already wrong. Nob was a priestly settlement near Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:32), apparently where the tabernacle and its priests had relocated after the destruction of Shiloh. Ahimelech's two questions — 'why are you alone?' and 'why is no one with you?' — are not redundant; the first asks why he lacks his military retinue, the second why he has no companion at all. A man of David's rank traveling utterly alone was deeply irregular and immediately suspicious.

3. David's lie is carefully constructed — he claims royal authority (ha-melekh tsivvani, 'the king commanded me') to explain both his secrecy and his lack of escort. The phrase peloni almoni ('a certain place,' literally 'such-and-such, so-and-so') is a Hebrew idiom for an unnamed or deliberately concealed location. It appears only here and in Ruth 4:1 and 2 Kings 6:8, always when the specific identity is being suppressed. David uses it to create the impression of a covert royal mission. The irony is bitter: the king has indeed sent David away, but to die, not on a mission. David's deception of the priest will have catastrophic consequences — Ahimelech's innocent cooperation will become the pretext for the massacre of Nob in chapter 22.

4. The phrase tachat yadkha ('under your hand') is an idiom meaning 'in your possession, available to you.' David asks specifically for five loaves (chamisha lechem), a modest amount suggesting he either has a small group to feed or is simply desperate and asking for what seems reasonable. The phrase o ha-nimtsa ('or whatever is found') reveals the urgency — David will take anything. He is not negotiating; he is begging. The number five may echo the five smooth stones David selected against Goliath (17:40), though the text does not make this connection explicit.

5. Ahimelech draws a sharp distinction between lechem chol ('ordinary bread,' literally 'profane bread') and lechem qodesh ('holy bread, consecrated bread'). The word chol is the opposite of qodesh — it describes what belongs to the common, everyday realm rather than the sacred. The priest's condition — im nishmeru ha-ne'arim akh me-ishah ('if the young men have kept themselves from women') — reflects the purity requirement of Leviticus 15:18, where sexual contact renders a person ritually unclean until evening. The priest is not making a moral judgment but a cultic one: contact with the holy requires ritual purity. This exchange becomes theologically significant when Jesus cites it to argue that human need creates a legitimate exception to ceremonial law (Matthew 12:3-4).

6. This verse is notoriously difficult to translate with certainty. The phrase derekh chol ('an ordinary way/mission') contrasts with the consecrated status David claims for his men. The argument seems to be: even on routine missions we observe purity disciplines, so a fortiori (kal va-chomer) we are pure enough for holy bread on this special mission. David may be lying about everything — his mission, his men, their purity status — but his ritual argument is technically sound, which is what makes the deception so effective.

6. The word kelei-ha-ne'arim ('the young men's vessels') likely serves as a euphemism for their bodies, as kelei functions elsewhere as a euphemism for male genitalia (1 Samuel 9:7, Isaiah 32:7 in some readings). David is assuring Ahimelech that his men are ritually clean in the specific sense the priest's question required.

7. The verb lasum ('to place, to set') describes the replacement of old bread with fresh loaves, confirming this took place on or near the Sabbath. The phrase lechem chom ('warm bread,' literally 'hot bread') suggests the replacement loaves were freshly baked, possibly that same morning. The entire transaction — holy bread given to a fugitive based on a lie — will be reinterpreted by Jesus not as David's sin but as God's provision, a reading that privileges mercy over ceremonial precision.

7. The construction ha-musarim millifnei YHWH ('removed from before the LORD') uses the Hophal participle of sur ('to turn aside, remove'), indicating the bread was formally taken away from the divine Presence. The preposition millifnei ('from before the face of') reinforces the spatial theology: this bread occupied the place directly before God and has now been handed to a hungry, desperate, lying fugitive.

8. This verse is a narrative time bomb. The phrase ne'etsar lifnei YHWH ('detained before the LORD') indicates Doeg was at the sanctuary under some form of ritual obligation — perhaps fulfilling a vow, undergoing purification, or observing a required period of worship. The irony is layered: Doeg is 'before the LORD' at the same moment David receives holy bread, and his presence will lead directly to the massacre of the priests who served before the LORD. The term abbir ha-ro'im ('chief of the herdsmen') uses abbir, which can mean 'mighty one, champion, chief' — the same word used for 'the Mighty One of Jacob' in Genesis 49:24. Applied to a herdsman, it likely means 'head herdsman' or 'foreman,' but the narrator may intend a subtle ironic elevation: this 'mighty one' among shepherds will prove to be a butcher of priests.

8. Doeg's identification as ha-adomi ('the Edomite') marks him as a foreigner in Saul's service. The Edomites, descendants of Esau (Genesis 36), had a fraught relationship with Israel. His foreign status may explain his willingness to do what Saul's Israelite servants refused to do in 22:17 — strike down the priests of the LORD.

9. David extends his deception — now claiming the king's mission was so urgent (nachuts, from the root chuts meaning 'to press, to hasten') that he left without weapons. The request for weapons from a priest would be unusual but not impossible, since sanctuaries sometimes housed war trophies and dedicated objects. The phrase gam-charbi ve-gam-kelai ('both my sword and my equipment') uses gam...gam ('both...and') to emphasize that he has absolutely nothing — no primary weapon, no backup, no gear at all. David the warrior-hero is completely unarmed. The stated reason — the king's urgency — adds another layer of bitter irony: the king indeed created this urgency, but by trying to pin David to the wall with a spear (18:11, 19:10), not by assigning him a mission.

10. The narrative creates a powerful loop: the sword David took from Goliath after defeating him with a sling and a stone (17:51) has been stored as a trophy at the sanctuary, wrapped in a simlah ('garment, cloth') behind the ephod — the priestly vestment used for inquiring of God. The weapon of Israel's greatest military victory rests behind the instrument of divine consultation. Now the hero who won that sword must reclaim it as a fugitive. David's response — ein kamoha ('there is none like it') — can be read as both practical assessment and emotional recognition. This is the sword that made him famous, the sword that proved God's power over Philistine might. Taking it now, while running from the king whose throne he saved, carries enormous ironic weight.

10. The verb lutah ('wrapped') from the root lut ('to wrap, to cover') indicates the sword was carefully preserved, not carelessly stored. The location acharei ha-efod ('behind the ephod') places it in the sacred precinct of the sanctuary, likely in a storage area near the priestly garments and instruments of worship.

11. The verb vayyivrach ('he fled') is blunt — the narrator does not soften David's flight. The man who once ran toward Goliath now runs from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath — Goliath's own hometown (17:4). David flees from Israel's king to the capital of Israel's enemy, carrying the sword of the champion he killed there. The situational irony could not be thicker. Achish (akhish) is likely the Philistine royal title or name attested in Egyptian sources as 'Ikausu' or similar. The Septuagint calls him 'Anchus.' Gath was one of the five Philistine city-states and the one most directly connected to the Goliath narrative.

12. The Philistine courtiers call David melekh ha-arets ('king of the land') — a title he does not yet hold. Either they are using the title loosely (as the champion or de facto leader) or their intelligence about Israel's internal politics is better than David expected. The song they quote — hikkah Sha'ul ba-alafav ve-David be-rivevotav ('Saul has struck his thousands and David his ten-thousands') — is the same victory chant from 18:7 that first provoked Saul's jealousy. The song that destroyed David's relationship with Saul now threatens to destroy David himself among the Philistines. What was a celebration in Israel is an intelligence report in Gath. The verb ya'anu ('they sang responsively,' from anah, 'to answer, to respond') indicates antiphonal singing — two groups calling and responding — which means the Philistines know not just the words but the performance style of the Israelite celebration.

13. The phrase vayyasem et ha-devarim ha-elleh bilvavo ('he placed these words in his heart') means David internalized the danger — he understood what the courtiers' recognition meant. The verb vayyira me'od ('he was very afraid') is the same construction used for Israel's terror before Goliath (17:24). The champion who was not afraid of the giant is now terrified of the giant's king. The phrase mippnei akhish ('from the face/presence of Achish') mirrors mippnei Sha'ul ('from Saul') in verse 11 — David is caught between two kings who both threaten his life. The Hebrew Bible does not romanticize David's fugitive period; he is genuinely, deeply afraid.

14. The verb vayshanno ('he changed, disguised') from the root shanah ('to change, to be different') is the same root found in the superscription of Psalm 34 (le-David be-shannoto et ta'mo lifnei avimelekh), which tradition connects to this episode — though the psalm names 'Abimelech' rather than Achish, a discrepancy that may reflect an alternate tradition or a Philistine throne-title. The word ta'mo ('his judgment, his sense, his behavior') from ta'am ('taste, discernment, good sense') indicates David altered not his appearance but his mental comportment — he made himself appear to have lost his capacity for rational behavior.

14. The physical details are deliberately degrading: vaytav al daltot ha-sha'ar ('he scratched/made marks on the gate doors') and vayyored riro el zeqano ('he let his drool run down onto his beard'). The verb tav means to make marks or scratch, and rir is saliva or drool. The future king of Israel, carrying the sword of Goliath, is scratching at doors and drooling. The narrator spares David no dignity. This is survival by humiliation.

15. The participle mishtage'a ('acting insane, behaving as a madman') from the root shaga ('to be mad, to go insane') is in the Hithpael form, which can indicate either genuine madness or pretended madness — the form itself is ambiguous, which serves David's purpose perfectly. Achish's irritation is directed at his servants, not at David — the deception has worked. The question lammah tavi'u oto elai ('why did you bring him to me?') implies

David was escorted or reported to the king rather than arriving of his own accord. Achish sees not a dangerous enemy warrior but a pathetic lunatic — exactly the perception David constructed.

16. Achish's retort is laced with sarcasm: chasar meshugga'im ani ('am I lacking madmen?') uses chasar ('to lack, to be short of') with the plural meshugga'im ('madmen, insane people'). The implication is that he already has enough unstable people in his court without adding another. The verb lehishtage'a ('to act insane') repeats the Hithpael form from verse 15, and the preposition alay ('upon me, in my presence') suggests David's performance was directed at or in front of Achish personally. The final rhetorical question — hazeh yavo el beiti ('shall this one come into my house?') — is David's salvation. 'My house' could mean either Achish's palace or his household. The king dismisses David as beneath concern, which is precisely the verdict David was performing toward. The anointed king of Israel escapes the Philistine court by being deemed too worthless to detain.

22

Summary: *David flees from Gath to the cave of Adullam, where his family and a ragged company of debtors, outcasts, and desperate men gather around him. He secures his parents' safety with the king of Moab, then returns to Judah on the prophet Gad's instruction. Meanwhile, Saul accuses his own Benjaminite officials of conspiring with David, and Doeg the Edomite reports that the priest Ahimelech aided David at Nob. Saul summons the entire priestly house and orders their execution. When his own guards refuse to strike the LORD's priests, Doeg carries out the slaughter — killing eighty-five priests and annihilating the town of Nob with the same total warfare Saul refused to apply to Amalek. Only Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, escapes and flees to David, who accepts responsibility for the massacre and pledges to protect him.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most devastating ironies in all of Scripture. In chapter 15, Saul was stripped of the kingship because he refused to carry out cherem — the complete destruction of Amalek. Here, Saul inflicts that same total destruction on an Israelite priestly city: men, women, children, infants, and livestock (v. 19). The Hebrew phrasing in verse 19 — me-ish ve-ad ishah, me-olel ve-ad yoneq, ve-shor va-chamor va-seh — deliberately echoes the language of the Amalek ban in 15:3. Saul would not do to Israel's enemy what he now does to Israel's priests. The man who spared Agag butchers the servants of God. The chapter also marks the birth of David's band — the four hundred misfits who will become his core fighting force and eventually form the backbone of his kingdom. That God builds a monarchy from debtors and fugitives is consistent with the entire biblical pattern: power forged from the discarded.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 2 describes David's followers with three Hebrew terms — kol ish matsoq, kol ish asher lo noshe, kol ish mar nefesh ('every man in distress, every man in debt, every man bitter of soul'). These are not flattering descriptions. The future king's first subjects are society's rejects. We render these categories plainly rather than softening them, because the text intends the contrast between this ragged assembly and the royal court Saul commands. In verse 17, Saul orders his runners (ratsim, the royal guard) to kill the priests, and they refuse — ki lo avu ('they were not willing'). The same verb of refusal (avah) was used when Saul's soldiers would not destroy the best livestock of Amalek (15:9). The verb links both acts of disobedience, but with opposite moral valences: the soldiers' refusal here is righteous, while their earlier refusal was sinful. David's confession in verse 22 — anokhi sabboti be-khol nefesh bet avikha ('I am the one who caused the death of every person in your father's house') — raises the question of moral responsibility. David did not wield the sword, but he recognizes that his deception at Nob set the chain of events in motion. We translate sabboti as 'I am responsible for' rather than the weaker 'I have occasioned' to preserve the weight of David's self-accusation.*

Connections: *The destruction of the priestly city of Nob fulfills the curse pronounced on the house of Eli (2:27-36, 3:11-14). The priestly line that was told 'all the increase of your house shall die by the sword' now perishes at Doeg's blade. Abiathar's survival as the lone priest carrying the ephod connects forward to David's repeated use of priestly inquiry (23:6-12, 30:7-8) and ultimately to Solomon's removal of Abiathar from the priesthood (1 Kings 2:26-27), which the narrator calls the final fulfillment of the word against Eli's house. David's cave at Adullam becomes the subject of Psalm 142 (titled 'when he was in the cave') and possibly Psalm 57 ('when he fled from Saul, in the cave'). His placement of his parents in Moab recalls Ruth's Moabite ancestry — David's great-grandmother was Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 4:17), so he is sending his family to their ancestral kin. The four hundred men who gather to David here will grow to six hundred (23:13, 27:2) and become the 'mighty men' catalogued in 2 Samuel 23.*

1David left that place and took refuge in the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his entire father's household heard, they
went down to him there. 2Every man in distress, every man crushed by debt, and every man bitter in spirit gathered around
him. He became their commander, and about four hundred men were with him. 3From there David went to Mizpeh in Moab
and said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do with
me." 4He brought them before the king of Moab, and they stayed with him the entire time David was in the stronghold. 5The
prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go — enter the land of Judah." So David left and came to the
forest of Hereth. 6Saul heard that David and his men had been located. Saul was sitting in Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on
the height, his spear in his hand, with all his officials standing around him. 7Saul said to his officials standing around him,
"Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of
thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8Is that why you have all conspired against me? Not one of you told me when my
own son made a pact with the son of Jesse. Not one of you is troubled on my behalf or tells me that my son has set my
servant against me to ambush me, as he does today." 9Doeg the Edomite, who was stationed among Saul's officials, spoke
up: "I saw the son of Jesse come to Nob, to Ahimelech son of Ahitub. 10He inquired of the LORD for him, gave him
provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." 11The king summoned Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub,
along with his entire father's house — the priests who were at Nob. They all came before the king. 12Saul said, "Listen, son of
Ahitub." He answered, "Here I am, my lord." 13Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me — you and the son of
Jesse? You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God on his behalf, so that he could rise against me and lie in
ambush, as he does today." 14Ahimelech answered the king: "And who among all your servants is as trusted as David — the
king's own son-in-law, who serves at your command and is honored in your household? 15Was that day the first time I
inquired of God for him? Absolutely not! Let the king not bring any charge against his servant or anyone in my father's
house, because your servant knew nothing at all about any of this — nothing small or great." 16The king said, "You will
certainly die, Ahimelech — you and your father's entire house." 17The king ordered the guards stationed around him, "Turn
and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too sided with David. They knew he was fleeing and did not tell me." But the
king's servants refused to raise their hand against the priests of the LORD. 18The king said to Doeg, "You — turn and strike
down the priests." Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down himself. He killed eighty-five men that day, each one a
wearer of the linen ephod. 19He also struck down Nob, the city of the priests, with the sword — men and women, children
and nursing infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep — all by the sword. 20But one son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub escaped. His
name was Abiathar, and he fled to David. 21Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 22David said to
Abiathar, "I knew that day — when Doeg the Edomite was there — that he would certainly report to Saul. I am responsible
for the death of every person in your father's house. 23Stay with me. Do not be afraid, because whoever seeks my life seeks
yours as well. You are under my protection."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb vayimmalet ('he escaped, he slipped away') carries the sense of slipping out of danger, narrowly evading capture. It implies urgency and relief. The cave of Adullam (me'arat Adullam) sits in the Shephelah, the low hill country between the coastal plain and the Judean highlands — strategically positioned for both defense and flight. The name Adullam may derive from a root meaning 'justice' or 'retreat.'

1. That David's entire father's house comes to him indicates that Saul's hostility now threatens the whole family. Jesse's household is no longer safe in Bethlehem. The descent of David's family to a cave marks the inversion of their status: a family that was hosting the king's son-in-law is now hiding as fugitives.

2. The three categories describe Israel's underclass. The word matsoq ('distress, pressure') suggests being squeezed or confined — men trapped by circumstances. The phrase asher lo noshe ('who had a creditor') identifies men in financial ruin, possibly facing debt slavery under Israelite law (Exodus 21:2-7, Deuteronomy 15:1-2). The phrase mar nefesh ('bitter of soul') describes men whose inner life has soured — men broken by grief, injustice, or despair. The same phrase described Hannah in 1:10.

2. That David becomes sar ('commander, chief') over this group transforms a collection of fugitives into a military unit. The number four hundred is significant — it represents a substantial fighting force in Iron Age Israel, roughly the size of a tribal militia. David is building an alternative power base outside Saul's control, composed of men who have nothing left to lose.

3. Mizpeh (Mitspeh) means 'watchtower' or 'lookout point' — a common place name in the ancient Near East. David's decision to shelter his parents in Moab reflects the family's Moabite connection through Ruth (Ruth 4:13-17). Jesse's grandmother was a Moabite woman, making this not a plea to strangers but an appeal to extended kin.

3. The phrase ad asher eda mah ya'aseh li Elohim ('until I know what God will do with/for me') uses the general term Elohim rather than the covenant name YHWH. David acknowledges divine sovereignty over his situation while expressing genuine uncertainty about the outcome. The verb eda ('I will know') implies that David is waiting for divine clarity, not acting on his own plan.

4. The verb vayyanichem ('he led them, he settled them') comes from nachah ('to lead, to guide'), suggesting David personally escorted his parents to safety. The phrase kol yemei heyot David ba-metsudah ('all the days of David's being in the stronghold') introduces the key term metsudah.

4. The metsudah ('stronghold, fortress') could refer to the cave of Adullam itself, to a separate fortified position in the Judean wilderness, or even to Masada. The term implies a naturally defensible location — a rocky height or walled refuge. David's time in the metsudah represents his period of fugitive leadership before he establishes a more permanent base.

5. Gad the prophet appears here without introduction, suggesting he was already attached to David's company. He will later serve as David's seer during his reign (2 Samuel 24:11). His instruction — lo teshev ba-metsudah ('do not sit/stay in the stronghold') — uses the verb yashav, which can mean 'sit, dwell, remain.' The command is to stop hiding and reenter covenant territory.

5. The directive lekh u-vata lekha erets Yehudah ('go and come for yourself into the land of Judah') sends David back into the tribal territory where he will eventually be crowned king (2 Samuel 2:4). The prophet is pushing David out of defensive isolation and into the arena where God's promises will unfold. The forest of Hereth (ya'ar Charet) is otherwise unknown; the name may derive from charut ('engraved') or charah ('to burn'). It was likely dense woodland in the Judean hills providing natural cover.

6. The scene shifts abruptly from David's fugitive camp to Saul's court. The image is carefully composed: Saul sits under the eshel (tamarisk tree) — the same kind of tree under which he will be buried (31:13). His spear (chanit) is in his hand, the weapon he has already hurled at David twice (18:11, 19:10). The spear has become Saul's signature prop, symbolizing his volatile authority.

6. The word ba-ramah ('on the height') may refer to the town of Ramah or simply to an elevated spot — a high place where the king holds court. The phrase kol avadav nitsavim alav ('all his servants standing over/around him') describes a formal court scene. The verb nitsavim ('standing, stationed') implies soldiers or officials at attention. Saul is surrounded by loyalty, yet consumed by suspicion.

7. Saul appeals to tribal loyalty by addressing his court as benei Yemini ('sons of Benjamin, Benjaminites'). This reveals that his inner circle is drawn primarily from his own tribe — and that he fears losing them to David. The phrase ben Yishai ('son of Jesse') is deliberately dismissive: Saul refuses to use David's name, reducing him to his father's son, a nobody from Bethlehem.

7. The gifts Saul describes — sadot u-kheramim ('fields and vineyards') and military rank — are the standard rewards a king bestows on loyal followers. Saul is essentially asking: 'What can David offer you that I cannot?' The question betrays both his political calculation and his paranoid insecurity. He assumes loyalty is transactional and fears being outbid.

8. The phrase galah et ozni ('uncover my ear') is an idiom meaning 'to inform, to reveal a secret to.' It pictures lifting the hair or headdress away from someone's ear to whisper confidential information. Saul uses it twice, emphasizing his sense of isolation. The verb choleh ('is sick, is pained') here means 'is troubled, grieves' — Saul accuses his officials of emotional indifference to his suffering.

8. Saul's accusation mixes legitimate intelligence (Jonathan and David did make a covenant, 18:3, 20:16-17) with paranoid distortion. The word le-orev ('to ambush, to lie in wait') mischaracterizes David's defensive flight as offensive aggression. Saul is rewriting reality to match his fear. The phrase ka-yom ha-zeh ('as on this day, as it is today') expresses Saul's sense that the conspiracy is ongoing and current.

9. Doeg (Do'eg) was introduced in 21:8 as 'detained before the LORD' at Nob — he was present when David deceived Ahimelech. The designation ha-Adomi ('the Edomite') marks him as a foreigner in Saul's service. That an Edomite serves in Saul's court is unremarkable for the period, but the narrator's consistent use of the ethnic label keeps his outsider status visible. His willingness to strike priests that Israelite soldiers refuse to touch (v. 18) will be connected to his non-Israelite identity.

9. Doeg adopts Saul's dismissive language — ben Yishai ('son of Jesse') rather than David's name — aligning himself with the king's perspective. His report is factually accurate but presented in a way designed to implicate Ahimelech in conspiracy.

10. Doeg's report lists three acts of priestly aid: (1) sha'al lo ba-YHWH ('he inquired of the LORD for him') — this refers to consulting the divine oracle, likely through the ephod and its Urim and Thummim; (2) tseidah natan lo ('he gave him provisions') — the consecrated bread from chapter 21; (3) cherev Golyat natan lo ('he gave him Goliath's sword'). Each act, presented neutrally by the narrator in chapter 21, now becomes evidence of conspiracy in Doeg's telling.

10. It is debated whether Ahimelech actually inquired of the LORD for David in chapter 21, where no such inquiry is explicitly mentioned. Either Doeg is embellishing, or the narrator omitted the detail earlier. Ahimelech will deny this charge in verse 15, claiming that inquiring on David's behalf was routine — not evidence of a conspiracy.

11. Saul summons not just Ahimelech but kol beit aviv ha-kohanim asher be-Nov ('all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob'). This is the entire priestly establishment at Nob — the community that had assumed the sanctuary role after Shiloh's destruction. That they all come voluntarily suggests they have no awareness of danger; they respond to a royal summons as loyal subjects.

11. The phrase vayavo'u khullam el ha-melekh ('they all came to the king') is heavy with dramatic irony. The priests come in obedience to royal authority, not knowing they are walking into a death sentence. The narrator's simple statement underscores the horror that follows.

12. Saul again uses a patronymic rather than the man's name — ben Achituv ('son of Ahitub') instead of Ahimelech. This may be dismissive or may reflect court formality, but given Saul's pattern of calling David 'son of Jesse,' it reads as deliberate depersonalization. You strip a man of his name before you strip him of his life.

12. Ahimelech's response — hinneni adoni ('Here I am, my lord') — uses the same word (hinneni) that Abraham used before God (Genesis 22:1) and that Samuel used as a child (3:4). It is a declaration of availability, of readiness to serve. The irony is devastating: the priest presents himself in obedience to a king who intends to destroy him.

13. Saul's accusation reframes every act of priestly hospitality as conspiracy (qesher). The verb qasharthem ('you conspired') is the same root used for political rebellion throughout Kings and Chronicles. By using it, Saul elevates Ahimelech's assistance from naivete to treason. The three charges — bread, sword, and divine inquiry — exactly mirror Doeg's report in verse 10 but in a different order, placing the mundane provisions first and building to the spiritual charge.

13. The phrase la-qum elai le-orev ('to rise against me to ambush') again distorts David's flight into offensive aggression. Saul interprets every event through the lens of conspiracy. The structural irony is that Ahimelech was deceived by David (21:2) — he assisted David precisely because he believed David was on royal business.

14. Ahimelech's defense is both courageous and logical. He lists David's credentials: ne'eman ('faithful, trusted') — the highest commendation for a royal servant; chatan ha-melekh ('the king's son-in-law') — bound to the crown by marriage; sar el mishma'tekha ('turns to your obedience, serves at your command') — obedient to royal orders; nikhbad be-veitekha ('honored in your house') — holding an esteemed position at court.

14. Every point Ahimelech makes is factually true from his perspective. He had no reason to suspect David was a fugitive. His defense implicitly challenges Saul: if David held all these positions of trust, why would a priest suspect him of treason? Ahimelech is defending not only himself but the reasonableness of trusting the king's own arrangements.

15. Ahimelech's defense of the divine inquiry is revealing: ha-yom hachilloti lish'ol lo ve-Elohim ('Was today the beginning of my inquiring of God for him?'). He claims this was routine — he had consulted God on David's behalf before, presumably as an authorized royal officer. The word chalilah ('far be it, God forbid') is a strong oath of denial.

15. The phrase davar qaton o gadol ('a small thing or a great thing') is a merism meaning 'absolutely nothing at all.' Ahimelech's plea of total innocence is emphatic: he knew nothing about any rift between Saul and David. His defense is convincing, but it will not save him. Saul has already made his decision — the trial is a performance, not a proceeding.

16. The sentence mot tamut ('dying you will die') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute construction — the same formula God used in Eden: 'you shall surely die' (Genesis 2:17). Saul speaks with the finality of a divine decree, but he is pronouncing it against God's own priests. The sentence extends beyond Ahimelech to kol beit avikha ('all your father's house') — collective punishment of an entire priestly clan for the alleged actions of one man.

16. The brevity of the sentence is itself terrifying. Ahimelech has just offered a careful, logical defense. Saul responds with six Hebrew words that condemn an entire family to death. No deliberation, no counter-argument, no witnesses beyond Doeg. This is royal power exercised without restraint.

17. The ratsim ('runners') are the royal guard — elite soldiers who serve as the king's bodyguard and executioners. Saul orders them to kill kohanei YHWH ('priests of the LORD') — the text emphasizes the title twice in this verse. The narrator wants the reader to feel the full weight of what Saul is demanding: the execution of God's consecrated servants.

17. The guards' refusal — lo avu avdei ha-melekh lishloch et yadam lifgo'a be-khohanei YHWH ('the king's servants were not willing to extend their hand to strike the priests of the LORD') — is an act of conscience that defies royal command. The verb avah ('to be willing, to consent') indicates a moral choice, not inability. These soldiers, who would kill in battle without hesitation, recognize a boundary that their king does not. The irony is sharp: Saul's own men show more reverence for God's servants than Saul does.

18. When Israelite soldiers refuse, Saul turns to the Edomite. The verb paga ('to strike, to encounter, to fall upon') carries lethal force here — it is the same verb used for judicial execution. Doeg does not hesitate. The narrator specifies: vayipga hu ('he himself struck') — the pronoun hu is emphatic, underscoring that Doeg personally carried out the killing.

18. The eighty-five victims are identified as nosei efod bad ('wearers of the linen ephod'). The efod bad was the distinctive garment of active priestly service — a linen vestment worn during sanctuary duties. By specifying this detail, the narrator ensures the reader understands that these were not random citizens but consecrated ministers in full priestly status. The slaughter of eighty-five serving priests in a single day is an atrocity without parallel in the biblical record.

19. The formula me-ish ve-ad ishah, me-olel ve-ad yoneq, ve-shor va-chamor va-seh ('from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, and ox and donkey and sheep') is the language of total annihilation — cherem warfare. This exact catalogue echoes the command given to Saul regarding Amalek in 15:3. The devastating irony is the chapter's central theological claim: Saul, who was rejected as king because he refused to carry out the ban against Israel's enemies, now inflicts that same ban on an Israelite city of priests.

19. The phrase le-fi cherev ('by the mouth of the sword') appears twice in the verse, bracketing the list of victims. The sword's 'mouth' is a Hebrew metaphor — the blade devours its victims. Nob, which had become the priestly center after Shiloh's destruction, is itself now destroyed. The cycle of sanctuary devastation continues: Shiloh fell to the Philistines, and Nob falls to Israel's own king.

20. The verb vayimmalet ('he escaped') is the same word used for David's escape to Adullam in verse 1 — the chapter is bookended by narrow escapes. Abiathar (Evyatar) means 'my father is great' or 'the father excels,' a name that now carries painful irony: his father has just been killed.

20. Abiathar's escape preserves a thread of the priestly line and, critically, he will bring the ephod with him (23:6), giving David access to divine oracular guidance that Saul has just destroyed for himself. By massacring the priests, Saul has cut himself off from the very means of consulting God, while David now gains that access through the sole survivor. Saul's violence against the priesthood becomes the mechanism of his own spiritual isolation.

21. The verb vayyagged ('he told, he reported') indicates a formal disclosure of terrible news. Abiathar's report is compressed to its essence: harag Sha'ul et kohanei YHWH ('Saul killed the priests of the LORD'). The narrator again uses the full title kohanei YHWH rather than simply 'the priests,' keeping the theological horror of the act in view. Saul has killed not merely men, but men who belonged to God.

22. David's confession — anokhi sabboti be-khol nefesh beit avikha ('I am the one who turned/caused regarding every life of your father's house') — is remarkable for its moral clarity. The verb sabboti (from savav, 'to turn, to cause to turn') here means 'I set in motion, I am responsible for.' David does not blame Saul, Doeg, or circumstances. He accepts that his deception at Nob (21:1-9) created the chain of events that led to the massacre.

22. The phrase ki haged yaggid le-Sha'ul ('that telling he would tell Saul') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute — David had been certain of Doeg's betrayal but acted anyway. This intensifies his guilt: he saw the danger, proceeded regardless, and now eighty-five men and an entire city are dead. David's willingness to own this distinguishes him sharply from Saul, who consistently deflects blame (13:11-12, 15:15, 15:21).

23. David's final words to Abiathar contain a promise that binds their fates together: asher yevaqesh et nafshi yevaqesh et nafshekha ('whoever seeks my life seeks your life'). The verb biqesh ('to seek') is the same word used throughout the Saul-David conflict for Saul's pursuit of David's life. David recognizes that the priest and the fugitive king are now joined by a common enemy.

23. The closing phrase ki mishmeret attah immadi ('for you are a guarded one with me') uses mishmeret, a term from the sanctuary vocabulary meaning 'guard duty, protective charge, sacred trust.' David is not merely offering Abiathar a hiding place — he is placing the priest under his solemn charge, using language that evokes the Levitical guard of the tabernacle. The hunter becomes the guardian. The chapter ends with the last priest of Nob under the protection of the man whose deception destroyed Nob — a covenant of shared guilt and shared survival.

23

Summary: *David receives word that the Philistines are raiding the threshing floors of Keilah and inquires of the LORD twice before going to rescue the town. After the victory, Saul learns David is in Keilah and mobilizes for siege. David inquires of the LORD a third time through Abiathar's ephod and learns that the citizens of Keilah will surrender him to Saul. David and his six hundred men flee into the wilderness of Ziph. There Jonathan comes to David one final time and strengthens his hand in God, and the two renew their covenant. The Ziphites betray David's location to Saul. Saul closes in on David at the Rock of Division in the wilderness of Maon, but a Philistine raid forces Saul to break off pursuit at the last possible moment. David escapes to the strongholds of En-gedi.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is built on two opposing verbs of seeking: sha'al (to inquire, to ask of God) and biqesh (to seek, to hunt). David sha'al-s the LORD three times (verses 2, 4, and the sequence at verses 10-12), each time receiving clear divine guidance. Saul biqesh-s David throughout the chapter (verses 14, 15, 25) but never once inquires of the LORD. The contrast is devastating: the man God rejected consults no one but his own paranoia, while the fugitive anointed one submits every decision to divine inquiry. The chapter also contains the last meeting between David and Jonathan, compressed into two verses (16-18) that carry enormous emotional weight. Jonathan's act of 'strengthening David's hand in God' is a priestly act performed by a prince — he ministers to David's faith at the cost of his own future, openly acknowledging that David will be king and that he himself will be second. They will never meet again. The chapter's climactic scene at the Rock of Division (sela ha-machlekot) is a masterpiece of narrative suspense: Saul and David are on opposite sides of the same mountain, Saul closing in, when a messenger arrives with news of a Philistine attack. Providence intervenes at the seam between capture and escape.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 6 presents a textual difficulty: it says that when Abiathar fled to David at Keilah, 'an ephod came down in his hand.' This note appears to be an editorial insertion clarifying how David had access to priestly inquiry — Abiathar brought the ephod from Nob. But the narrative timeline is complicated: Abiathar's flight was narrated in 22:20-23, apparently before the Keilah episode. Some scholars argue*

that 23:6 is a displaced note or that the events overlap chronologically. We render the verse as it stands, treating it as the narrator's parenthetical explanation. The Ziphites' betrayal (verses 19-20) raises the question of why Judahites would betray David to Saul. The answer likely involves Saul's threat to their safety and the political reality that harboring a fugitive endangered the entire community. David's escape in verse 28 is narrated with almost frustrating brevity — the theological claim is clear (God delivered him) but the mechanics are left to the reader's imagination.

Connections: *David's repeated inquiries of the LORD through the ephod connect backward to the legitimate priesthood destroyed at Nob (chapter 22) and forward to David's consistent pattern of seeking God before acting (2 Samuel 2:1, 5:19, 5:23). Saul's failure to inquire connects to his final desperate consultation of the medium at Endor (chapter 28), where he seeks guidance from the dead because the LORD will not answer him. Jonathan's words in verse 17 — 'you will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you' — recall the original anointing of David in chapter 16 and anticipate the covenant theology of the Davidic line (2 Samuel 7). The Rock of Division prefigures the psalm tradition of God as rock and refuge (Psalm 18, which is attributed to David's deliverance from Saul). The Ziphites' betrayal is remembered in the superscription of Psalm 54: 'When the Ziphites went and told Saul, David is hiding among us.'*

1They reported to David, "The Philistines are attacking Keilah and plundering the threshing floors." 2David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Should I go and strike these Philistines?" The LORD said to David, "Go. Strike the Philistines and rescue Keilah." 3But David's men said to him, "We are already afraid here in Judah. How much more if we go to Keilah against the battle lines of the Philistines!" 4So David inquired of the LORD a second time. The LORD answered him and said, "Get up. Go down to Keilah, because I am giving the Philistines into your hand." 5David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines, drove off their livestock, and struck them with a devastating blow. David rescued the inhabitants of Keilah. 6Now when Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, an ephod had come down in his hand. 7When Saul was told that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has handed him over to me, because he has trapped himself by entering a town with double gates and a bar." 8Saul summoned all the troops to war, to march down to Keilah and besiege David and his men. 9David learned that Saul was forging evil against him in secret. He said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard with certainty that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account." 11"Will the citizens of Keilah hand me over to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, please tell your servant." The LORD said, "He will come down." 12David said, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" The LORD said, "They will surrender you." 13David and his men — about six hundred — got up, left Keilah, and moved from place to place wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he abandoned the expedition. 14David settled in the wilderness, in the strongholds, and he stayed in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. Saul hunted for him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. 15David saw that Saul had marched out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph, at Horesh. 16Jonathan son of Saul set out and went to David at Horesh, and he strengthened his hand in God. 17He said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not reach you. You will reign as king over Israel, and I will be second to you — and even Saul my father knows this." 18The two of them cut a covenant before the LORD. David stayed at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. 19Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is David not hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, south of the wasteland?" 20So now, whenever your soul desires to come down, O king, come down — and it will be our task to surrender him into the king's hand. 21Saul said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have shown compassion to me." 22"Go now, make further preparations. Learn and observe his exact location — where his feet tread, and who has seen him there. For I have been told that he is extremely cunning." 23"Observe and learn every hiding place where he conceals himself, then return to me with certain information. I will go with you, and if he is anywhere in the land, I will search him out among all the clans of Judah." 24They set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah south of the wasteland. 25Saul and his men went to hunt for him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. Saul heard this and pursued David into the wilderness of Maon. 26Saul moved along one side of the mountain, and David and his men along the other side. David was racing to escape

from Saul, while Saul and his men were closing in around David and his men to capture them. 27Then a messenger came to Saul: "Hurry! Come quickly! The Philistines have raided the land!" 28Saul turned back from pursuing David and went to confront the Philistines. That is why they called that place the Rock of Division. 29David went up from there and settled in the strongholds of En-gedi.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb shosim ('plundering') describes the systematic stripping of grain at the most vulnerable moment — when it has been harvested and is being processed at the open-air threshing floors. This is economic warfare: seize the food supply at the point of maximum exposure. Keilah was a fortified town in the Judean lowlands (Shephelah), near Philistine territory. David, himself a fugitive with no settled base, receives intelligence about a town under attack — placing him in the position of deciding whether a man on the run can afford to fight someone else's war.

2. The verb sha'al ('inquired') is the same root as Saul's name (Sha'ul, 'asked for'). The irony pervades the chapter: David does what Saul's name implies but Saul himself never does. David asks God; Saul asks no one. The medium of inquiry is likely the Urim and Thummim associated with the priestly ephod, though the text does not specify the method until verse 6 clarifies that Abiathar brought the ephod.

2. God's response adds a dimension David did not ask about: vehoshata et-Qe'ilah ('and you will rescue Keilah'). David asked only whether he should go and fight; God answers with a mission that extends beyond military victory to the salvation of a community. This pattern — David acting as protector of vulnerable Israelites while Saul hunts him — is the chapter's central irony.

3. The men's objection follows a qal va-chomer ('light and heavy') argument — a logical escalation that would become a standard rabbinic reasoning form. If they are already afraid (yere'im) as fugitives hiding in Judah, how much more terrified will they be marching into an open confrontation with Philistine military formations (ma'arkhot, 'battle lines, arranged ranks')? The word ma'arkhot is the same term used for the Philistine battle arrays that Goliath challenged in chapter 17 — David's men may be remembering what Philistine formations look like.

3. The men's fear is entirely rational. They are a band of roughly four hundred fugitives (22:2), many of them debtors and malcontents, not a trained army. They are being hunted by their own king. And now David proposes to fight the Philistines — the dominant military power in the region. Their objection reveals the gap between David's faith-informed decision-making and the raw terror of those who must carry it out.

4. The verb vayyosef ('he added, he did again') indicates David's persistence in seeking God — a pastoral detail showing that divine inquiry is not a one-time formality but an ongoing dialogue, especially when circumstances generate doubt. The second divine response is tailored to the men's fear: the first answer told David to go; the second tells him God will personally deliver the enemy. The addition of ki ani noten ('because I myself am giving') addresses the fear directly — the outcome does not depend on David's military strength but on God's sovereign action.

5. The verb vayyinhag ('he drove off') specifically refers to driving livestock — David not only defeats the Philistines but captures their supply train. This detail transforms a defensive action into an offensive victory with material gain, feeding David's fugitive band. The closing statement vayyosha David et yoshvei Qe'ilah ('David rescued the inhabitants of Keilah') echoes the language of the judges (Judges 2:16, 3:9, 3:15). David is doing what the king should be doing — protecting Israelite towns from foreign enemies — while the king hunts the man doing his job.

6. The efod in priestly contexts refers to the linen garment worn by the high priest, which contained the breastplate (choshen) holding the Urim and Thummim — the sacred lots used to receive yes-or-no answers from God. This is the mechanism behind David's inquiries in this chapter. The text emphasizes that the ephod 'came down in his hand' (yarad beyado), a phrase that may indicate Abiathar was carrying it when he fled, or it may be a theological statement: the instrument of divine communication descended to the true anointed one.

7. The verb nikkar is debated. Some derive it from nakhar ('to treat as foreign, to alienate') — meaning God has estranged David, cast him out. Others derive it from makar ('to sell') with a textual corruption. We follow the reading that Saul claims God has delivered David into his power, treating nikkar as meaning 'handed over' in context. Saul's interpretation of events is consistently self-serving throughout 1 Samuel: every development confirms his paranoid narrative.

7. The phrase delatayim u-veriach ('double gates and a bar') refers to the standard fortification of a Judean town — heavy wooden doors reinforced with a crossbar. Saul sees the fortification as a trap for David. What he does not see is that David's presence in the town was an act of divine obedience, not strategic blundering.

8. The verb vayyeshamma ('he summoned, he called to hear') is from the Piel of shama, meaning to call together or muster. Saul mobilizes the entire military apparatus of Israel — not against the Philistines who were just raiding Keilah, but against the man who drove them off. The verb latsur ('to besiege') is a technical military term for surrounding a fortified position and cutting off supply lines. Saul is prepared to lay siege to an Israelite town to capture David — an act that would harm the very citizens David just rescued.

9. The verb charash in the Hiphil can mean 'to devise silently, to plot' — combining the ideas of secrecy and deliberate crafting. David's intelligence network has detected Saul's mobilization, and his first response is not tactical but theological: bring the ephod. The command hagishah ('bring near, present') is a priestly technical term — the same verb used for presenting offerings. David is requesting a formal priestly consultation, not an informal prayer.

10. The infinitive absolute construction shamoa shama ('hearing, he has heard' — rendered 'heard with certainty') conveys absolute confidence in the intelligence: David is not guessing. The verb mevaqesh ('is seeking') is the chapter's hunting verb — biqesh, to seek or pursue — here applied to

Saul's pursuit of David. The phrase leshachet la'ir ('to destroy the city') reveals the full horror of Saul's intention: he will destroy an entire Israelite town to catch one man. The word ba'avuri ('on my account, because of me') shows David's awareness that his presence endangers others — a moral burden that drives his inquiry and his eventual departure.

11. David asks two questions, and the ephod-based inquiry yields answers to one at a time. The verb yasgiruni ('will they hand me over, will they shut me in') is from sagar, meaning to close, deliver up, or surrender — the same verb used for handing over prisoners or betraying fugitives. The ba'alei Qe'ilah ('citizens of Keilah,' literally 'lords/masters of Keilah') are the leading men of the town. David is asking whether the very people he just saved will betray him. God answers the second question first: Saul will indeed come down. The first question — about betrayal — is reserved for verse 12.

12. The divine answer reveals a conditional future — what will happen if David remains. David's departure changes the outcome: Saul does not attack Keilah (verse 13). This raises a profound question about the nature of prophetic knowledge: God tells David what the citizens of Keilah would do under certain conditions, and David uses that knowledge to alter the conditions. The ephod inquiry here functions less like prophecy and more like divine counsel — God advising David based on knowledge of human hearts and intentions.

13. The phrase vayyithallekhu ba'asher yithallakhu ('they moved about wherever they could move about') describes aimless, survival-driven wandering — the Hithpael of halakh repeated to convey continuous, directionless motion. David has gone from commander of a rescue mission to a nomad with six hundred mouths to feed. The number shesh me'ot ('six hundred') has grown from the four hundred of 22:2, suggesting David's band is expanding even as his situation deteriorates.

13. The verb vayyechdal ('he abandoned, he ceased') shows Saul's siege plan collapsing the moment David leaves. Saul had no interest in Keilah itself — only in David. Without the target, the military operation has no purpose. The narrator's dry report of Saul's cancellation highlights the absurdity of his campaign: the king of Israel mobilized the entire army to besiege a town David had just saved, then went home when David left.

14. The theological summary — 'God did not give him into his hand' — uses the same verb (natan, 'to give') that Saul used in verse 7 and that God used in verse 4. In verse 4, God gives the Philistines into David's hand. In verse 7, Saul claims God has given David into his hand. In verse 14, the narrator settles the matter: God gave nothing to Saul. The verb natan becomes a marker of divine allegiance — God gives victory to David and withholds David from Saul.

15. The phrase levaqesh et-nafsho ('to seek his life/soul') intensifies the hunting language: Saul is not just looking for David's location but seeking his nefesh — his life, his very self. The word bachorshah is debated: it could mean 'in the forest/thicket' (from choresh, 'wooded area') or it could be a place name, Horesh. Given that the wilderness of Ziph is largely scrubland with limited tree cover, many scholars read this as a proper noun. We render it as the place name Horesh, following the Septuagint's treatment of it as a location rather than a generic description.

16. The phrase vaychazzeq et-yado be-Elohim resists easy translation because English has no single verb that captures the Hebrew chazaq in the Piel — it means to make strong, to grasp firmly, to reinforce from outside. Jonathan is not cheering David up; he is actively transferring courage by redirecting David's gaze toward God. The preposition be ('in') is locative: the strength is located in God, and Jonathan's act is to reconnect David to that source. This is the last act of the Jonathan-David relationship, and it is purely theological — not military, not political, but faith sustaining faith.

17. Jonathan's fourfold declaration is structured as a covenant oracle: reassurance, promise of protection, announcement of kingship, and personal pledge of loyalty. The phrase ehyeh-lekha le-mishneh ('I will be second to you') is poignant because it will never be fulfilled — Jonathan will die with his father at Mount Gilboa (31:2) before David takes the throne. Jonathan is offering a future he will not live to see.

17. The claim that Saul 'knows' (yodea) David will be king echoes Saul's own admission in 24:20: 'I know that you will certainly be king.' Jonathan's statement here either reflects private knowledge of his father's inner awareness or is a prophetic insight into Saul's psychology. Either way, it frames Saul's pursuit as rebellion against known truth — not ignorance but willful resistance.

18. The brevity of the closing — vayyeshev David bachorshah viYhonatan halakh le-veito ('David stayed at Horesh and Jonathan went to his house') — is one of the most understated farewells in scripture. The narrator does not describe an emotional parting, tears, or embraces. The two simply separate: one into wilderness, one into a doomed household. The lack of sentiment makes the scene more, not less, powerful. The reader knows what the characters do not yet know — that Jonathan will die at Gilboa and the promise of verse 17 will go unfulfilled.

19. The Ziphites are inhabitants of Ziph, a town in the tribal territory of Judah — David's own tribe. Their betrayal is an intra-tribal act, not an inter-tribal one. They travel to Gibeah, Saul's capital in Benjamin, to volunteer intelligence. The phrase mistatter immanu ('hiding among us') uses the Hithpael of satar ('to hide'), the reflexive form suggesting David is actively concealing himself in their territory. Their report is geographically precise: the strongholds at Horesh, the hill of Hachilah, south of the Yeshimon ('wasteland, desolation'). This level of detail suggests they are offering to guide Saul's forces directly to David — not merely reporting a rumor but providing tactical coordinates.

19. The Yeshimon ('wasteland') refers to the barren eastern slopes of the Judean hill country descending toward the Dead Sea — a landscape of extreme aridity and deep wadis. The hill of Hachilah will reappear in chapter 26 as the site of David's second opportunity to kill Saul.

20. The phrase lekhol-avvat nafshekha ('according to all the desire of your soul') is obsequious flattery — the Ziphites frame the operation around Saul's personal desire (avvah, 'craving, longing'), treating his obsession as a legitimate royal prerogative. The verb hasgiro ('to hand him over, to surrender him') is the same root (sagar) that appeared in David's inquiry at verses 11-12 — the very betrayal David feared from Keilah is now being offered by the Ziphites. The word lanu ('for us, our part') indicates the Ziphites are volunteering as active collaborators, not passive informants. They will do the work of cornering David if Saul will come.

21. The irony of Saul invoking the LORD's blessing here cannot be overstated. The LORD has explicitly rejected Saul (15:26), refused to answer him (14:37, and later 28:6), and is actively protecting David (verse 14). Saul's use of God's name to validate his manhunt represents the final corruption of his theological language — he uses covenant vocabulary to authorize covenant-breaking behavior. The verb chamal ('to have compassion, to spare') is the same verb used in 15:9 where Saul 'spared' Agag and the best livestock against God's command. Saul's pattern is consistent: he applies compassion where it does not belong and withholds it where it does.

22. Saul's instructions reveal both tactical sophistication and personal anxiety. The verbs pile up in rapid succession: lekhu ('go'), hakhinu ('prepare'), de'u ('know'), re'u ('observe') — four commands before the main intelligence request. The phrase asher tihyeh raglo ('where his foot will be') is a tracking idiom: Saul wants to know David's movement patterns, not just his current position. The admission arum ya'arim li ('he is extremely cunning toward me') uses the verb aram ('to be shrewd, crafty'), the same root used for the serpent in Genesis 3:1 (arum). Whether intentional or not, the echo is suggestive: Saul perceives David as a dangerous adversary of serpentine cleverness, when in fact David's 'cunning' consists primarily of inquiring of the LORD.

23. The word machabo'im ('hiding places') is from the root chava, 'to hide' — the same root used for Adam and Eve hiding from God in Genesis 3:8. Saul commands a systematic intelligence sweep of David's positions. The phrase el-nakhon ('with certainty, with what is established') demands verified intelligence, not rumors. Saul's promise vechipassti oto bekhol alfei Yehudah ('I will search him out among all the clans of Judah') reveals the scale of his obsession: he will comb through every military unit (elef, 'thousand/clan') in David's own tribe. The word alfei can mean either 'thousands' (military units) or 'clans' (tribal subdivisions) — either way, Saul is planning a territory-wide sweep of Judah to find one man.

24. The Ziphites depart as advance scouts, heading back to Ziph lifnei Sha'ul ('ahead of Saul') to finalize David's location before Saul arrives. Meanwhile, David has moved south from Ziph to the wilderness of Maon — a more remote and rugged area deeper into the Judean desert. The Arabah here likely refers to the dry depression running south toward the Dead Sea. The narrator tracks both parties simultaneously, building narrative tension: the Ziphites are heading to Ziph, David is in Maon, and Saul is mobilizing. The geography tightens like a noose.

25. The verb levaqesh ('to seek, to hunt') returns — Saul's defining action throughout the chapter. David receives intelligence (vayyaggidu le-David, 'they told David') — his network of informants continues to function even in the wilderness. The sela ('rock, crag') is a specific geological feature, likely a cliff face or rock formation that David uses as a defensive position. The verb vayyeradof ('he pursued') is from radaf, the standard verb for military pursuit or hunting — Saul is now in active chase mode, closing the distance in the wilderness of Maon.

26. The spatial arrangement — both parties moving along opposite sides of the same mountain — creates an almost cinematic image. The narrator achieves maximum suspense with minimal language: David is running, Saul is encircling, capture is imminent. The verb otrim ('encircling') is a military technical term for surrounding an enemy position to cut off escape routes. David appears to be trapped. The chapter has moved from divine guidance (verses 1-12) through theological encouragement (verses 16-18) to this moment of raw physical danger where no human solution is visible.

27. The narrative structure is masterful: the messenger's arrival interrupts the most suspenseful moment in the chapter with a single-verse pivot. The verb pashat ('to spread out, to raid') is the same verb used for stripping and spreading — it conveys an enemy spreading across the land like a flood. Saul must choose between his private obsession (David) and his public duty (national defense). The Philistines force the choice, and Saul has no option but to turn away. The narrator attributes no theological explanation — the bare sequence of events carries the theological weight.

28. The etiology (origin story for a place name) is a common narrative device in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Genesis 22:14, Judges 15:17). Sela ha-Machlekot becomes a physical marker in the landscape testifying to David's deliverance. The verb vayyashav ('he turned back') marks Saul's forced retreat — not a voluntary decision but a compelled one. The phrase vayyelekh liqra't Pelishtim ('he went to meet/confront the Philistines') uses the verb qara't, which implies moving toward a confrontation. Saul finally does what a king is supposed to do — fight the national enemy — but only because God's timing removed every other option.

29. The final verse is a single sentence of geographical transition. David ascends (vayyaal, 'went up') from the wilderness of Maon to the metsadot ('strongholds') of En-gedi — the oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, famous for its spring, its waterfall, and its network of caves in the surrounding cliffs. The name En-gedi means 'Spring of the Young Goat,' and the ibex that still inhabit the area provided both the name and the imagery for David's life in this period: a nimble creature surviving in impossible terrain. The caves of En-gedi will be the setting for the next chapter's dramatic encounter, where Saul enters the very cave where David is hiding. The chapter ends where it began — with David in motion, seeking shelter, guided by God but homeless in his own land.

24

Summary: *Saul returns from pursuing the Philistines and takes three thousand men to hunt David in the wilderness of En-gedi. He enters a cave to relieve himself — the very cave where David and his men are hiding deep in the recesses. David's men urge him to strike, claiming this is the LORD's promised moment, but David only cuts the corner of Saul's robe. Immediately his conscience strikes him, and he restrains his men from attacking. After Saul leaves the cave, David emerges, bows to the ground, and delivers a speech that is both legal defense and theological argument: he will not raise his hand against the LORD's anointed. He holds up the cut piece of robe as evidence that he had the power to kill but chose restraint. Saul weeps, acknowledges that David is more righteous than he is, and extracts an oath that David will not destroy Saul's descendants. The two part — Saul to his home, David to the stronghold.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter stages one of the most psychologically complex scenes in the Hebrew Bible. The cave at En-gedi becomes a moral theater where David holds absolute power over his enemy and refuses to use it. The Hebrew narrator builds the tension with exquisite economy: Saul comes into the cave 'to cover his feet' (a euphemism for relieving himself) — he is at his most vulnerable and undignified, and David is armed and hidden in the darkness behind him. David's men interpret the situation theologically, claiming God has delivered Saul into David's hand. David's act of cutting the kanaf (corner/wing) of Saul's robe is more significant than it appears: the robe's corner carried symbolic weight in ancient Israel, representing authority and identity (the same word appears in Ruth 3:9 where Ruth asks Boaz to spread his kanaf over her). By cutting Saul's kanaf, David symbolically severed Saul's royal authority — and his conscience immediately recognized it. His refusal to go further establishes a principle that will echo through the entire Davidic narrative: legitimate kingship cannot be seized by violence against God's current anointed. The chapter's theology of restraint — that the right thing done the wrong way is still wrong — is one of the most mature ethical statements in the Old Testament.*

Translation Friction: *The central translation difficulty lies in verse 5 (WLC), where David's heart 'struck him' (vayyakh lev David oto). The verb nakhah is the same word used for a physical blow — David's conscience did not merely trouble him but hit him with the force of a weapon. Translators must decide whether to soften this to 'his conscience bothered him' or preserve the violence of the metaphor. We preserve the blow. A second friction point is the phrase mashiach YHWH ('the LORD's anointed') in verses 7 and 11, which David invokes as an inviolable category. The term does not yet carry its later messianic weight, but it establishes a theological principle — that God's chosen agent, even when corrupt, is not for humans to remove. This creates genuine moral tension: David's restraint is not because Saul is good but because Saul's anointing is God's business, not David's. Translators who flatten mashiach to a mere political title miss the theological nerve of David's argument. A third issue is the relationship between WLC versification (23 verses) and KJV (22 verses): WLC verse 1 corresponds to the chapter division note, and the remaining verses are offset by one.*

Connections: *The cave scene directly parallels 1 Samuel 26, where David again spares Saul (this time taking his spear and water jug). The two episodes form a deliberate doublet, reinforcing the pattern of David's restraint. The cutting of the kanaf connects backward to Ruth 3:9, where kanaf symbolizes protective covenant covering, and forward to 1 Samuel 15:27-28, where Samuel's robe is torn as a sign that the kingdom is torn from Saul. David's argument that 'the LORD will strike him' (verse 7) — letting God handle Saul's fate rather than seizing it — anticipates 2 Samuel 1, where David executes the Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul. The principle is consistent: no human hand may touch the LORD's anointed. Saul's acknowledgment that David is 'more righteous' (tsaddiq) than he is echoes Judah's confession about Tamar in Genesis 38:26 — both are moments where a powerful man admits that the person he wronged holds the moral high ground. David's oath not to cut off Saul's descendants connects directly to 2 Samuel 9, where David shows kindness to Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake.*

1 David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of En-gedi. 2 When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he
was told, "David is in the wilderness of En-gedi." 3 Saul took three thousand men, chosen from all Israel, and went to search

for David and his men along the rock faces where the wild goats climb. 4He came to the sheep pens along the road, where there was a cave. Saul went inside to relieve himself, while David and his men were sitting deep in the recesses of the cave. 5 David's men said to him, "This is the day the LORD told you about: 'I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you may do to him whatever seems good to you.'" David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul's robe. 6Afterward, David's heart struck him over the fact that he had cut Saul's corner. 7He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord — to the LORD's anointed — to stretch out my hand against him, for he is the LORD's anointed." 8David tore into his men with these words and did not allow them to rise against Saul. Saul got up from the cave and went on his way. 9Then David got up, went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" Saul looked behind him, and David knelt with his face to the ground and bowed low. 10David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of people who say, 'David is seeking to harm you'? 11This very day your own eyes have seen that the LORD gave you into my hand in the cave. Someone urged me to kill you, but I had compassion on you and said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' 12Look, my father — yes, look! The corner of your robe is in my hand. When I cut the corner of your robe and did not kill you, know and see that there is no evil or rebellion in my hand. I have not sinned against you, yet you are hunting me to take my life. 13May the LORD judge between me and you. May the LORD take vengeance for me against you — but my hand will not touch you. 14As the ancient proverb says, 'From the wicked comes wickedness' — but my hand will not touch you. 15After whom has the king of Israel marched out? Whom are you chasing? A dead dog! A single flea! 16May the LORD be the judge and render judgment between me and you. May he see and take up my case and deliver me from your hand." 17When David finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is that your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted his voice and wept. 18He said to David, "You are more righteous than I am, for you have repaid me with good while I have repaid you with evil. 19You have shown today how you dealt well with me: the LORD handed me over to you, and you did not kill me. 20When a man finds his enemy, does he send him on his way unharmed? May the LORD repay you with good for what you have done for me today. 21Now I know that you will certainly be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. 22Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not wipe out my name from my father's house." 23David swore to Saul. Saul went to his home, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. WLC verse 1 corresponds to the final clause of KJV 23:29. The noun metsadot ('strongholds, fortified places') refers to the natural rock fortifications in the cliffs above the oasis of En-gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The terrain is riddled with caves and narrow passes — ideal for a fugitive band to defend. En-gedi means 'spring of the young goat,' named for the ibex that still inhabit the area. David moves from the wilderness of Maon to these natural fortifications, trading open desert for defensible high ground.

2. The narrative resumes Saul's obsession with David. The Philistine incursion (23:27-28) had momentarily diverted Saul from the hunt, but the moment the external threat passes, Saul returns to his internal fixation. The verb shuv ('returned') carries ironic weight throughout 1 Samuel: Saul keeps returning to hunt David but never returns to the LORD. The informants who report David's location are unnamed — the text repeatedly shows that David's movements are betrayed by locals (the Ziphites in 23:19, unnamed sources here), heightening the sense that David has no safe refuge except God.

3. The ye'elim ('ibex, wild goats') are the Nubian ibex native to the Judean desert cliffs. The place name later associated with this area is 'the Crags of the Ibex' (tsurei hayye'elim). The irony is architectural: Saul brings an overwhelming force into terrain that nullifies numerical advantage. The caves, narrow ledges, and vertical rock faces favor the small, mobile band hiding in them — not the army searching from below.

4. We render lehasekh et raglav as 'to relieve himself' — modern, clear, and dignified without being euphemistic to the point of obscurity. The KJV's 'to cover his feet' is a literal rendering of the Hebrew euphemism that no modern English reader would understand. The Vulgate's purgare ventrem ('to empty his belly') was more explicit. The narrative point is vulnerability: the king of Israel is exposed and defenseless in the very cave where his enemy hides.

4. The detail that David's men were 'sitting' (yoshvim) suggests they were encamped, not merely passing through. They had been living in these caves. The participle form indicates ongoing habitation — this was their base of operations.

5. The word ballat ('secretly, stealthily') appears only here and in verse 5 of Ruth 3:7 in this form. David moves with stealth — the act is furtive, not bold. He creeps close enough to Saul to cut his robe without detection, which means he was close enough to kill. The narrative forces the reader to feel the proximity and the restraint.

5. We render kenaf as 'corner' rather than 'skirt' (KJV) because 'skirt' in modern English carries misleading connotations. The kenaf was the border or wing of the outer garment, often bearing tassels (tsitsit) as commanded in Numbers 15:38. It was the part of the garment that carried legal and symbolic significance.

6. We preserve the violent metaphor 'his heart struck him' rather than softening to 'his conscience troubled him' or 'he felt guilty.' The Hebrew is intentionally physical — the verb nakhah makes David's conscience a weapon turned inward. This same verb will describe David 'striking' enemies throughout 2 Samuel. Here, the only blow David lands in this entire chapter is against himself.

6. The connection between this verse and the earlier tearing of Samuel's robe (15:27-28) is unmistakable. In chapter 15, a torn robe signified the kingdom torn from Saul by God's decree. David's cutting of the kanaf flirts with the same symbolism — and David recoils, recognizing that he was acting out a divine prerogative that belongs to God alone.

7. The double use of meshiach YHWH ('the LORD's anointed') is emphatic and deliberate — David is establishing a principle, not making a one-time judgment. This principle will govern his behavior through the rest of 1 Samuel and into 2 Samuel 1, where he executes the man who claims to have killed Saul. The mashiach concept here is political-theological, not yet eschatological, but it plants the seed: there is a category of person whom God has set apart, and human hands must not presume to remove what God has installed.

7. David calls Saul adoni ('my lord') even while hiding from Saul's death squads. This is not sycophancy but covenantal respect for the office. David consistently distinguishes between Saul's personal wickedness and Saul's divinely granted role.

8. We render vayshassa as 'tore into' to preserve the violent energy of the verb. The KJV's 'stayed' is far too mild — this root carries the force of physical rending. David's restraint of his men required the same intensity that killing Saul would have required, channeled in the opposite direction.

8. The juxtaposition of David's inner turmoil and Saul's oblivious departure creates one of the great dramatic ironies in biblical narrative. Saul has no idea that his life was held in another man's hands and returned to him — he simply 'went on his way.'

9. The address adoni hammelekh ('my lord the king') maintains David's consistent stance: he treats Saul as the legitimate sovereign. This is not performance — David uses this title even in the internal dialogue of verse 7. The prostration is likewise genuine, not theatrical. David's theology of anointed kingship requires this posture regardless of Saul's murderous behavior.

9. The narrator builds the scene cinematically: David emerges, calls out, Saul turns, David drops to the ground. Every action is visible against the desert landscape. The private moment in the dark cave has given way to a public confrontation in full daylight.

10. David opens his defense by challenging the source of Saul's hostility — not Saul's own judgment but the divrei adam ('words of men, human speech') that have poisoned his thinking. The verb mevaqesh ('is seeking') is the same verb used of Saul's search for David (verse 3, levaqesh). David reverses the accusation: Saul is seeking David, but the slanderers claim David is seeking Saul's ra'ah ('harm, evil'). David's rhetorical strategy is to separate Saul from his informants, appealing to what Saul can verify with his own eyes rather than what he has been told by others.

11. The textual tradition here has some variation. The MT reads vayyomer ('and he said' or 'and one said') while some manuscripts and the Septuagint read va'amar ('and I said'). We follow the MT, which creates a more honest picture: David acknowledges the pressure to kill without specifying whether it was his own temptation or his men's urging.

11. This is the third occurrence of meshiach YHWH in the chapter (after two in verse 7). The repetition functions like a legal citation — David is building a case on a single foundational principle and returning to it with each argument.

12. The address avi ('my father') is the only time David uses this term for Saul in the chapter. It likely reflects the father-in-law relationship (David married Saul's daughter Michal) but also carries rhetorical weight: a father hunting his own son's life is a perversion of the natural order. David forces Saul to confront the monstrous nature of his pursuit.

12. The word pesha ('rebellion, transgression') is a covenant term — it describes willful breach of a binding agreement, not accidental wrongdoing. David is asserting that he has maintained covenant loyalty to Saul despite Saul's aggression. The three-term denial (ra'ah, pesha, chet) echoes judicial oath formulas where the accused categorically clears himself of all charges.

13. The juxtaposition of 'may the LORD avenge me' and 'my hand will not touch you' is the chapter's ethical thesis in a single verse. David holds simultaneously that he has been genuinely wronged (vengeance is warranted) and that he has no right to execute that vengeance himself. This is not passivity — it is an active theological commitment to let God resolve what human hands must not touch.

14. The phrase mashal haqqadmoni ('proverb of the ancients') suggests an established oral tradition of wisdom sayings predating David's time. The word qadmoni ('ancient, eastern, former') indicates this proverb was already old when David cited it. This is one of our earliest glimpses of proverbial culture in Israel prior to the formal wisdom literature associated with Solomon.

14. David's rhetorical strategy is subtle: he never directly accuses Saul of being wicked. He cites a general principle and lets Saul draw the conclusion. This is more damaging than a direct accusation because Saul must convict himself.

15. The 'dead dog' (kelev met) is the lowest possible self-reference in biblical Hebrew. Dogs in ancient Israel were not domesticated companions but semi-feral scavengers associated with garbage and carrion. A dead dog was worthless refuse. David uses this image in 2 Samuel 9:8 as well (through Mephibosheth). The addition of 'single flea' (par'osh echad) takes the diminishment to the microscopic — David claims he is not even worth the energy required to scratch an itch.

15. The fourfold repetition of acharei ('after') creates a rhythmic, almost mocking cadence. David is not merely arguing — he is performing the absurdity of Saul's pursuit. The rhetoric functions as both self-abasement (a political survival strategy) and genuine theological argument (the king's attention should be on matters worthy of a king, not on a fugitive who poses no threat).

16. The density of legal language in this verse is extraordinary — five judicial terms in a single sentence. David has constructed his entire speech as a legal brief, and this verse is his closing argument. He rests his case not on his own strength but on God's role as cosmic judge. The phrase veyarev et rivi ('may he contend my contention') uses the figura etymologica (cognate accusative) for emphasis — 'may he argue my argument, may he fight my fight.'

16. This verse closes David's speech. Everything from verse 10 through verse 16 forms a coherent courtroom address: evidence presentation (the robe corner), witness testimony (Saul's own eyes), character defense (the proverb), and the final appeal to the supreme Judge.

17. The question 'Is this your voice?' may suggest distance — David called from far enough away that Saul could hear words but not clearly identify the speaker. Or it may be an emotional question: 'Can it really be you saying these things?' The ambiguity is productive and we preserve it.

17. Saul's weeping here must be read against 1 Samuel 26:21-25, where Saul makes a nearly identical response after David spares him a second time. The pattern — Saul weeps, acknowledges David's righteousness, then resumes hunting — raises the question of whether Saul's repentance is genuine or merely situational. The narrator does not resolve this; Saul's sincerity is left to the reader's judgment.

18. The phrase tsaddiq attah mimmenni echoes Genesis 38:26, where Judah says of Tamar tsadqah mimmenni ('she is more righteous than I'). Both are moments where a man in power confesses that the person he wronged is in the right. The verbal parallel is unlikely to be accidental — the narrator invites the reader to see David in the role of the wronged party who holds moral authority over the powerful.

18. The verb gamal has agricultural overtones — 'to ripen, to bring to full growth.' Applied to human actions, it means to bring an action to its full consequence: to repay in kind. Saul acknowledges that David's actions have matured into goodness while his own have matured into evil.

19. The verb siggerani ('he shut me in, he delivered me') comes from sagar, meaning 'to close, to shut, to hand over.' It portrays God closing Saul into David's hand the way a gate closes around a prisoner — Saul was trapped, enclosed, and entirely at David's mercy. Saul now interprets the cave encounter from David's perspective: God did deliver Saul into David's power, and David chose mercy. The acknowledgment higadta ('you have declared, you have shown') uses the Hiphil of nagad, a verb of public disclosure — David's act of mercy was not merely felt but demonstrated, made visible and undeniable.

20. Saul's blessing here is genuine in the moment, though the narrative will show that it does not last. The reader must hold two truths simultaneously: Saul is sincerely moved, and Saul will resume his pursuit. The text does not psychoanalyze Saul's inner state — it simply records his words and leaves the tension unresolved.

20. The verb yeshallemekhah ('may he repay you') uses the same root as Solomon's name (Shelomoh) and the city of Jerusalem (Yerushalayim). The prayer is for God to bring David to shalom — a state of completeness and wholeness that stands in stark contrast to David's current condition as a hunted fugitive.

21. The phrase malokh timlokh echoes God's own speech patterns — the infinitive absolute plus finite verb construction is characteristically divine in the Hebrew Bible. Whether Saul is consciously echoing prophetic language or simply using emphatic grammar, the effect is the same: his statement carries the weight of inevitability.

21. This verse connects directly to Jonathan's earlier acknowledgment in 23:17: 'You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you — and even my father Saul knows this.' Jonathan was right. Saul did know. The difference is that Jonathan embraced it while Saul has fought against it with three thousand soldiers.

22. Saul's request anticipates a common practice in ancient Near Eastern dynastic succession: the incoming king would eliminate all potential rivals from the previous dynasty. This actually happened in the northern kingdom of Israel repeatedly (1 Kings 15:29, 16:11, 2 Kings 10:17). Saul's fear was entirely realistic. David's oath here will be honored in 2 Samuel 9, where he brings Jonathan's son Mephibosheth to the royal table — though it will be complicated by the Gibeonite incident in 2 Samuel 21.

22. The pairing of 'seed' (zera) and 'name' (shem) covers both biological and memorial continuation. To have descendants but no name is to be forgotten; to have a name but no descendants is to have no one to carry it. Saul asks for both forms of survival.

23. The word metsudah ('stronghold, fortress') is the same word from verse 1 (metsadot is the plural). The chapter forms an inclusio — it begins and ends with David in the strongholds of the wilderness. The narrative cycle is complete but unresolved: the theological argument has been made, the moral verdict rendered, and yet the political situation remains unchanged. David will not seize the kingdom; he will wait. This patient endurance — the willingness to live in the metsudah while God works out the transfer of the mamlakhah — is the chapter's final statement about what it means to trust the LORD's timing.

23. The contrast between beito ('his home') and hametsudah ('the stronghold') encapsulates the two men's situations: Saul has a house but is losing a kingdom; David has no house but is gaining one. The narrator does not editorialize — the geography does the work.

25

Summary: *Samuel dies, and all Israel gathers to mourn him at Ramah. The narrative immediately shifts to David in the wilderness of Paran, where he encounters a wealthy Calebite named Nabal whose name means 'Fool.' David's men have been protecting Nabal's shepherds, but when David sends messengers requesting provisions during sheep-shearing, Nabal insults David and refuses. David straps on his sword and marches with four hundred men to destroy Nabal's household. Abigail, Nabal's wise and perceptive wife, intercepts David with generous provisions and delivers one of the most theologically sophisticated speeches in the Hebrew Bible — invoking the bundle of the living, divine restraint from bloodguilt, and David's future kingship. David relents, crediting God for sending Abigail to prevent him from avenging himself. When Abigail tells Nabal what happened, his heart dies within him and he becomes like a stone; ten days later the LORD strikes him dead. David then sends for Abigail and takes her as his wife.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Abigail's speech in verses 24-31 is extraordinary in scope and theological precision. She is the first person in the narrative to speak of David's kingdom as an established certainty — a 'secure house' (bayit ne'eman) that the LORD will build, the same language later used in the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7. She introduces the image of the 'bundle of the living' (tseror ha-chayyim), a metaphor for divine safekeeping that has no parallel elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and became central to Jewish memorial tradition. She speaks of David's enemies being 'slung out as from the hollow of a sling' — a deliberate echo of David's victory over Goliath using the same weapon. This woman, married to a fool, articulates covenant theology with a clarity that surpasses anything Samuel's own sons managed. The chapter also functions as a moral test for David: he passed the test of not killing Saul (chapters 24, 26) but nearly fails here, ready to massacre an entire household over an insult. It takes a woman's wisdom to do what the prophet Samuel's death left undone — speak God's restraining word to the future king.*

Translation Friction: *The central tension is David's near-descent into blood vengeance. His oath in verse 22 — to destroy every male in Nabal's household by morning — would have made him no different from Saul, who slaughtered the priests of Nob over a perceived slight (chapter 22). The text presents David's rage as genuine and his intent as murderous, not ceremonial. Translators must render his oath with its full violence: this is not a frustrated outburst but a military operation already underway. The chapter also raises the uncomfortable question of divine violence: the LORD strikes Nabal dead (verse 38), executing the judgment David was prevented from carrying out. The narrator treats this as justice, but the mechanism — Nabal's heart 'dying within him' after hearing what almost happened — blurs the line between divine act and natural consequence. The name theology is also challenging: verse 25 has Abigail say 'as his name is, so is he — Naval is his name, and foolishness (nevalah) is with him.' This is not gentle wordplay but a wife publicly declaring her husband's character as definitional ruin.*

Connections: *Samuel's death in verse 1 bookends his birth narrative in chapter 1, completing the arc of the last judge. The wilderness setting connects David to Moses and Elijah — leaders tested in the desert before assuming their roles. Abigail's phrase 'bundle of the living' (tseror ha-chayyim, verse 29) became the basis for the Jewish memorial formula 'may his/her soul be bound in the bundle of life,' inscribed on tombstones for centuries. Her prediction that God will 'sling out' David's enemies (verse 29) recalls the sling of chapter 17, linking David's identity as shepherd-warrior to his future as king. The 'secure house' (bayit ne'eman) that Abigail promises anticipates the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:16, where God promises David's house and kingdom will endure forever. Nabal's connection to Caleb (verse 3) ties this story to the conquest tradition — the Calebites received Hebron as their inheritance (Joshua 14:13-14), and it is Hebron where David will first be crowned king (2 Samuel 2:1-4). David's marriage to Abigail, alongside the note about Ahinoam of Jezreel and the loss of Michal to Palti (verses 43-44), maps the political marriages that will shape his dynasty.*

1 Samuel died. All Israel gathered and mourned for him, and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David set out and
went down to the wilderness of Paran. 2 There was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very wealthy
— he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats — and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 The man's name was
Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man was harsh and destructive in

his dealings. He was a Calebite. 4David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. 5David sent ten young men and told them, "Go up to Carmel. When you come to Nabal, greet him in my name with peace. 6Say to him: 'Life to you! Peace to you, peace to your household, and peace to everything you have. 7I have heard that you have shearers. Now, your shepherds were with us, and we did not mistreat them, and nothing of theirs went missing the whole time they were in Carmel. 8Ask your own servants and they will tell you. So let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" 9David's young men came and delivered all these words to Nabal in David's name, and then they waited. 10Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? These days, runaway slaves are everywhere — servants breaking away from their masters. 11Should I take my bread, my water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers and give it to men I do not even know where they come from?" 12David's young men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported all of this to him. 13David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword." Each man strapped on his sword, and David strapped on his sword as well. About four hundred men went up behind David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. 14But one of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our master, and he screamed at them. 15But those men were very good to us. We were never mistreated, and we never lost anything the whole time we moved about with them in the open country. 16They were a wall around us, both night and day, the entire time we were with them tending the flock. 17So know this and consider what you will do, because disaster is closing in on our master and on his entire household. And he is such a worthless wretch that no one can speak to him." 18Abigail moved quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five measures of roasted grain, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred fig cakes, and loaded them on donkeys. 19She told her servants, "Go on ahead of me. I will be right behind you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20As she was riding her donkey down a hidden path on the mountain, David and his men came descending toward her, and she met them face to face. 21Now David had been saying, "It was all for nothing that I guarded everything this man owns in the wilderness, so that nothing of his went missing — and he has repaid me evil for good. 22May God do the same to David's enemies — and worse — if by morning I leave alive a single male of everything he owns." 23When Abigail saw David, she quickly dismounted from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed to the ground. 24She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord — let the guilt fall on me. Please, let your servant speak in your hearing, and listen to the words of your servant. 25Please, my lord, do not give this worthless man a second thought — this Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: his name is Fool, and foolishness clings to him. But I, your servant, did not see the young men my lord sent. 26And now, my lord — as the LORD lives, and as you yourself live — it is the LORD who has held you back from bloodshed and from delivering justice with your own hand. Now let your enemies and those who seek to harm my lord become like Nabal. 27And now, let this gift that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who march at my lord's side. 28Please forgive your servant's offense. For the LORD will certainly build my lord a lasting house, because my lord fights the battles of the LORD, and no evil has been found in you all your days. 29Should anyone rise up to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound secure in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies — he will sling them away like a stone from the hollow of a sling. 30And when the LORD has done for my lord everything good that he has promised concerning you, and has appointed you as leader over Israel — 31t hen this will not be a staggering burden or a stumbling block on my lord's conscience — the shedding of innocent blood, or my lord taking vengeance into his own hands. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, remember your servant." 32 David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me. 33Blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you yourself, who kept me this day from bloodshed and from delivering justice with my own hand. 34But as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives — the one who held me back from harming you — if you had not hurried to meet me, by the light of morning not a single male would have been left to Nabal." 35David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, "Go up to your home in peace. See — I have listened to your voice and granted your request." 36Abigail came home to Nabal, and there he was — holding a feast in his house like the feast of a king. Nabal's heart was merry, and he was extremely drunk. So she told him nothing at all, small or great, until the light of morning. 37In the morning, when the wine had left Nabal, his wife told him everything. His heart died within him, and he became like a stone.

38About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal, and he died. 39When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has taken up my case against the insult from Nabal's hand, and who held back his servant from doing wrong. The LORD has brought Nabal's wickedness down on his own head." Then David sent word to Abigail and proposed marriage to her. 40David's servants came to Abigail at Carmel and said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you as his wife." 41She rose, bowed with her face to the ground, and said, "Here is your servant — a maidservant ready to wash the feet of my lord's servants." 42Abigail quickly rose, mounted her donkey, and with five of her attendants walking behind her, she followed David's messengers and became his wife. 43David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, so both of them became his wives. 44 Meanwhile, Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The burial at 'his house in Ramah' echoes the opening of Samuel's story — Ramah was his family's home (1:19), the place of his birth and now his burial. The phrase beveto ('in his house') may indicate burial in a family tomb on the household property, a common practice in ancient Israel.

1. The wilderness of Paran is a vast desert region in the northern Sinai, far from Saul's reach. Some manuscripts and the Septuagint read 'Maon' instead of 'Paran,' which would place David closer to the events that follow. The Masoretic text's 'Paran' emphasizes David's isolation — he is as far from power as a person can be in the land of Israel.

2. The word gadol ('great') here refers primarily to wealth and social standing, not moral greatness. The narrator sets up the contrast immediately: this man is great in possessions but, as we will learn, small in character. Three thousand sheep and a thousand goats represents enormous wealth by ancient Judean standards. Carmel here is not Mount Carmel in the north but a town in the hill country of Judah, south of Hebron (modern Khirbet el-Kirmil). Sheep-shearing was a festive occasion — a time of abundance when generosity was culturally expected, making Nabal's refusal in verse 11 all the more egregious.

3. The name Naval (often spelled Nabal) means 'fool, senseless one' in Hebrew. It is almost certainly a pejorative characterization rather than a birth name — no parent would name a child 'Fool.' The narrator may be using the name the community gave him, or it may function as a literary device. Either way, verse 25 will make the name theology explicit.

3. The phrase ra ma'alalim ('evil of deeds/dealings') uses ma'alalim, which refers to habitual actions or practices — this is not a single bad act but a pattern of destructive behavior. The same word appears in prophetic indictments (Jeremiah 4:4, Micah 3:4) to describe Israel's persistent unfaithfulness.

4. Sheep-shearing was the ancient equivalent of harvest festival — a time of feasting, generosity, and open hospitality. For David and his men, who had been protecting Nabal's flocks in the wilderness (as the servants will confirm in verses 15-16), this was the natural moment to request compensation. David's approach follows established custom, not extortion.

5. The phrase ush'eltem-lo vishmi leshalom ('ask after him in my name for peace') is a formal diplomatic greeting — David sends an official delegation, not a raiding party. The number ten suggests a significant embassy. The word shalom here functions as both greeting and implicit request: David offers peace and expects the reciprocal obligations that peace entails.

6. The greeting koh lechai ('thus to the living one' or 'life to you') is a festive salutation appropriate for the sheep-shearing celebration. The threefold repetition of shalom — to Nabal personally, to his household, and to all his possessions — is extravagant courtesy. David is doing everything right by the conventions of the culture: formal delegation, proper greeting, blessing before request. This makes Nabal's response in verse 10-11 all the more shocking.

7. The verb hiklamnum ('we shamed/mistreated them') comes from kalam, meaning to humiliate, insult, or harm. David's claim is that his men not only avoided harassing Nabal's shepherds but actively protected them — a claim the servants will independently verify in verses 15-16. The phrase lo nifqad lahem me'umah ('nothing was missing to them, not anything') uses the Niphal of paqad ('to reckon, to miss upon counting') — when the flock was tallied, not a single animal was unaccounted for. This was the result of David's protection.

8. David's self-designation as 'your son' (binekha) is deliberate diplomatic humility — he places himself in the position of a junior relation seeking a patron's generosity. The phrase yom tov ('good day, feast day') refers to the sheep-shearing festival, when abundance made generosity easy and refusal shameful. David's request — 'whatever your hand finds' (et asher timtsa yadekha) — is intentionally open-ended, leaving the amount to Nabal's discretion rather than naming a specific demand. This is the language of a respectful petitioner, not a warlord issuing demands.

9. The verb vayyanuchu ('and they rested/waited') indicates the messengers finished speaking and stood in respectful silence, awaiting a response. The verb nuach can mean 'to rest' or 'to settle, to wait.' They have delivered the message exactly as instructed and now pause — the ball is in Nabal's court.

10. Nabal's response is a calculated insult on every level. The question 'Who is David?' feigns ignorance of the man all Israel knows as Saul's former champion and the anointed future king. Calling him 'son of Jesse' reduces David to his father's obscure household rather than acknowledging his public identity. The word hammitparetsiym ('those who break loose, who burst away') characterizes David as a fugitive slave, not a legitimate leader. Nabal is publicly framing David as a rebellious servant of Saul — a politically dangerous accusation that aligns Nabal with the ruling king and brands David's band as outlaws.

11. The possessive pronouns are emphatic and repeated: my bread, my water, my slaughtered meat. Nabal sees everything as his own property, owed to no one. The phrase lo yadati ei mizzeh hemmah ('I do not know from where they are') is not geographic ignorance but social dismissal — he refuses to acknowledge David's people as having any standing or claim. The irony is thick: Nabal's own servants know exactly who David is and what his men have done (verses 14-17), but Nabal either will not or cannot see past his own possessiveness. The verb tavachti ('I have slaughtered') emphasizes the labor of preparation — this feast is for his shearers, his workers, his celebration. No outsider will share it.

12. The verbs pile up in rapid succession — vayyahpekhu ('they turned'), vayyashuvu ('they returned'), vayyavo'u ('they came'), vayyaggidu ('they reported') — conveying the urgency of messengers who know the insult will provoke a violent response. They deliver the words exactly as spoken, letting Nabal's contempt arrive at David's ears without softening.

13. The threefold repetition of 'sword' (cherev) — strap on his sword, they strapped on his sword, David strapped on his sword — creates a drumbeat of escalation. The narrative slows down to let the reader feel the momentum of violence building. David does not deliberate, does not pray, does not consult God. The contrast with chapter 23, where David repeatedly 'inquired of the LORD' before any military action, is striking and deliberate. Four hundred armed men against a sheep-farmer's household is not a proportional response — it is a punitive massacre force. The two hundred who stay with the supplies (kelim) follow standard military protocol (see 30:24), confirming this is a full military operation.

14. The servant goes directly to Abigail, bypassing Nabal entirely — a detail that reveals the household's internal dynamics. The servants know who actually manages crises. The verb vayyaat ('he flew at them, he screamed at them') comes from a root meaning to rush at or pounce, suggesting Nabal did not merely decline but verbally attacked the messengers. The servant's choice of the word levarekh ('to bless') rather than 'to ask' frames David's approach in the most favorable light possible — the messengers came with blessing, and the master responded with abuse.

15. The servant independently confirms David's claims from verse 7 — the verb hiklamnu ('we were shamed/mistreated') and the phrase lo faqadnu me'umah ('we did not miss anything') mirror David's own words exactly. This is unsolicited corroboration from Nabal's own household. The phrase hithallakhnu ittam ('we walked about with them') uses the same Hithpael of halakh that described Samuel's public conduct in chapter 12 — David's men conducted themselves honorably alongside the shepherds.

16. The metaphor chomah ('wall') is powerful — David's men were not merely present but formed a protective barrier around the shepherds and their flocks. This is military-grade protection described in architectural terms. The emphasis on 'both night and day' (gam-laylah gam-yomam) means continuous security, the kind that prevents losses from both predators and raiders. The servant is making the case that David has already earned compensation through concrete service.

17. The phrase ben-beliyya'al is notoriously difficult. Beliyya'al may derive from beli ('without') and ya'al ('worth, profit'), yielding 'worthless one,' or from beli ('without') and ol ('yoke'), yielding 'without restraint, lawless.' In either case, it describes someone who has placed themselves outside the obligations of community and covenant. The term appears throughout Judges and Samuel to describe the worst kinds of people — the men of Gibeah (Judges 19:22), Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12), and now Nabal. A servant applying this term to his own master is an act of social desperation.

18. The verb vattemaher ('she hurried') opens Abigail's response and sets the pace for everything that follows — urgency drives every action. The provisions are lavish and precisely enumerated: this is not a token offering but a feast on the move. The 'five sheep already dressed' (asuyot, literally 'made, prepared') means they are already slaughtered and ready to eat — Abigail raids the sheep-shearing feast to provision David. The five seahs of roasted grain (qali) is a substantial quantity, roughly equivalent to about seven gallons of parched wheat. The raisins and fig cakes are concentrated, portable, high-energy foods — trail provisions for fighting men. Abigail is not merely generous; she is tactically precise, assembling exactly what a wilderness military company needs.

19. Abigail's decision not to tell Nabal is both practical and subversive. Practically, he would have refused or interfered. Narratively, it positions Abigail as acting independently of her husband's authority — a bold move in a patriarchal society that the text presents without criticism. The servants go ahead to create a procession of gifts that David will encounter before Abigail arrives, softening the approach. Abigail is staging the encounter with the same care a diplomat would bring to a hostage negotiation.

20. The phrase beseter hahar ('in the cover/hidden part of the mountain') suggests a concealed ravine or path where the mountain blocks the view — Abigail and David cannot see each other until they are suddenly face to face. The verb vatifgosh ('she met, she encountered') implies an unexpected meeting at close range. The scene is cinematic: the woman descending with provisions meets the armed column ascending for slaughter, both hidden from each other by the terrain until the last moment.

21. The narrator inserts David's inner monologue (or words to his men) using the pluperfect 'had said' (amar with context indicating prior speech), showing what was driving him as he marched. The phrase akh lashseqer ('surely for falsehood/in vain') expresses bitter disillusionment — David's service was wasted, treated as if it never happened. The formula ra'ah tachat tovah ('evil in place of good') is a standard biblical expression for betrayal of kindness (see Psalm 35:12, 38:20). David is not merely angry about provisions; he feels the moral outrage of violated reciprocity.

22. We render mashtin beqir as 'a single male' because the Hebrew idiom, while anatomically specific, functions as a comprehensive term for all males. The oath formula koh ya'aseh... vekoh yosif ('may God do thus and add more') appears frequently in Samuel and Kings as the most binding form of self-curse. David has placed himself under divine penalty if he fails to carry out the massacre. The mention of 'by morning' (ad-habboqer) gives the timeline: this is tonight's operation.

23. Every verb conveys speed and submission: vattemaher ('she hurried'), vattered ('she descended'), vattippol ('she fell'), vattishtachu ('she bowed down'). Abigail's physical posture — face down on the ground before an armed and furious David — is total vulnerability. She places herself between David's army and her household, using her own body as the first line of negotiation. The word aretz ('to the ground/earth') emphasizes how

completely she prostrates herself.

24. Abigail's speech (verses 24-31) is carefully structured rhetorical art. She begins with self-abasement (v24), deflects blame to Nabal's character (v25), reframes the situation theologically (v26), offers gifts (v27), requests forgiveness (v28a), delivers a prophetic promise about David's dynasty (v28b-29), warns against bloodguilt (v30-31a), and asks to be remembered (v31b). This is not spontaneous pleading — it is a masterwork of persuasion under mortal pressure.

25. A wife publicly declaring her husband a fool whose name defines his character is extraordinary in the ancient Near East. Abigail is not merely being diplomatic — she is throwing Nabal under the rhetorical chariot to save her household. The distinction between naval (fool) and nevalah (disgraceful folly, outrage) is important: naval describes the person; nevalah describes the moral quality of his actions. Together they form a complete condemnation.

26. The phrase mibbo vedamim ('from coming into bloods') uses the plural damim, which in Hebrew specifically denotes bloodguilt — the stain of unjust killing. Abigail is not merely saying David would have killed people; she is saying he would have incurred guilt that would follow him into his kingship. This is prophetic counsel of the highest order: she is protecting David's future moral authority.

26. The curse-wish 'let your enemies become like Nabal' is both brilliant rhetoric and prophecy. If Nabal is the fool whose own name condemns him, then to wish someone 'become like Nabal' is to wish them into self-destructive futility — which is exactly what will happen to Nabal himself within days.

27. The word berakhah ('blessing') for the provisions elevates a food delivery into a covenantal act — this is not payment or bribery but blessing, the overflow of goodwill. Abigail directs it to the soldiers (hanne'arim hammithallkhim beraglei adoni, 'the young men who walk at the feet of my lord'), acknowledging David's military company with respect while also subtly reminding him that his men need food, not vengeance.

28. The phrase bayit ne'eman ('lasting house, faithful house') is among the most significant theological terms in the Davidic tradition. When Abigail speaks these words, David is a fugitive living in caves. She sees through his present circumstances to his covenant destiny. The same language appears in 1 Kings 11:38 when God promises Jeroboam a lasting house if he obeys — a promise Jeroboam will forfeit. Abigail's use of this language is prophetic in the fullest sense.

29. The phrase tseror ha-chayyim has been rendered various ways: 'bundle of life,' 'bundle of the living,' 'pouch of life.' We choose 'bundle of the living' to preserve both the concrete image (a tied bundle) and the theological meaning (belonging among those who live in God's care). The preposition et ('with') after tseror ha-chayyim indicates that David's life is bound up together with the LORD — not merely protected by God but held in the same bundle, in intimate proximity.

29. The sling imagery (yeqalle'ennah betokh kaf haqqala, 'he will sling them in the hollow of the sling') is a brilliant double reference. On the literal level, it recalls David's victory over Goliath. On the theological level, it describes divine expulsion — the enemies' lives will be hurled away from God's presence with the same force and finality as a sling stone.

30. The word nagid is distinct from melekh ('king'). A nagid is one designated by God to lead — the term emphasizes divine appointment rather than human political authority. Abigail's use of this specific word rather than 'king' shows theological precision: David's authority comes from God's command, not from military conquest or popular acclaim.

31. The word puqah is a hapax legomenon — it occurs only here in the entire Hebrew Bible. Its meaning must be derived from context and cognate languages: something that causes staggering, wavering, or moral disorientation. Abigail is coining a word for the psychological torment David would carry if he follows through with the massacre.

31. Abigail's speech ends where it began — with herself. She opened by taking the blame (verse 24) and closes by asking to be remembered (verse 31). The request vezakharta et amatekha ('and you will remember your servant') is both a plea for future patronage and, as the narrative will reveal, a subtle opening for the relationship that follows Nabal's death.

32. David's first word is barukh ('blessed') — directed not at Abigail but at God. He immediately recognizes divine providence in the encounter: asher shelachekh ('who sent you'). David sees Abigail's arrival as God's intervention, not human initiative. This is the theological reading Abigail herself proposed in verse 26 — the LORD held David back — and David accepts it completely. The phrase hayyom hazzeh ('this day') marks the encounter as a turning point: today, God acted through a woman to prevent a king from becoming a murderer.

33. David pronounces a threefold blessing: on God (verse 32), on Abigail's discernment (ta'amekh, literally 'your taste, your judgment'), and on Abigail herself (berukhah att). The word ta'am means taste or discernment — the ability to judge rightly, to distinguish what is fitting. David then echoes Abigail's own language from verse 26: mibbo vedamim ('from coming into bloodshed') and hosheet yadi li ('saving my hand for myself'). He has fully internalized her argument. By repeating her exact theological framing, David acknowledges that he was on the wrong path and that Abigail's intervention was God's own restraint.

34. David acknowledges how close the massacre came with chilling specificity. The oath formula chai-YHWH ('as the LORD lives') makes this a sworn statement. The counterfactual lulei mihhart ('if you had not hurried') credits Abigail's speed — her repeated vattemaher ('she hurried') — as the decisive factor. David repeats his original oath language from verse 22 (mashtin beqir, 'one who urinates against a wall' — any male) but now speaks of it as averted catastrophe rather than determined purpose. The phrase mera aotakh ('from doing evil to you') is revealing: David recognizes that the massacre would have been evil done to Abigail, not just to Nabal. He has come to see the innocent who would have been swept up in his vengeance.

35. The phrase vaessa panayikh ('I have lifted your face') is an idiom for showing favor, accepting a person's petition. David uses the same verb (nasa, 'to lift') that Abigail used when she asked him to 'lift away' her transgression (verse 28). The language of lifting — lifting guilt away, lifting the face in acceptance — threads through the exchange. David's dismissal leshalom ('in peace') is the same word that opened his embassy to Nabal (verse 5-6). The peace that Nabal refused, David now returns to Abigail. The phrase shamati beqolekh ('I have listened to your voice') echoes the opening of chapter 12 (Samuel saying 'I have listened to your voice') — David, the future king, heeds wise counsel as Samuel heeded Israel's demand, but this time the counsel is wise rather than misguided.

36. The phrase kemishteh hammelekh ('like a king's feast') is loaded with political irony. Nabal, who dismissed David as a runaway slave (verse 10), feasts as royalty while the actual anointed king marches in the wilderness. The narrator's contempt is barely concealed.

37. Medical commentators have speculated about the nature of Nabal's condition — stroke, heart attack, or severe shock leading to a catatonic state. The text is more interested in theological than medical precision: the man who lived as a fool dies as a stone, his inner life extinguished before his body follows. The ten-day interval before actual death (verse 38) may indicate a coma or progressive organ failure.

38. The verb vayyiggof ('he struck') is a divine action verb — the LORD is the explicit subject. The narrator leaves no ambiguity: this is not a natural death following illness but a divine execution. The same verb (nagaf) is used for God striking the Egyptians (Exodus 12:23) and for divine punishment of Israel (2 Samuel 24:17). The ten-day interval between the heart-death and the body-death creates a grim symmetry with the ten days of sheep-shearing festivity. The man who feasted while others went hungry now lies dying for ten days. God does what David was restrained from doing — but in God's own time and by God's own hand.

39. The speed of David's proposal raises questions about motive. Is this a love story, a political acquisition of a wealthy Calebite estate, or both? The narrator offers no internal commentary on David's feelings — only his theological speech and his immediate action. The verb vayedabber ba'avigayil ('he spoke concerning Abigail') uses the preposition be, which in this context means 'concerning' or 'about' — he sent messengers to negotiate the marriage, following proper protocol.

40. The messengers come to Carmel — the same location where the whole crisis began with the sheep-shearing. The proposal is direct and unadorned: David shelachanu elayikh leqachttekh lo le-ishah ('David has sent us to you to take you to him as a wife'). In ancient Israelite marriage practice, the groom's representatives negotiate with the bride's family. With Nabal dead, Abigail is the head of household, and the proposal comes directly to her.

41. Abigail's response is an extravagant act of humility: she offers to wash the feet not of David himself but of his servants — placing herself beneath even the lowest member of David's household. The word shifchah ('maidservant') is a lower status term than amah ('female servant'), which she used in her earlier speech. She deliberately lowers her self-designation for the acceptance. The phrase lirchots raglei avdei adoni ('to wash the feet of the servants of my lord') reflects ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs where foot-washing was typically performed by the lowest-ranking household member. Abigail's offer is both culturally appropriate humility and a rhetorical masterstroke — the wealthy widow of a great landowner presents herself as willing to serve at the most basic level.

42. Once again the verb vattemaher ('she hurried') characterizes Abigail — the same urgency that drove her to intercept David now drives her toward marriage. The five attendants (na'aroteyha) indicate that Abigail brings her own household retinue, confirming her status and wealth. She follows David's messengers (mal'akhei David) rather than preceding them, maintaining the posture of one who has been summoned. The final clause — vattehi-lo le-ishah ('and she became his wife') — is terse and final, closing Abigail's transition from Nabal's household to David's.

43. Ahinoam of Jezreel is mentioned with minimal introduction — she appears to have married David before Abigail, though the timeline is uncertain. The Jezreel here is likely a town in the Judean hill country, not the more famous Jezreel in the north. The narrator notes David's growing household without comment, but the accumulation of wives signals David's increasing status as a political figure. In the ancient Near East, multiple marriages were instruments of alliance and wealth consolidation as much as personal choice.

44. The chapter closes with a devastating political note. Michal, identified pointedly as eshet David ('David's wife'), has been given by Saul to another man. The verb natan ('he gave') treats Michal as property transferred by royal authority — Saul is dissolving David's marriage to his daughter, severing the dynastic tie that once bound them. This is both a personal betrayal and a political act: by removing David's connection to the royal family, Saul attempts to delegitimize David's claim to the throne. Palti (or Paltiel, as in 2 Samuel 3:15) son of Laish from Gallim is otherwise unknown — a nobody who receives a king's daughter because the king wants to erase his son-in-law. The placement of this verse at the end of the chapter creates a bitter frame: David gains two wives but loses the one who was his first and who represents his connection to Saul's house. The full weight of this verse will not be felt until 2 Samuel 3:14-16, when David demands Michal back and Palti follows her, weeping.

26

Summary: *The Ziphites again betray David's location to Saul, and Saul pursues him into the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen soldiers. David scouts Saul's camp and discovers it unguarded in the night, the entire army fallen into a supernatural deep sleep (tardemah) sent by the LORD. Abishai urges David to kill Saul, but David refuses to touch the LORD's anointed (mashiach YHWH), taking only Saul's spear and water jug as proof. From a distant hilltop, David calls out to Abner, shaming him for failing to guard the king, then addresses Saul directly. Saul acknowledges his own guilt a final time, blesses David, and the two separate — never to meet face to face again.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is structured as a mirror of chapter 24 (the cave at En-gedi), yet every detail has been intensified. In chapter 24, David stumbled upon Saul in a cave by accident; here, David deliberately infiltrates the enemy camp at night. In chapter 24, David cut Saul's robe — a symbolic act he immediately regretted; here, David takes Saul's spear (chanit) and water jug (tsapachath hammayim), symbols of royal power and basic sustenance. The spear is Saul's signature weapon, the same one he hurled at David (18:11, 19:10) and at Jonathan (20:33), and the one he planted in the ground beside his head as a royal standard. By removing it without violence, David performs a devastating symbolic act: he disarms the king without drawing blood. Most remarkable is the tardemah in verse 12 — the same word used for the deep sleep God placed on Adam before creating Eve (Genesis 2:21) and on Abraham during the covenant of the pieces (Genesis 15:12). This is not ordinary exhaustion. The narrator explicitly states it came from the LORD, marking the entire scene as divinely orchestrated. God opened the way for David to kill Saul and David chose restraint.*

Translation Friction: *The central theological tension is David's twice-stated principle that the LORD's anointed must not be struck by human hands (verses 9-11). David insists that the LORD himself must deal with Saul — through natural death, battle, or divine judgment. This raises a difficult question: if God sent the tardemah to give David access to Saul, was God testing David or tempting him? Abishai reads the situation as divine permission to kill ('God has delivered your enemy into your hand today,' verse 8), while David reads the same situation as a divine test of loyalty to the principle of mashiach YHWH. The text does not resolve this explicitly — it lets David's interpretation stand by showing Saul's subsequent acknowledgment. A second tension emerges in verses 19-20: David's complaint that his enemies have 'driven him out from sharing in the LORD's inheritance' and told him to 'go serve other gods.' This is not hyperbole. In the ancient Near Eastern worldview, to be exiled from your god's territory was to be cut off from that god's presence. David is making a theological protest: forced exile is spiritual violence, not merely political displacement. His request that his blood not fall 'to the ground far from the LORD's face' reveals a man genuinely afraid of dying outside God's domain.*

Connections: *The tardemah (deep sleep) connects this passage to Genesis 2:21 (Adam's sleep before the creation of Eve) and Genesis 15:12 (Abraham's sleep during the covenant ceremony). In all three cases, God acts decisively while the human sleeps — creating, covenanting, and here, demonstrating David's worthiness to rule. David's refusal to harm the LORD's anointed anticipates 2 Samuel 1:14-16, where David executes the Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul, applying the same principle retroactively. The spear (chanit) as a symbol of Saul's kingship connects to 1 Samuel 22:6, where Saul holds court with his spear in hand, and to its final appearance planted in the ground at Gibeah. David's lament about being 'driven from the LORD's inheritance' (nachalat YHWH, verse 19) anticipates the theological geography of the Psalms, where exile from God's land equals exile from God's presence (Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1). Saul's final words — 'I have played the fool and gone badly astray' (verse 21) — echo and surpass his partial confession in 24:17, and stand as the last direct words Saul will speak to David in the entire narrative.*

1The Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah and said, "David is hiding on the hill of Hachilah, overlooking the wasteland." 2Saul set out and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, and with him three thousand of Israel's picked soldiers, to hunt for David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3Saul made camp on the hill of Hachilah, overlooking the wasteland, beside the road. David was staying in the wilderness, and when he learned that Saul had come after him into the wilderness, 4David sent out scouts and confirmed that Saul had arrived for certain. 5David set out and came to the place where Saul had encamped. David observed

the spot where Saul was lying, with Abner son of Ner, the commander of his army, beside him. Saul was lying inside the circle of wagons, with the troops camped all around him. 6David spoke to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and said, "Who will go down with me into Saul's camp?" Abishai said, "I will go down with you." 7David and Abishai made their way into the camp at night. There was Saul, lying asleep inside the circle of wagons, his spear thrust into the ground by his head. Abner and the troops lay sleeping around him. 8Abishai said to David, "God has handed your enemy over to you today. Now let me pin him to the ground with a single thrust of the spear — I will not need a second." 9David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him. For who has ever raised his hand against the LORD's anointed and remained innocent?" 10David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD himself will strike him — either his day will come and he will die, or he will go down into battle and be swept away. 11The LORD forbid that I should raise my hand against the LORD's anointed! But take the spear by his head and the water jug, and let us go." 12David took the spear and the water jug from beside Saul's head, and they left. No one saw. No one knew. No one woke — because all of them were asleep, for a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them. 13David crossed over to the far side and stood on top of a hill at a distance — a wide gap between them. 14David called out to the troops and to Abner son of Ner: "Are you not going to answer, Abner?" Abner answered, "Who are you, calling out to the king?" 15David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? And who is your equal in all Israel? Then why did you not guard your lord the king? Someone entered the camp to destroy the king, your lord. 16What you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you all deserve death, because you did not guard your lord — the LORD's anointed! Now look — where is the king's spear? And where is the water jug that was beside his head?" 17Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, my son David?" David said, "It is my voice, my lord the king." 18He said, "Why does my lord pursue his servant? What have I done? What wrong is in my hand? 19Now please, my lord the king, hear the words of your servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, let him be appeased by an offering. But if it is human beings, let them be cursed before the LORD, because they have driven me out today from sharing in the LORD's inheritance, saying in effect, 'Go serve other gods.' 20So now, do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the LORD's face. The king of Israel has come out to hunt a single flea — like someone chasing a partridge through the hills." 21Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, my son David. I will not harm you again, because you treated my life as precious today. I have played the fool — I have gone badly, badly astray." 22David answered, "Here is the king's spear. Let one of the young men come over and retrieve it. 23The LORD repays each person according to his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD gave you into my hand today, but I refused to raise my hand against the LORD's anointed. 24Just as your life was precious in my eyes today, so may my life be precious in the LORD's eyes, and may he deliver me from every distress." 25Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David. You will certainly accomplish great things, and you will surely prevail." David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Ziphites' second betrayal (the first was in 23:19) establishes them as consistent collaborators with Saul. Their report uses the interrogative halo ('is it not the case that…'), which functions rhetorically as a confident assertion. They are not asking whether David is hiding; they are handing Saul actionable intelligence. The geographical markers — Gibeah (Saul's capital), Hachilah (a known ridge), and ha-yeshimon (the wasteland east of Ziph) — ground the narrative in real terrain that both parties would recognize.
2. The verb yared ('went down') is geographically accurate — Gibeah sits at a higher elevation than the Judean wilderness. The number shelosheth alafim ('three thousand') represents a massive force deployed against one fugitive and his band of roughly six hundred men (23:13). The word bechurei ('chosen, picked') indicates elite troops, not a general levy. The verb levaqesh ('to seek') carries predatory overtones in this context — Saul is not searching; he is hunting. The repetition of 'wilderness of Ziph' at the beginning and end of the verse frames the entire action within this desolate landscape.
3. The verb chanan ('he encamped') indicates a military encampment, not a casual stop. The phrase al ha-derekh ('beside the road') suggests Saul positioned himself along a known route, likely trying to cut off David's escape. The contrast between Saul's organized camp on the hill and David's residence in the open wilderness (yoshev ba-midbar, 'dwelling in the wilderness') underscores the power imbalance. The verb vayyar ('he saw' or 'he perceived') indicates David had scouts monitoring Saul's movements — intelligence was flowing both ways.
4. The word meraggelim ('scouts, spies') comes from the root ragal ('to go on foot, to spy out'), the same word used for the spies Moses sent into Canaan (Numbers 13:2). David operates as a military commander, gathering intelligence before acting. The phrase el nakhon ('to a certainty, for certain') emphasizes that David verified the report — he did not act on the Ziphites' word alone but confirmed Saul's presence through his own reconnaissance.

5. The phrase shar tseva'o ('commander of his army') identifies Abner not merely as a general but as the one personally responsible for Saul's safety. His position next to the king makes the coming scene all the more damning — David will penetrate to the very center of the camp, past thousands of soldiers and past the army commander himself. The verb shakhav ('lying, sleeping') appears three times in this verse, emphasizing the vulnerability of the entire camp.

6. Ahimelech the Hittite (not to be confused with Ahimelech the priest of Nob, chapter 21-22) is a foreign warrior in David's band — his presence confirms that David's company included non-Israelites. The identification of Abishai as achi Yo'av ('Joab's brother') is important for the larger narrative: the sons of Zeruiah — Joab, Abishai, and Asahel — will become David's most capable and most problematic military leaders. Abishai's immediate willingness to descend into the enemy camp reveals his characteristic boldness, but also his recklessness, which the next verses will demonstrate.

6. The verb yered ('go down') is literal — the camp was below David's observation point, and the descent was physical as well as metaphorical. David is entering the place of maximum danger.

7. The phrase chanitho me'ukhah va-arets mera'ashotav ('his spear thrust into the ground at his head') is one of the most visually striking images in the David narrative. The spear planted beside the sleeping king is both a military marker and an ironic symbol — the weapon Saul used to try to kill David now stands unguarded within David's reach. The verb me'ukhah ('thrust in, stuck') comes from a root meaning to press or drive in, indicating the spear was firmly planted, not casually laid aside.

8. Abishai's theological interpretation — 'God has delivered your enemy into your hand' — echoes the exact language used in 24:4 when David's men urged him to kill Saul in the cave. The repetition of this claim across two separate incidents forces the reader to ask whether providential opportunity equals divine permission. Abishai assumes it does. David will argue it does not.

8. The phrase pa'am achat ('one time, a single stroke') and lo eshneh lo ('I will not do it to him a second time') is a soldier's pledge of efficiency. Abishai is not asking for permission to fight — he is asking for permission to execute, and he guarantees it will be clean and quick.

9. The phrase meshiach YHWH ('the LORD's anointed') appears four times in this chapter (verses 9, 11, 16, 23), making it the dominant theological concept. David's ethic is not based on Saul's merit but on God's act of anointing. The verb niqqah ('be clean, be innocent, be acquitted') is a legal term — David is asking whether anyone could stand before God's court after killing the one God consecrated. The answer is built into the question.

10. The threefold enumeration — divine stroke, natural death, or battle death — covers every possibility except assassination. David is not expressing indifference about how Saul dies; he is systematically eliminating the one option Abishai proposed. The verb yigpenu ('will strike him') uses nagaf, which typically describes divine blows — plagues, sudden judgments, military defeats sent by God. The phrase yomo yavo ('his day will come') treats death as an appointed event, part of the divine calendar. The verb nispah ('be swept away') is the same verb Samuel used in 12:25 for the fate of a wicked king — David echoes the prophetic warning without claiming the right to carry it out.

11. The juxtaposition of what David refuses to take (Saul's life) and what he does take (the spear and water jug) creates a powerful contrast. The chanit ('spear') is Saul's weapon and royal emblem; the tsappachath hammayim ('water jug') is a clay or leather container for drinking water — an utterly ordinary object. Together they serve as undeniable proof that David stood over the sleeping king and chose restraint. The phrase nelkhah lanu ('let us go for ourselves') ends the scene with decisive withdrawal — David has made his point and leaves.

12. The three-part negation (no one saw, no one knew, no one woke) uses a literary technique called climactic enumeration, building from external perception (seeing) to internal awareness (knowing) to physical response (waking). The entire sensory apparatus of three thousand soldiers has been disabled.

12. The word tardemah appears only seven times in the Hebrew Bible, and each occurrence involves divine action during human unconsciousness. Its use here is the narrator's explicit theological commentary: this was not luck, exhaustion, or coincidence. God orchestrated the scene.

13. The phrase rav ha-maqom beinehem ('the space between them was great') is both geographical and symbolic. David has placed a valley between himself and Saul's camp before he speaks — he is beyond reach of pursuit. The verb avar ('crossed over') suggests he traversed a wadi or ravine. The positioning on rosh ha-har ('the top of the hill') gives David both safety and acoustic advantage — sound carries across the Judean wilderness valleys, and the hilltop position ensures his voice will reach the camp below.

14. David calls to the troops generally (ha-am, 'the people') but singles out Abner by name. The taunt halo ta'aneh ('will you not answer?') is deliberately provocative — David is waking the camp commander and immediately putting him on the defensive. Abner's response — mi attah qarata el ha-melekh ('who are you, calling to the king?') — is both a challenge and an admission that he does not know who is speaking. The irony is thick: Abner, whose job is to protect the king, cannot even identify the voice of the man who just stood over the king's sleeping body.

15. The phrase halo ish attah ('are you not a man?') is cutting sarcasm. David is questioning Abner's competence, courage, and basic manhood all at once. The follow-up umi khamokha be-Yisra'el ('and who is like you in Israel?') intensifies the mockery — if Abner is the greatest warrior in Israel, how did an intruder reach the king? The verb le-hashchit ('to destroy') is the same root David used in verse 9 (al tashchitehu), creating a deliberate echo: David commanded Abishai not to destroy the king, but someone could have destroyed the king because Abner failed. The double use of adonekha ha-melekh ('your lord the king') hammers Abner's duty and his failure.

16. The phrase benei maveth (literally 'sons of death') is a Hebrew idiom for those under sentence of death. David pronounces this sentence with covenant authority — he is not threatening personal revenge but declaring a legal verdict based on the dereliction of sacred duty. The identification of Saul as meshiach YHWH rather than simply 'the king' elevates the charge from military negligence to sacrilege.

16. The demand to look at the missing spear and water jug is David's proof. Physical evidence replaces verbal accusation — the empty ground beside Saul's head speaks louder than any testimony.

17. The exchange of titles — 'my son' and 'my lord the king' — captures the fractured relationship in miniature. Saul uses kinship language; David uses political language. Both are technically accurate (David was Saul's son-in-law and Saul was still the reigning king), but neither captures the full reality of their situation. The voice recognition across the valley in the pre-dawn darkness adds an intimate quality to this confrontation between two men who once loved each other.

18. David's speech shifts from addressing Abner (verses 14-16) to addressing Saul directly. His self-designation as avdekha ('your servant') maintains the fiction of feudal loyalty even while protesting persecution. The two questions — meh asiti ('what have I done?') and mah be-yadi ra'ah ('what evil is in my hand?') — are not requests for information but legal challenges. David demands that Saul produce a charge. The word ra'ah ('evil, wrong') in David's hand is contrasted with what was actually in David's hand moments ago: Saul's own spear, which David chose not to use.

19. The verb hesitikha ('has stirred you up, has incited you') is striking because it attributes potential hostile agency to God. The same verb is used in 2 Samuel 24:1 when God incites David to take a census and in Job 2:3 when God says the Adversary incited him against Job. David entertains the possibility that his suffering is divinely caused — and if so, the proper response is worship, not resistance.

19. The phrase nachalat YHWH ('the LORD's inheritance') refers to the promised land as God's personal estate. Israel does not merely live in the land; they share in God's own inheritance. Exile from this land is theological catastrophe, not merely geographical displacement. David's anguish here is not primarily about safety but about access to God's presence.

20. The phrase minneged penei YHWH ('from before the face of the LORD') is theologically critical. David links his physical location to God's presence — to die in exile is to die outside God's sight. This reflects the ancient Israelite conviction that the land of Israel was uniquely God's territory and that God's 'face' (panim) was accessible primarily there.

20. The partridge (qore, likely the chukar partridge common in the Judean hills) was hunted by persistent chase. Hunters would flush it repeatedly until it could no longer take flight, then catch it by hand. David is saying: you are expending royal resources on an exhausting pursuit of something worthless. The self-deprecation is strategic — by minimizing his own importance, David maximizes the absurdity of Saul's obsession.

21. Saul's threefold confession — I have sinned, I have played the fool, I have gone far astray — surpasses his admission in 24:17 ('you are more righteous than I'). Here Saul does not merely compare himself unfavorably to David; he indicts himself absolutely. Yet the narrator offers no indication that this confession leads to changed behavior. The reader knows from the larger narrative that Saul will not seek David again, but neither will he abdicate or restore David to his place. The confession is genuine but ultimately impotent — Saul sees the truth but cannot reorganize his life around it.

21. The double intensifier harbeh me'od ('greatly, exceedingly') is rare and emphatic. Saul is not minimizing his failure; he is drowning in the recognition of it.

22. David does not return the spear personally. He offers it back through an intermediary — a deliberate choice that maintains the distance between them. The phrase hinneh chanith ha-melekh ('here is the king's spear') presents the weapon as evidence one final time before releasing it. The spear will return to Saul, but the point has been made: David held the instrument of royal power and gave it back. The verb yiqqacheha ('let him take it') is matter-of-fact — David treats the spear as an object to be retrieved, not a trophy to be bargained over.

23. David now openly states what he implied to Abishai: God did deliver Saul into his hand. He accepts Abishai's reading of the situation as providentially arranged but rejects the conclusion. The distinction is crucial for the theology of the chapter: divine opportunity is not the same as divine command. God may open a door without requiring you to walk through it.

23. The pairing of tsedaqah ('righteousness') and emunah ('faithfulness') represents the full scope of covenant loyalty — right action and consistent character. David claims both, not arrogantly but as evidence submitted to the divine court.

24. The symmetry of the verse is deliberate: your life / my eyes becomes my life / the LORD's eyes. David has acted as God's representative toward Saul — protecting the anointed, refusing violence — and now he asks God to act toward him with the same protective care. This is not a quid pro quo but a prayer grounded in the conviction that God's character mirrors the mercy David has shown.

25. The infinitive absolute pairs (aso ta'aseh and yakhol tukhal) represent the highest degree of certainty Hebrew grammar can express. Saul is not wishing David well; he is declaring an outcome he can see but cannot prevent. There is something prophetic and tragic in a king blessing the man who will replace him.

25. The final sentence — David went his way, Saul returned to his place — is one of the great narrative closings in the Hebrew Bible. No further commentary is offered. No reconciliation occurs. No promise is extracted. The two men simply walk apart, and the narrator lets the silence speak. This is the last direct encounter between Saul and David in the entire narrative of 1 Samuel.

27

Summary: *David, exhausted by years of fleeing Saul through the Judean wilderness, concludes that he will eventually be killed unless he escapes Israelite territory entirely. He crosses the border into Philistia with his six hundred men and their households, placing himself under the protection of Achish son of Maoch, king of Gath. When Saul learns David has fled to Philistia, he stops pursuing him. David requests and receives Ziklag, a town in the southern frontier, as his base of operations. From Ziklag, David conducts raids against the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites — peoples of the deep south — while telling Achish he has been raiding Judean territory and its allies. David leaves no survivors from his raids to prevent anyone from reporting his deception to Gath. Achish, completely deceived, believes David has made himself permanently hated by Israel and will serve as his vassal forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter presents David at his most morally ambiguous. The man anointed by God's prophet now swears fealty to a Philistine king, lives among Israel's archenemies, and sustains himself through a systematic campaign of deception and total warfare. The narrator offers no divine oracle, no prophetic word, no consultation of the ephod — the silence of God in this chapter is deafening. David's opening soliloquy in verse 1 ('I will be swept away one day by the hand of Saul') is the only time in the narrative where David's reasoning is presented without divine input, and his conclusion — to flee to Philistia — appears to be entirely his own strategic calculation. The text neither condemns nor approves. It simply records. What makes this especially striking is the contrast with David's earlier refusals to kill Saul (chapters 24 and 26), where he explicitly invoked covenant theology. Here, covenant language disappears entirely. David operates in a theological vacuum, surviving by wit and brutality rather than by faith. The chapter is also structurally pivotal: it removes David from Israelite soil, setting up the catastrophic collision at the battle of Gilboa where David will be expected to fight against his own people.*

Translation Friction: *The deepest tension is theological: is David outside God's will, or is God's providence operating through David's morally compromised choices? The text refuses to answer. The verb amar in verse 1 ('David said in his heart') presents David's reasoning as internal deliberation, not divine instruction — a sharp contrast with earlier episodes where David 'inquired of the LORD' before acting (23:2, 23:4). Translators must also navigate the ethical horror of verse 11: David kills every man and woman in his raids specifically to eliminate witnesses to his deception. The Hebrew lo yechayeh ('he would not let live') uses the Piel of chayah, an intensive form indicating deliberate, systematic killing. This is not battlefield casualties but calculated extermination for the purpose of maintaining a lie. The translator's challenge is to render this without either sanitizing the violence or sensationalizing it — the Hebrew text states it flatly, and so must the rendering. Finally, the phrase 'to this day' in verse 6 (regarding Ziklag belonging to the kings of Judah) is a rare editorial note that reveals the narrator is writing long after the events, during or after the divided monarchy.*

Connections: *David's flight to Gath recalls his earlier, disastrous visit in chapter 21, where he feigned madness to escape Achish. Now he returns with an army of six hundred, and Achish welcomes him — the power dynamic has completely shifted. The Ziklag gift connects forward to 2 Samuel 1:1, where David receives news of Saul's death while at Ziklag, and backward to the tribal allotments, since Ziklag was originally assigned to Simeon within Judah's territory (Joshua 19:5). David's raids against the Amalekites continue the unfinished business of Saul's failed war in chapter 15 — the very mission whose botched execution cost Saul his kingdom. There is deep irony: the exile is completing the holy war the king could not. David's deception of Achish foreshadows the larger deception that will nearly trap him at the battle of Gilboa (chapters 28-29), where Achish expects David to fight against Israel. The Geshurites mentioned here should be distinguished from the Geshurites of the Transjordan, whose princess Maacah will later become David's wife and Absalom's mother (2 Samuel 3:3) — a connection that suggests David's time in the south was laying political groundwork for his future reign.*

1 David said to himself, "One of these days I will be swept away by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to
escape — escape completely — into the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in the
territory of Israel, and I will slip out of his grasp." 2 So David set out and crossed over — he and the six hundred men with

him — to Achish son of Maoch, king of Gath. 3David settled with Achish in Gath — he and his men, each man with his household. David brought his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal. 4When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he stopped searching for him entirely. 5David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in one of the outlying towns so I can settle there. Why should your servant live in the royal city alongside you?" 6So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. This is why Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. 7The total time David lived in Philistine territory was a year and four months. 8David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites — for these were the peoples who had inhabited the region from ancient times, along the road toward Shur and as far as the land of Egypt. 9David would strike the region and leave no man or woman alive. He would take the sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels, and clothing, then return and come to Achish. 10When Achish would ask, "Where did you raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negev of Judah," or "Against the Negev of the Jerahmeelites," or "Against the Negev of the Kenites." 11David would leave no man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, reasoning, "Otherwise they will report against us and say, 'This is what David did.'" This was his practice the entire time he lived in Philistine territory. 12Achish trusted David completely, thinking, "He has made himself so repulsive to his own people Israel that he will be my servant permanently."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The absence of divine consultation is conspicuous. In the preceding chapters, David repeatedly 'inquired of the LORD' through Abiathar's ephod (23:2, 23:4, 23:9-12). Here, no inquiry is made. David's reasoning is entirely pragmatic: probability of death under Saul versus probability of survival under Achish. Whether this silence represents a lapse in faith or simply a narrative choice to focus on David's strategic mind, the text does not say.

1. The doubling of the verb malat (himalet immalet, 'escaping I will escape') mirrors the emphatic construction Saul used when God rejected him — the same grammatical intensity that marked Saul's doom now marks David's survival strategy. The irony is layered: David flees to the very people whose champion he killed in chapter 17.

2. The verb vayyaqom ('he rose up') followed by vayyaavor ('he crossed over') is a formulaic pair indicating decisive departure. The verb avar ('to cross over') carries weight in biblical narrative — it is the verb used for crossing the Jordan, crossing boundaries, and transitioning between states. David is not merely traveling; he is crossing a theological and political boundary from the LORD's land into Philistine territory. The six hundred men represent the loyal fighting force that has been with David since Adullam (chapter 22), now a mobile army-in-exile. Achish ben Maokh is identified by patronym and title, establishing him as a legitimate vassal king, not a minor chieftain.

3. The identification of Abigail as 'wife of Nabal the Carmelite' rather than 'wife of David' is narratively significant. The text preserves her former identity, perhaps as an editorial reminder that David's household has a complicated history. The phrase ish u-veito ('each man and his house') totals a community of several thousand people when women and children are included — this is a mass emigration, not a covert operation.

4. The verb barach ('he fled') is the standard term for flight from danger — the same verb used of Jacob fleeing Laban (Genesis 31:20-21) and Moses fleeing Pharaoh (Exodus 2:15). It frames David's departure not as a strategic relocation but as a fugitive's desperate escape. The phrase lo yosef od levaqsho ('he did not continue again to seek him') uses the verb yosef ('to add, to continue') with the infinitive, a construction meaning complete cessation. David's calculation from verse 1 has proved correct: crossing into Philistia ended Saul's pursuit. But the irony is severe — David is safe from the king of Israel only because he is now a vassal of the king of Gath.

5. The phrase ir hamamlakhah ('the royal city') is literally 'the city of the kingdom,' meaning the capital or seat of royal power. David's stated reason for leaving — that he is unworthy to live alongside the king — is deferential on the surface but deceptive in purpose. By relocating to the periphery, David creates the operational freedom he needs to maintain his double life. The request also benefits Achish by removing a large, potentially destabilizing foreign military force from his capital — a point David may have calculated as well.

6. The editorial note lakhen hayetah Tsiqlag le-malkhei Yehudah ('therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah') uses the preposition le- indicating ongoing possession. This is an etiological note — it explains a present reality by narrating its origin. The plural 'kings of Judah' dates the narrator (or a later editor) to the period of the divided monarchy at the earliest. The irony is thick: a Philistine vassal grant becomes permanent Judean royal property, a piece of the promised land recovered not through holy war but through political asylum.

7. The phrase yamim ve-arba'ah chodashim is literally 'days and four months.' The word yamim ('days') here functions idiomatically to mean 'a year' — the same usage appears in Leviticus 25:29 and Judges 17:10. Some interpreters read it as 'some days and four months,' yielding a shorter period, but the traditional understanding as 'a year and four months' (sixteen months total) is supported by the Septuagint and the scope of activity described in the following verses. This chronological note serves a structural function, marking the duration of David's Philistine exile as a defined period with a beginning and an end.

8. The Geshurites here (ha-Geshuri) must be distinguished from the Geshurites of 2 Samuel 3:3 and 13:37, who lived east of the Sea of Galilee. These southern Geshurites occupied the Negev frontier. The Girzites (ha-Gizri) appear nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, making them one of the text's small mysteries — a people remembered only because David raided them.

8. David's choice of targets is strategic: he attacks peoples who are enemies of both Israel and Judah, gaining plunder while eliminating groups that might threaten Judean settlements. The Amalekites in particular are the people Saul was commanded to destroy in chapter 15 — David is finishing work the rejected king failed to complete, though his motive here is survival, not obedience.

9. The grammar here shifts to habitual aspect — the Hebrew uses converted perfects (vav-consecutive) in a way that describes repeated, customary action. This was not a single raid but David's sustained practice throughout his sixteen months in Philistine territory. The phrase lo yechayeh ish ve-ishah ('he would not let man or woman live') is chilling in its matter-of-fact delivery. The narrator reports extermination without comment, leaving the moral weight entirely on the reader.

9. The five categories of plunder (sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels, clothing) form a complete inventory of movable wealth in the ancient Near East. Clothing (begadim) was a significant form of portable wealth — garments were expensive, durable, and easily transported, functioning almost as currency in the ancient world.

10. The rendering adjusts the grammar to habitual aspect ('would ask,' 'would say') to match the iterative nature of the Hebrew, which describes a repeated pattern rather than a single conversation. The word Negev (negev) means 'south' or 'dry region' and functions both as a compass direction and as a proper regional name for the arid zone south of the Judean hill country.

10. David's three named targets — Judah, the Jerahmeelites, and the Kenites — are precisely the groups he was actually cultivating as allies (see 30:29 where David sends gifts to these same groups). The deception is architecturally perfect: the peoples David claims to be attacking are the ones he is actually protecting and courting for his future kingdom.

11. The phrase ve-khoh mishpato ('and such was his practice') uses mishpat in its sense of 'customary procedure' or 'established pattern.' This is the same word that elsewhere means 'justice' or 'judgment' — its application to David's extermination policy creates a disturbing semantic collision. The narrator does not editorialize; the word choice does the work.

11. The clause kol hayyamim asher yashav bisdei Pelishtim ('all the days he lived in the territory of the Philistines') confirms that this was not an isolated incident but David's sustained operational method for sixteen months. The totality of the statement — all the days, no survivors, every raid — forces the reader to sit with the full scope of what David's survival required.

12. The root aman ('to trust, to believe') connects to one of the deepest theological terms in the Hebrew Bible — it is the root of emunah ('faithfulness') and amen ('it is firm, it is sure'). The application of this word to Achish's misplaced confidence is richly ironic: the vocabulary of covenant faithfulness describes a pagan king's naivety. Achish 'amens' a lie.

12. The phrase le-eved olam ('as a permanent servant') uses the same language found in the law of the Hebrew slave who chooses perpetual bondage (Exodus 21:6). Achish sees David as having voluntarily entered permanent Philistine servitude. The dramatic irony is at its peak: David, the LORD's anointed king over Israel, is confidently classified as a Philistine possession forever. The chapter ends on this note of total deception — Achish deceived, David compromised, God silent, and the future entirely uncertain.

28

Summary: *The Philistines muster for war against Israel, and Saul — terrified, abandoned by God, and desperate — seeks out a woman at Endor who traffics with the dead, the very practice he himself had banned. He asks her to summon Samuel from death. What rises is described by the woman as an elohim ascending from the earth, and Samuel himself appears — not as a pale ghost but as a speaking, judging presence who delivers God's verdict: tomorrow Saul and his sons will die, and Israel will fall to the Philistines. Saul collapses face-first on the ground, broken by the sentence. The woman, showing unexpected compassion, persuades the king to eat before he goes out to meet his death.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most theologically volatile chapters in the Hebrew Bible. The narrator never hedges: the figure who rises is called Samuel (verse 12, 14, 15, 16). The text does not say 'a spirit claiming to be Samuel' or 'what appeared to be Samuel.' The woman sees him; Samuel speaks; his prophecy comes true the next day. Yet the entire episode takes place through a practice that the Torah explicitly condemns (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 20:27, Deuteronomy 18:10-12) and that Saul himself had outlawed (verse 3). The text offers no resolution to the tension. It does not explain how a banned ritual could produce a genuine prophetic word, nor does it validate necromancy by the outcome. Instead, it lets the contradiction stand as testimony to how far Saul has fallen: the king who once stood among the prophets (10:11) now crouches in disguise before a medium, begging the dead for what the living God will no longer give him. The woman's terrified scream when Samuel actually appears (verse 12) suggests that even she did not expect this to work — something beyond her craft has intervened.*

Translation Friction: *The word elohim in verse 13 is the primary translation flashpoint. The woman says 'I see an elohim ascending from the earth.' Elohim can mean 'God,' 'gods,' 'divine being,' 'supernatural being,' or even 'judges' depending on context. The KJV renders it 'gods,' the LXX has theoi. We render it 'a divine being' because the singular description that follows (an old man wrapped in a robe) indicates a single figure, and because the term here functions as a category marker — the woman is telling Saul that what she sees belongs to the supernatural realm, not the human one. This is not a statement about Samuel's deity but about his post-mortem status. The second major difficulty is the phrase ba'alat ov (verse 7), traditionally 'a woman with a familiar spirit.' The word ov refers to the pit or the spirit summoned from it, and ba'alat means 'mistress of, one who controls.' We render it 'a woman who commands a spirit-pit' to preserve the sense of professional expertise in necromancy without importing later demonological frameworks. The chapter also raises the question of whether God himself sent Samuel or whether the medium's ritual succeeded on its own power — the text deliberately refuses to answer.*

Connections: *Saul's nocturnal journey to Endor inverts his earlier journey to find Samuel in chapter 9 — there he was looking for lost donkeys and found a kingdom; here he is looking for lost guidance and finds his death sentence. The disguise motif connects to later royal disguises in the tradition (Jeroboam's wife in 1 Kings 14:1-6, Ahab at Ramoth-gilead in 1 Kings 22:30), all of which fail because God sees through them. Samuel's pronouncement that 'the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand' (verse 17) reprises his earlier declaration at the robe-tearing incident (15:27-28), creating a frame around Saul's entire reign. The woman's preparation of food for Saul — slaughtering a fatted calf and baking unleavened bread — carries sacrificial overtones; it is almost a funeral meal before the death has occurred. The Philistine gathering at Shunem (verse 4) sets the stage for the battle of Mount Gilboa in chapter 31, where every detail of Samuel's prophecy will be fulfilled.*

1In those days the Philistines assembled their forces for war, to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You must understand clearly that you and your men will march out with me in the army." 2David said to Achish, "Then you yourself will see what your servant can do." Achish said to David, "Then I will make you my permanent bodyguard." 3Now Samuel was dead. All Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had expelled the spirit-conjurers and the diviners from the land. 4The Philistines assembled, advanced, and encamped at Shunem. Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. 5When Saul saw the Philistine camp, he was afraid, and his heart shook violently. 6Saul inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him — not by dreams, not by the Urim, not by prophets. 7Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who commands a spirit-pit, so I can go to her and seek answers through her." His servants said to him, "There is a woman who commands a spirit-pit at Endor." 8Saul disguised himself, put on different clothing, and set out — he and two men with him. They came to the woman at night. He said, "Conjure for me through the spirit-pit and bring up for me whoever I name to you." 9The woman said to him, "You surely know what Saul has done — how he cut down the spirit-conjurers and the diviners from the land. Why are you setting a trap for my life, to get me killed?" 10Saul swore to her by the LORD: "As the LORD lives, no punishment will fall on you for this." 11The woman said, "Whom should I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." 12When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed aloud. The woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" 13The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said to Saul, "I see a divine being rising from the earth." 14He said to her, "What does he look like?" She said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." Saul knew it was Samuel. He bent down with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. 15Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul said, "I am in terrible distress. The Philistines are waging war against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no longer — not through prophets, not through dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what I should do." 16Samuel said, "Why do you ask me, when the LORD has turned away from you and become your adversary?" 17The LORD has done to you just as he spoke through me: the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand and given it to your neighbor — to David. 18Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not carry out his burning anger against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you today. 19The LORD will also hand Israel over, along with you, into the power of the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will give the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines. 20Saul immediately fell full-length on the ground, terrified by Samuel's words. There was no strength left in him, because he had eaten no food all that day and all that night. 21The woman came to Saul and saw that he was deeply shaken. She said to him, "Your servant listened to your voice. I

put my life in my hands and obeyed the words you spoke to me. 22Now please, you too listen to the voice of your servant. Let me set a piece of bread before you. Eat, so that you will have strength when you go on your way." 23He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, along with the woman, pressed him until he gave in. He got up from the ground and sat on the bed. 24The woman had a fattened calf in the house. She quickly slaughtered it, took flour, kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread. 25She set it before Saul and before his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went out into the night.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase ba-yamim hahem ('in those days') signals a temporal overlap with the events of chapters 26-27. The Philistine muster is the military backdrop that will drive the entire chapter. The verb yiqbetsu ('they assembled') uses the root qavats, denoting the deliberate concentration of scattered forces into a unified army.

1. Achish's statement to David assumes complete fealty. David has been living under Achish's protection in Ziklag (chapter 27), raiding Israelite enemies while pretending to raid Israelites. The moment of reckoning has arrived: Achish expects David to fight Israel. David's response in verse 2 is masterfully ambiguous.

2. The adverb lakhen ('therefore, accordingly') appears in both David's and Achish's statements, creating a false sense of mutual agreement. David's lakhen is evasive; Achish's is decisive. The disconnect between what David means and what Achish understands is the engine of dramatic irony throughout the Ziklag narrative.

2. The phrase kol ha-yamim ('all the days') means permanently — Achish envisions David as his personal guard indefinitely. This scene is cut short and will not resolve until chapter 29, where the Philistine lords will refuse to let David march into battle, providentially rescuing him from the impossible dilemma.

3. This verse is nearly identical to 25:1, where Samuel's death was first reported. The repetition here serves a narrative purpose: the reader must be reminded that Samuel is dead before he appears. The redundancy is deliberate, emphasizing the impossibility of what is about to happen.

3. The term ha-ovot ('the spirit-conjurers') is the plural of ov, referring to those who practice necromancy — summoning the dead through a ritual pit or spirit. The yidde'onim ('the diviners' or 'knowing ones') are a related class of occult practitioners who claim access to hidden knowledge. Saul's ban on both classes fulfills the Deuteronomic mandate (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) — which makes his later violation of his own law all the more self-condemning.

4. The geography is critical. Shunem sits in the Jezreel Valley at the foot of the Hill of Moreh; Gilboa is the mountain ridge to the south across the valley. The two armies face each other across open ground — terrain that favors the Philistines with their chariots and iron weapons. Saul has allowed the Philistines to penetrate deep into Israelite territory, far north of their traditional coastal base. The strategic situation is already catastrophic before any spiritual crisis begins.

4. The verb vayyiqbetsu ('they assembled') mirrors verse 1 — the Philistine war machine is in motion. Saul's parallel gathering (vayyiqbots) uses the same root, but the symmetry is deceptive. The Philistines assemble with confidence; Saul assembles in terror (verse 5).

5. The verb charad appears elsewhere for the trembling of Isaac when he discovers Jacob's deception (Genesis 27:33) and for the trembling of the earth at Sinai (Exodus 19:18). It denotes a violent, involuntary shaking that signals the loss of composure and control. Saul's heart — the seat of will and courage in Hebrew thought — is no longer his own.

6. The triple gam construction ('also by...also by...also by') is emphatic in Hebrew — it lists every available channel and slams each one shut. The order may be ascending in directness: dreams are indirect and ambiguous, the Urim gives a yes-or-no answer, and prophets deliver articulated messages. God refuses all three levels of communication.

6. The silence of God is one of the most terrifying themes in the Hebrew Bible. In 1 Samuel 14:37, Saul experienced a similar silence when he inquired about pursuing the Philistines, and that silence was connected to Jonathan's unwitting violation of Saul's oath. Here the silence is total and final — it is the covenant relationship itself that has gone dark.

7. The speed of the servants' reply is narratively significant. They do not hesitate or express surprise at the request. They know exactly where a medium is operating despite the ban. This suggests either that the purge was superficial or that the servants were already aware of Saul's desperation.

7. Endor (Ein Dor, 'spring of the dwelling') is located on the northern slope of the Hill of Moreh — which means it is on the far side of the Philistine camp from Saul's position at Gilboa. To reach the medium, Saul will have to skirt or pass through enemy territory at night. The geography underscores his desperation: he risks his life just to reach the woman.

8. The verb qasam ('to divine, to practice divination') is from the same root as qosem ('diviner'), one of the forbidden practitioners listed in Deuteronomy 18:10-12. Saul is not merely bending the rules; he is commanding a woman to perform the exact practice he banned and that the Torah condemns.

8. The phrase et asher omar elayikh ('whoever I name to you') delays the revelation of whom Saul wants summoned, building narrative tension. The reader already knows — the dead prophet has been on Saul's mind since verse 3 — but the woman does not.

9. The verb hikhrit ('he cut down, he cut off') comes from karat, the covenant-cutting root — the same verb used for making covenants and for the penalty of being 'cut off from the people.' Saul did not merely banish these practitioners; he annihilated them. The woman's fear is justified: the penalty for necromancy is death (Leviticus 20:27).

9. The verb mitnaqesh ('setting a trap, ensnaring') comes from naqash or yaqosh, meaning to lay a snare as a hunter traps prey. The woman suspects entrapment — that this stranger is an agent provocateur sent by Saul to flush out surviving mediums. The irony, unknown to her, is that the man asking her to break Saul's law is Saul himself.

10. The oath formula chai YHWH ('as the LORD lives') is the most solemn oath available in Israelite speech. David uses it repeatedly throughout 1 Samuel (as in 20:3, 25:26). To use it in this context — guaranteeing immunity for necromancy — is to weaponize sacred language for profane purposes. The narrator records this without comment, letting the reader absorb the full weight of the contradiction.

11. The exchange is terse — two short sentences that carry enormous theological weight. The verb a'aleh ('I will bring up') and ha'ali ('bring up') both use the Hiphil of alah, the causative form meaning 'to cause to ascend.' The dead are imagined as below, in Sheol, and must be brought upward through ritual action. Saul names Samuel without hesitation — this has been his intention all along. The dead prophet is his last hope.

12. The woman's scream is the strongest evidence that what occurred transcended her normal practice. Mediums who regularly performed seances would not scream at their own results. The implication is that genuine contact with the dead was not what her rituals typically produced — this time, something real broke through, and it terrified her.

12. Her instant recognition of Saul suggests a connection between the apparition and the revelation of identity. Some interpreters argue that Samuel told her; others that the sheer magnitude of the event made her realize only a king would dare seek such consultation for such a figure.

13. We render elohim as 'a divine being' rather than 'gods' (KJV) or 'a spirit' (NIV) because the term here functions as a category designation: the woman is telling Saul that what she sees belongs to the supernatural order. The plural form elohim is used elsewhere for single supernatural beings (as in Psalm 82:1, where God stands in the assembly of el, among the elohim). The woman is not making a theological claim about Samuel's nature; she is reporting what category of entity she perceives.

13. The participle olim ('ascending, rising') confirms the vertical cosmology assumed throughout: the dead are below, in Sheol, and must come up. The preposition min ha-arets ('from the earth/ground') locates the point of emergence.

14. The me'il ('robe') is the connecting thread. In 2:19, Hannah brings a small me'il to the boy Samuel at Shiloh each year. In 15:27, Saul seizes the hem of Samuel's me'il and tears it, and Samuel turns the torn robe into a prophetic sign: 'The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today.' In 24:4, David cuts the hem of Saul's me'il and is immediately stricken with guilt. The robe carries symbolic weight throughout 1 Samuel as a marker of authority and identity. That Samuel appears still wearing it in death suggests that his prophetic identity persists beyond the grave.

14. The verb vayyeda ('he knew, he perceived') indicates recognition without sight — Saul identifies Samuel from the woman's verbal description alone. The verb vayyishtachu ('he prostrated himself') is from shachah, the standard verb for worship or deep obeisance. Whether this constitutes worship of the dead or simply the prostration of a desperate man before a greater authority, the text does not distinguish.

15. The narrator identifies the speaker as shemu'el ('Samuel') without qualification — not 'the apparition' or 'the spirit' but Samuel by name. The text commits fully to the reality of Samuel's presence. Whatever theological difficulties this creates, the narrative does not flinch.

15. Saul's list of failed channels differs slightly from verse 6: here he mentions prophets before dreams (reversing the order) and omits the Urim entirely. The omission of the Urim may be significant — Saul may not want to remind Samuel (or himself) that the priestly oracle is unavailable because he massacred the priests.

16. The word arekha is one of the more debated forms in this chapter. Some derive it from 'ar' ('enemy'), while others connect it to the root 'ur ('to rouse, to be hostile'). The Septuagint reads meta tou plesion sou ('with your neighbor'), interpreting it as a reference to David. We follow the reading 'your adversary' because it maintains the theological focus: God himself has crossed to the other side of the conflict.

16. Samuel's question is not a request for information but a rhetorical demolition. If God has departed, what can a dead prophet do? The answer, as verses 17-19 will show, is deliver the verdict God has already decided.

17. The phrase beyadi ('by my hand') is the prophetic agency formula, marking the prophet as the instrument through which God's word comes. Samuel uses it even in death, asserting the continuity of his prophetic office beyond the grave.

17. The naming of David is significant. In chapter 15, Samuel said 'your neighbor who is better than you' without naming anyone. Now the name is spoken aloud: David. The obscure prophecy has become a specific sentence. Saul hears his replacement named to his face by the prophet who anointed both of them.

18. Samuel identifies the specific cause: Saul's failure to execute the cherem (total destruction ban) against Amalek in chapter 15. The phrase charon apo ('his burning anger, his fierce wrath') describes God's settled fury against Amalek, rooted in the Amalekite attack on Israel's rear guard during the exodus (Exodus 17:8-16, Deuteronomy 25:17-19). Saul was commanded to be the instrument of that centuries-old sentence and failed by sparing King Agag and the best livestock.

18. The phrase ha-yom hazzeh ('this day') gives the judgment immediacy. The consequences that began in chapter 15 have now reached their terminal point — 'this day' is the day before Saul's death.

19. The phrase attah u-vanekha immi ('you and your sons with me') is one of the most haunting lines in the Hebrew Bible. 'With me' means in Sheol, in the realm of the dead. Samuel does not promise paradise or punishment — only shared residence in the underworld. The theology of the afterlife here is minimal: the dead are together, below, at rest (until disturbed, as Samuel was). There is no developed eschatology, no heaven or hell — only the grave.

19. The prophecy is fulfilled with exact precision in chapter 31: Saul and three of his sons die on Mount Gilboa the next day, and the Israelite army is routed by the Philistines. Samuel's word, delivered from beyond death, proves as reliable as any prophecy he gave in life.

20. The phrase melo qomato ('the fullness of his stature') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. It is a unique construction that forces the reader to see Saul's entire body — the same body singled out for its impressive height at his coronation — stretched flat on the ground. The narrative arc from 'head and shoulders above everyone' to 'full-length on the floor' is complete.

20. The detail about not eating serves a dual purpose: it explains why Saul has no physical strength to absorb the shock, and it sets up the woman's act of feeding him in verses 21-25. The fasting may also carry ritual significance — those who approached the divine or the dead sometimes fasted in preparation.

21. The verb nivhal ('he was shaken, devastated') comes from bahal, meaning to be terrified, dismayed, or overwhelmed. It describes not mere fear but a shattering of composure — Saul is undone. The woman's approach shifts the scene from prophetic judgment to unexpected human compassion. Her self-designation as shifchatekha ('your maidservant') is the formal language of a subordinate addressing a superior, but the power dynamic has reversed: the outlaw medium is now caring for the broken king.

21. The phrase va-asim nafshi bekhappi ('I put my life in my hands') is an idiom for risking one's life (also in Judges 12:3, 1 Samuel 19:5). She reminds Saul that she took a mortal risk to serve him — now she asks him to do something far simpler: eat.

22. The verbal echo is unmistakable: Saul did not shema beqol YHWH ('listen to the voice of the LORD,' verse 18), but the woman asks him to shema beqol shifchatekha ('listen to the voice of your servant'). The chapter's architecture turns on the question of whose voice Saul will heed. He rejected God's voice, sought a dead prophet's voice, and now accepts a medium's voice.

23. The verb parats ('to breach, to press through') is unusually forceful for a scene of persuasion. It suggests that Saul's refusal was serious and required real effort to overcome. The same verb describes the LORD 'breaking out' against Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:8) and water bursting through (2 Samuel 5:20). The servants and the woman had to break through Saul's death-wish to make him eat.

23. The mittah ('bed, couch') is likely the woman's own furniture — a raised platform or frame with a mat, standard in modest homes. Saul moves from the floor to the bed, the first step in a physical recovery that will get him out the door and back to his army, where he will die the next day.

24. The egel marbeq ('fattened calf') appears in other hospitality scenes: Abraham slaughters a calf for his angelic visitors (Genesis 18:7), and the prodigal son's father kills the fattened calf (Luke 15:23). The motif signals extravagant generosity. This woman — an outlaw medium operating under a death sentence — gives the king who banned her profession the best she has.

24. The matstsot ('unleavened bread') may carry Passover echoes, though the text does not make this connection explicit. The association of unleavened bread with deliverance and departure adds a layer of unintended meaning: Saul is about to depart, but not toward deliverance.

25. The phrase ballaylah hahu ('that night') bookends the chapter with verse 8, where Saul arrived at night (laylah). He came in darkness and leaves in darkness. The narrator offers no commentary, no moral, no theological resolution. The events speak for themselves: a king who lost God, consulted the dead, received his death sentence, was fed by an outlaw, and walked into the night to die.

25. The unnamed woman of Endor is one of the most complex minor characters in the Hebrew Bible. She is a lawbreaker, a necromancer, and a practitioner of everything the Torah condemns — yet she is also the only person in this chapter who shows Saul genuine compassion. She risks her life, sacrifices her best animal, bakes bread, and feeds a broken man. The text refuses to resolve her moral status, leaving the reader to hold both realities together.

29

Summary: *The Philistines muster their forces at Aphek for war against Israel, with David and his men marching in the rear guard under Achish. The Philistine tyrants spot the Hebrews in their ranks and demand their removal, invoking David's reputation as a killer of tens of thousands. Achish defends David's loyalty but is overruled by the furious tyrants, who fear David will turn on them mid-battle to regain Saul's favor. Achish reluctantly sends David away with an oath affirming his personal trust, and David departs early the next morning to return to Ziklag — arriving just in time for the crisis that awaits him in chapter 30.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is a masterpiece of providential narrative engineering. David has spent sixteen months living a double life in Philistine territory (27:7), raiding non-Israelite settlements while telling Achish he was attacking Judah. Now the deception reaches its breaking point: David is marching to war against his own people, against Saul whom he has twice refused to kill, against the very nation he is anointed to rule. The narrator never tells us what David intended to do if the battle proceeded — that moral crisis is left deliberately unresolved because God removes it before it arrives. The Philistine tyrants, acting entirely from self-interest and military pragmatism, become the unwitting instruments of divine rescue. The Hebrew word seren (used exclusively for Philistine rulers, never for Israelite leaders) appears at the critical decision points, emphasizing that these foreign tyrants — not prophets, not priests, not the LORD speaking directly — are the mechanism through which David is extracted from an impossible situation.*

Translation Friction: *The most uncomfortable feature of this text is David's protest in verse 8. When Achish tells him to leave, David objects: 'What have I done? What fault have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?' Translators must decide who 'my lord the king' refers to — Achish or Saul. The ambiguity may be deliberate, reflecting David's double life. If David means Achish, his protest is either genuine (he actually intended to fight Israel) or calculated (maintaining his cover). If David means Saul, the phrase 'enemies of my lord the king' would refer to the Philistines themselves — a subversive declaration hidden in plain sight. The narrator provides no internal monologue, no divine oracle, no authorial comment to resolve this. We are left with the surface of David's words and the providence of his removal. The rendering preserves this ambiguity without forcing a resolution, because the Hebrew text itself refuses to resolve it.*

Connections: *David's situation in Philistine territory connects backward to his flight from Saul (21:10-15, 27:1-4) and forward to the Ziklag crisis (chapter 30) and ultimately to his ascension as king over Judah (2 Samuel 2:1-4). The Philistine muster at Aphek echoes 1 Samuel 4:1, where the Philistines previously assembled at Aphek before capturing the ark — the narrator signals that history is repeating with heightened stakes. The phrase 'Is this not David, of whom they sang in the dances' (verse 5) reaches back to 18:7, where the women's victory song first created the rift between Saul and David. That song, born from triumph over Goliath, has followed David into exile and now both endangers him (the tyrants recognize him as a threat) and saves him (their fear removes him from the battle). Achish's oath 'as the LORD lives' (verse 6) is striking — a Philistine king swearing by Israel's God, either as diplomatic courtesy or as evidence of David's theological influence during his stay in Gath.*

1The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, while Israel was encamped by the spring in Jezreel. 2The Philistine tyrants marched past with their units of hundreds and thousands, and David and his men marched in the rear guard with Achish. 3T he Philistine commanders said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" Achish answered the Philistine commanders, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me now for a year or more? I have found no fault in him from the day he defected to me until this day." 4But the Philistine commanders were furious with him and said, "Send this man back! Let him return to the post you assigned him. He must not go down with us into battle — he could turn against us in the fighting. How better to buy back his master's favor than with the heads of our own men? 5Is this not the David they sing about in their dances: 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" 6So Achish summoned David and said to him, "As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and your service with me in the camp — going out and coming in — has been good in my eyes. I have found nothing wrong with you from the day you came to me until this day. But you are not acceptable to the tyrants. 7So now, go back and go in peace. Do nothing that the Philistine tyrants would consider hostile." 8David said to Achish, "But what have I done? What have you found against your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" 9Achish answered David, "I know — you are as trustworthy in my eyes as a messenger of God. But the Philistine commanders have said, 'He must not go up with us into battle.' 10So rise early in the morning — you and the servants of your lord who came with you. Rise at first light and go." 11David and his men rose early in the morning to head back to Philistine territory, while the Philistines advanced to Jezreel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aphek appears multiple times in the Old Testament as a mustering point for armies moving against Israel. Its mention here deliberately recalls 1 Samuel 4:1, where the same location preceded catastrophic Israelite defeat and the loss of the ark. The narrator is loading the scene with ominous historical resonance.

1. The ayin ('spring, fountain') in Jezreel is a landmark identification, not a symbolic term. Jezreel sits at the southeastern end of the valley bearing its name, controlling a critical pass. Saul's decision to camp here suggests a defensive posture against Philistine advance from the coastal plain.

2. The word seren is rendered 'tyrant' rather than 'lord' to distinguish it from adon ('lord, master') and melekh ('king'). The term is specific to Philistine political structure and carries connotations of autocratic rule within a confederation. The Philistine pentapolis operated as a league of five city-states, each governed by its seren, who held equal authority within the council.

2. David's position ba-acharonah ('in the rear') is ambiguous in its implications. It could indicate a subordinate, less trusted position — or it could reflect the role Achish assigned David as his personal bodyguard (28:2). The narrator lets both readings coexist, building tension about David's actual status and intentions.

3. The text uses sarei pelishim ('commanders of the Philistines') rather than sarnei ('tyrants') here — this may reflect a broader group of military officers beyond the five city-state rulers, or it may be a stylistic variation. Some scholars see the two terms as interchangeable in this context; others distinguish between the sarnei (political rulers) and sarim (military commanders).

3. Achish's defense of David is unwittingly ironic. David has been systematically deceiving Achish for over a year (27:8-12), raiding Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites while reporting that he was attacking Judean clans. Achish's confidence that David has been faultless is itself evidence of how thorough the deception was.

4. The word satan here is not the personal name 'Satan' as it develops in later biblical and intertestamental literature. It is the common noun meaning 'adversary, accuser, opponent' — someone who opposes you in a legal or military context. The same word appears in Numbers 22:22 where the angel of the LORD stands as a satan (opponent) to Balaam, and in 1 Kings 11:14 where God raises up a satan (political adversary) against Solomon. The rendering uses 'turn against us' to capture the military sense without importing later theological connotations.

4. The verb yitratseh ('he would reconcile himself, make himself pleasing') comes from the root ratsah, which carries connotations of restoring favor, gaining acceptance, making amends. The commanders understand the political calculus perfectly: a defector who returns bearing enemy heads is a defector who has proven his loyalty has shifted back.

5. This victory song first appeared in 18:7 after David's defeat of Goliath. It provoked Saul's jealousy (18:8-9), contributed to Saul's attempts on David's life, and now resurfaces in the mouths of Philistine commanders who use it as evidence against David. The song has become a narrative thread connecting David's greatest triumph to his present entanglement — the fame that made him a hero in Israel makes him a suspected traitor among the Philistines.

5. The verb hikkah ('he struck down') is the same martial verb used for David's killing of Goliath (17:50) and his slaughter of two hundred Philistines for the bride price (18:27). The Philistine commanders are reciting a song that celebrates the killing of their own people — the irony is savage and their alarm entirely rational.

6. Achish's oath chai-YHWH ('as the LORD lives') is one of the most remarkable features of this chapter. A Philistine king invoking the personal name of Israel's God is either an extraordinary theological concession, a calculated diplomatic gesture to put David at ease, or evidence that David's presence in Gath has had a religious influence. The narrator does not explain; the oath stands as an unexplored detail that invites reflection.

6. The contrast between be-einay ('in my eyes') and be-einei ha-seranim ('in the eyes of the tyrants') structures Achish's speech: what is good in his eyes is not good in theirs. Achish is caught between personal loyalty and political reality. The seranim as a governing body hold collective authority that overrides any individual seren's judgment, including the king of Gath.

7. The phrase be-shalom ('in peace') appears frequently as a dismissal formula (Genesis 26:29, 44:17; Judges 18:6). It does not necessarily mean 'at peace' but rather 'whole, unharmed, without incident.' Achish is telling David to leave cleanly, without creating a confrontation.

7. The verb ta'aseh ra ('do evil') is deliberately vague — Achish does not specify what hostile act he fears. The ambiguity may reflect his own uncertainty about David's true loyalties, or it may be a diplomatic way of saying: whatever you are planning, do not do it where the tyrants can see.

8. This verse is the single most ambiguous speech in David's narrative. The phrase 'enemies of my lord the king' permits David to mean the exact opposite of what Achish hears. Maintaining this ambiguity in translation is essential — resolving it in either direction would impose a clarity the Hebrew text deliberately withholds. David may be performing loyalty to maintain his cover, or he may be subtly declaring that he would have fought for Israel from within the Philistine ranks. The narrator provides no interior access to David's thoughts.

8. The repeated mah ('what') in David's double question (meh asiti / mah-matsata, 'what have I done / what have you found') mirrors Samuel's self-defense before Israel in 12:3. David is borrowing the language of judicial innocence — presenting himself as a servant wrongly dismissed. Whether this is genuine hurt, political theater, or relief disguised as protest, the text does not say.

9. The phrase mal'akh elohim ('messenger of God') appears again in 2 Samuel 14:17 and 14:20, where it describes someone with supernaturally reliable judgment. Achish may be using a known idiom rather than making a specific theological claim — but the narrator's decision to record it on Philistine

lips is notable. David, the man after God's own heart, is recognized as godlike even by Israel's enemies.

9. The tension between Achish's personal trust and the commanders' collective veto illustrates the limits of Philistine political structure. Achish governs Gath but cannot override the confederacy's military decisions. This structural constraint becomes God's instrument for extracting David from the impossible situation.

10. The urgency of Achish's command — rise early, leave at first light — suggests he fears what might happen if the Philistine commanders find David still in camp. The doubled imperative is not merely rhetorical emphasis but practical urgency: the window for a peaceful departure may be narrow.

10. The phrase avdei adonekha ('servants of your lord') has generated significant textual discussion. The Septuagint expands this verse considerably, adding a reference to the place Achish assigned David. The shorter Hebrew (Masoretic) text preserved here is more terse and more ambiguous, which is characteristic of the narrator's approach throughout this chapter.

11. The verb alu ('they went up') is the standard military term for advancing to battle — the same verb the commanders used in verse 9 when forbidding David to 'go up' (ya'aleh) with them. The Philistines go up without David, and this decision — made by suspicious tyrants for purely strategic reasons — saves David from the impossible choice of fighting his own people and positions him to be absent when Saul dies, preserving his innocence in the succession.

11. The narrator's silence at the chapter's close is theologically significant. There is no prophetic word, no angelic intervention, no dream or vision. God acts entirely through secondary causes: Philistine military paranoia, political confederation dynamics, and Achish's inability to overrule his peers. The providence is total but invisible — discernible only in retrospect.

30

Summary: *David and his men return to Ziklag after being dismissed by the Philistine commanders, only to find the city burned and all their families taken captive by an Amalekite raiding party. Grief turns to mutiny as David's own warriors talk of stoning him. In his lowest moment, David strengthens himself in the LORD his God, inquires through the priest Abiathar, and receives divine authorization to pursue. A collapsed Egyptian slave leads them to the Amalekite camp, where David recovers everything — every person, every possession — and takes additional plunder. When some of David's men refuse to share the spoils with the two hundred who stayed behind at the Wadi Besor, David overrules them and establishes a permanent legal precedent: those who guard the supplies share equally with those who fight.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains the most compressed emotional arc in the David narrative. Within a span of verses, David passes through catastrophic loss, near-assassination by his own men, spiritual renewal, divine consultation, providential guidance through a dying slave, total military victory, and legislative innovation. The pivotal sentence — vayyitchazzeq David ba-YHWH Elohav ('David strengthened himself in the LORD his God') — is one of the most theologically dense single clauses in Samuel. The verb chazaq in the hitpael stem means David actively seized strength from God; it was not passive comfort but a deliberate act of will directed toward the divine. This is the only time in the narrative that David is described this way, and it comes at precisely the moment when every external support has been stripped away: his city burned, his family captured, his men turned against him. The chapter also quietly demonstrates David's fitness for kingship in contrast to Saul. Where Saul consulted God and received silence (28:6), David inquires and receives immediate, specific guidance. Where Saul hoarded or mismanaged plunder (chapter 15), David distributes it with justice. Where Saul's authority fractured under pressure, David's leadership emerges stronger from crisis.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between this chapter and the preceding Philistine narrative requires careful attention. Chapter 29 ends with David dismissed from the Philistine army at Aphek; chapter 30 opens with him arriving at Ziklag 'on the third day.' The Amalekite raid happened while David was away marching with the Philistines — a consequence of his dual allegiance. The text presents this without moralizing, but the reader should notice that David's attempt to serve two masters (Achish and the LORD) nearly cost him everything. The phrase 'statute and ordinance' (choq u-mishpat) in verse 25 raises a question of legal authority: David is not yet king, but he legislates as if he were. The narrator validates this by saying it has been binding 'from that day forward, even to this day' — the formula for established law in Israel. David exercises royal judicial function before he holds the royal office.*

Connections: *The Amalekite raid connects directly to Saul's failure in chapter 15. Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites utterly and did not; now the Amalekites raid with impunity, and it falls to David to do what Saul could not. David's inquiry through the ephod (verse 7-8) recalls the pattern established in 23:1-6 when Abiathar brought the ephod to David — the priestly instrument of divine consultation that Saul forfeited when he slaughtered the priests of Nob (22:18-19). The spoil-sharing law of verse 25 has precedent in Numbers 31:25-27, where Moses divided plunder between warriors and the congregation after the Midianite war. David adapts this Mosaic precedent to his own situation, functioning as a second Moses. The gifts sent to Judah's elders in verses 26-31 are a masterful political act — David shares the plunder from defeating Judah's enemies with the very towns that sheltered him during his fugitive years, building the loyalty base that will make him king at Hebron in 2 Samuel 2:1-4.*

1When David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had already raided the Negev and struck Ziklag — they had attacked it and burned it to the ground. 2They had taken captive the women and everyone in it, from the youngest to the oldest. They killed no one but drove them away and went on their way. 3When David and his men came to the city, they found it burned — and their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken captive. 4David and the men with him raised their voices and wept until they had no strength left to weep. 5David's two wives had been taken captive — Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 6David was in severe distress, because the men were talking of stoning him — the soul of every man was bitter over his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. 7 David said to Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8David inquired of the LORD: "Should I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue — for you will certainly overtake them, and you will certainly recover everything." 9David set out with the six hundred men who were with him. When they reached the Wadi Besor, those who were left behind stopped there. 10David continued the pursuit with four hundred men, while two hundred stayed behind — too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor. 11They found an Egyptian man in the open field and brought him to David. They gave him bread to eat and water to drink. 12They gave him a piece of pressed fig cake and two raisin cakes. He ate, and his spirit returned to him, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. 13David asked him, "Who do you belong to? Where are you from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian youth, a slave of an Amalekite man. My master abandoned me because I fell ill three days ago." 14We raided the Negev of the Cherethites, the territory belonging to Judah, and the Negev of Caleb — and we burned Ziklag. 15David said to him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He replied, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or hand me back to my master, and I will lead you down to them." 16He led him down, and there they were — spread out across the open ground, eating and drinking and celebrating over all the vast plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17David struck them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who mounted camels and fled. 18David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken. David also rescued his two wives. 19Nothing was missing — from the youngest to the oldest, sons and daughters, plunder and everything the Amalekites had taken. David brought it all back. 20David also took all the flocks and herds. They drove these animals ahead of the other livestock, and the men declared, "This is David's plunder." 21David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and had been left at the Wadi Besor. They came out to meet David and the men with him. When David approached, he greeted them warmly. 22But every worthless and wicked man among those who had gone with David spoke up and said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the plunder we recovered — except for each man's wife and children. Let them take those and go." 23David replied, "You must not do this, my brothers — not with what the LORD has given us. He protected us and handed over to us the raiding party that came against us." 24Who would agree with you in this? The share of the one who goes down into battle and the share of the one who stays with the supplies will be the same — they will divide equally. 25From that day forward he established it as a binding statute and rule for Israel, and it remains so to this day. 26When David returned to Ziklag, he sent portions of the plunder to the elders of Judah — to his allies — saying, "Here is a gift for you from the plunder of the enemies of the LORD." 27He sent gifts to those in Bethel, to those in Ramoth of the Negev, and to those in Jattir, 28to those in Aroer, to those in Siphmoth, and to those in Eshtemoa, 29to those in Racal, to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites, and to those in the towns of the Kenites, 30to those

in Hormah, to those in Bor-ashan, and to those in Athach, 31and to those in Hebron — and to every place where David and his men had moved about.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The 'third day' marks the travel time from Aphek, where the Philistine commanders dismissed David (chapter 29). The verb pashtu ('they raided') is the standard term for a sudden military incursion — a fast, violent sweep through undefended territory. The Negev ('the south,' 'the dry land') is the arid region south of the Judean hills, where Ziklag is located. The Amalekites' target was the same region David had been raiding on behalf of Achish (27:8-10), suggesting a retaliatory strike.

1. The verb yisrefu ('they burned') with the object ba-esh ('with fire') is emphatic — Ziklag was not merely damaged but reduced to ash. David returns from one war front to discover devastation at home, a consequence of his absence while playing the double agent with the Philistines.

2. The verb vayyishbu ('they took captive') indicates that the Amalekites seized the population for enslavement or ransom, not slaughter. The phrase mi-qaton ve-ad gadol ('from small to great') encompasses the entire population — children, women, elderly. The narrator pauses to note lo hemitu ish ('they did not kill anyone'), which is both a relief and a narrative necessity: the captives must be alive for David to recover them.

2. The Amalekite restraint stands in ironic contrast to Saul's incomplete destruction of the Amalekites in chapter 15. The Amalekites take captives alive; Saul was supposed to leave none alive but spared King Agag. The reversal is pointed.

3. The particle ve-hinneh ('and behold') marks the moment of horrified discovery. This is the narrator's way of placing the reader inside the soldiers' experience — they arrive expecting home and find ruin. The verb serufah ('burned') is a passive participle indicating a completed state: the city was already fully consumed. The possessive pronouns shift to first-person perspective — neshehem u-vnehem u-vnotehem ('their wives and their sons and their daughters') — making the devastation personal for every man in David's force.

4. The phrase vayyis'u et qolam vayyivku ('they lifted up their voice and wept') is a formulaic expression for loud, public grief — not private tears but the communal wailing of men who have lost everything. The clause ad asher ein bahem koach livkot ('until there was no strength in them to weep') is extraordinary: these are battle-hardened warriors who weep themselves into physical exhaustion. The verse makes no distinction between David and his men — the king-in-waiting and the common soldier share the same collapse.

4. This level of grief from fighting men signals total devastation. These six hundred veterans (27:2) have survived years of pursuit by Saul, but the loss of their families breaks them in a way that no battlefield ever did.

5. The narrator specifies David's personal loss within the collective disaster. Ahinoam is identified by her hometown (Jezreel in the southern hill country, not the northern Jezreel Valley), and Abigail is still identified in relation to her first husband Nabal despite being married to David. The designation eshet Naval ('wife of Nabal') may be a legal or customary identifier — she was known by her previous marriage — or it may remind the reader of her story from chapter 25, where she emerged as a woman of extraordinary wisdom. David's most personal stakes are named.

6. The verb tsarar ('to be narrow, distressed, pressed in') conveys constriction — David is hemmed in by simultaneous catastrophes. The phrase amru ha-am lisqolo ('the people spoke of stoning him') uses the standard vocabulary for mob execution (saqal, 'to stone'). Stoning was both a legal punishment and a mob action; here it is the latter — grief-driven fury seeking a target.

6. The clause vayyitchazzeq David ba-YHWH Elohav is the theological hinge of the chapter. The hitpael stem of chazaq indicates reflexive, deliberate action: David strengthened himself, seized strength, took hold of firmness. The preposition ba- ('in') indicates the source and ground of this strength. Elohav ('his God') is a possessive construction expressing personal covenant relationship. No external agent intervenes — no prophet, no angel, no miracle. David turns inward to a relationship with God and draws from it what he needs to act.

7. David's first act after strengthening himself in the LORD is to summon the priestly instrument of divine inquiry. Abiathar is identified as ben Ahimelekh ('son of Ahimelech'), connecting this moment to the massacre at Nob (22:20-23) — Abiathar is the sole surviving priest, and he carries the ephod that enables communication with God. The ephod here is the priestly garment containing the Urim and Thummim, the oracular devices used to receive yes-or-no answers from God.

7. The request haggisha-na li ha-efod ('please bring near to me the ephod') uses the polite particle na ('please'), showing that even in crisis David addresses the priest with respect for his office. The verb higgish ('bring near') is the same verb used for bringing an offering before God — there is a liturgical quality to this request.

8. The verb sha'al ('to inquire') is the same root that gives us the name Sha'ul (Saul). David does what Saul's name promises — he asks of the LORD — while Saul himself has been cut off from divine response (28:6). The irony is profound: the man named 'Asked' cannot get an answer, while the man named 'Beloved' asks and is answered immediately.

8. The double infinitive absolute construction in God's reply — hasseg tassig ve-hatsel tatsil — is emphatic beyond English translation. Each pair intensifies the verb to its maximum: 'overtaking you will overtake, rescuing you will rescue.' We render this with 'certainly' to convey the guarantee, though the Hebrew is more forceful than any single English adverb can express.

9. The nachal Besor ('Wadi Besor') is a seasonal streambed in the northern Negev, typically identified with Wadi Shallaleh or Wadi Gaza. The name Besor may derive from basar ('flesh, good news') or be of non-Hebrew origin. The phrase ve-hannotarim amadu ('and the remaining ones stood/stopped') introduces the group that will become central to the legal dispute in verses 21-25. The verb amad ('to stand, to stop') simply indicates

they halted — the reason is given in the next verse.

10. The verb piggeru ('they were too exhausted, they collapsed') derives from pagar, meaning to be faint, exhausted, or spent beyond the ability to continue. These two hundred men had already marched three days from Aphek to Ziklag, wept until they had no strength (verse 4), and now faced a forced pursuit south — their bodies simply gave out. The narrative does not criticize them; it records their exhaustion as fact.

10. The division of forces — four hundred pursuing, two hundred remaining — will become the basis for the legal dispute in verses 21-25. The narrator sets this up without commentary, allowing the reader to hold the question: are the exhausted men lesser partners or equal sharers?

11. The discovery of the Egyptian slave is the chapter's providential hinge — a seemingly random find in the wilderness that becomes the key to recovering everything. The phrase ish Mitsri ba-sadeh ('an Egyptian man in the field') presents him as abandoned and alone in open country. David's men feed him before questioning him, an act of practical compassion that also serves their tactical needs — a starving man cannot speak coherently. The provision of lechem ('bread') and mayim ('water') are the basic elements of sustaining life.

12. The pelach develah ('piece of fig cake') and tsimmuqim ('raisin cakes') are concentrated, high-energy foods carried on military campaigns — ideal for reviving a starving man. The phrase vattashov rucho elav ('his spirit returned to him') uses ruach ('spirit, life-breath') to describe his revival from near-death. The three-day period without food or water (sheloshah yamim u-sheloshah lelot) means the Egyptian was abandoned roughly when the raid occurred — he collapsed during or just after the Amalekite attack on Ziklag, placing his abandonment contemporaneous with the raid.

13. David's two questions — le-mi attah ('to whom are you?') and ei mi-zeh attah ('from where are you?') — ask about ownership and origin, the two essential identifiers for a person found alone in the wilderness. The young man identifies himself as a na'ar Mitsri ('Egyptian youth') who is an eved ('slave, servant') of an Amalekite master. The verb azaveni ('he abandoned me') reveals the Amalekite's character: a slave too sick to keep up is left to die. This disposable treatment of a human being contrasts sharply with David's feeding of the man before questioning him.

13. The detail that he fell ill 'three days ago' (ha-yom sheloshah) synchronizes his abandonment with the Ziklag raid, confirming that he was part of the raiding party.

14. The Egyptian slave reveals the full scope of the Amalekite raid: three distinct regions were hit. The Negev of the Kerethi ('Cherethites') refers to the territory of a Philistine-associated group (the Cherethites later appear as part of David's royal guard in 2 Samuel 8:18). The territory 'belonging to Judah' is the tribal allotment, and the Negev of Caleb is the area around Hebron granted to Caleb's clan (Joshua 15:13). This was not a pinpoint strike but a sweeping raid across the entire southern frontier.

14. The slave's admission ve-et Tsiqlag sarafnu va-esh ('and Ziklag we burned with fire') gives David exactly the intelligence he needs. The abandoned slave becomes the instrument of divine provision — the very cruelty of the Amalekite master produces the guide who will lead David to the enemy camp.

15. The Egyptian's two conditions reveal his situation: he fears death at David's hand (im temiteni, 'if you kill me') and return to his master (im tasgireni be-yad adoni, 'if you hand me over into the hand of my master'). The verb hisgir ('to deliver up, to hand over') is the same verb David's enemies used when trying to get towns to 'deliver' David to Saul (23:11-12). The slave bargains with the only leverage he has — information — and secures an oath by God (hishave'ah li be-Elohim) as his guarantee. He trusts David's God-oath more than his own master's loyalty.

16. The particle ve-hinneh ('and behold') again marks a dramatic discovery — but this time it is David finding the enemy. The Amalekites are described as netushim al penei khol ha-arets ('spread out over the face of all the land'), a picture of a force so confident in its safety that it has dispersed without any defensive posture. The three participles — okhelim ve-shotim ve-choggim ('eating and drinking and celebrating') — paint a scene of total revelry. The verb chagag ('to celebrate, to hold a festival') is the same word used for Israel's religious festivals. The Amalekites are holding a feast with stolen goods.

16. Their tactical negligence — no sentries, no defensive perimeter, scattered across open terrain in drunken celebration — makes them perfectly vulnerable. The narrative presents their overconfidence as the setup for David's strike.

17. The battle lasted from neshef ('twilight' — either dawn-twilight or dusk-twilight; most interpreters read this as predawn darkness) until erev le-mochoratam ('the evening of the next day'), a sustained assault lasting up to twenty-four hours. David attacked while the Amalekites were incapacitated from their celebration. The scope of the victory is near-total: only four hundred men on camels — the fastest means of desert escape — got away. The camel detail is specifically Amalekite; this nomadic people's expertise with camels appears as early as Judges 6:5.

17. The four hundred who escape on camels is a notable detail — it matches exactly the number of David's attacking force. The narrator may be drawing attention to the symmetry, or simply recording the fact.

18. The verb hitsil ('he rescued, delivered') fulfills God's promise from verse 8 (hatsel tatsil, 'you will certainly rescue'). The narrator states the recovery in two stages: first the collective — kol asher laqchu Amaleq ('everything the Amalekites had taken') — then the personal — et shtei nashav ('his two wives'). The repetition of David's name in both clauses (vayyatsel David... hitsil David) emphasizes that this is David's victory, achieved under divine authorization.

19. The emphatic accumulation of categories — min ha-qaton ve-ad ha-gadol ('from the small to the great'), banim u-vanot ('sons and daughters'), mi-shalal ('from the plunder'), kol asher laqchu ('everything they had taken') — builds to the comprehensive conclusion ha-kol heshiv David ('David returned everything'). The verb ne'dar ('was missing, was lacking') is negated: nothing was unaccounted for. This total recovery is the fulfillment of the double infinitive absolute promise in verse 8. God said 'you will certainly rescue' and not one person or possession was lost.

20. This verse distinguishes between the recovered property (which belonged to the original owners) and additional Amalekite livestock captured in the battle. The phrase nahagu lifnei ha-miqneh ha-hu ('they drove before that livestock') separates the newly captured animals from the recovered ones. The declaration zeh shelal David ('this is David's plunder') attributes the surplus to David personally — it is his by right of military command. This additional plunder will become the basis for the gifts David sends to Judah's elders in verses 26-31.

21. The verb piggeru ('they were exhausted') is repeated from verse 10 without any added shame — the narrator maintains a neutral description of their physical condition. The phrase vayyets'u liqrat David ('they went out to meet David') shows these men coming forward eagerly, not hiding in embarrassment. David's response — vayyiggash et ha-am vayyish'al lahem le-shalom ('he drew near to the people and asked them about their welfare') — uses the standard greeting formula sha'al le-shalom ('to ask about peace/well-being'). David treats the exhausted men as comrades, not as failures.

22. The narrator's moral judgment is explicit: kol ish ra u-veliyya'al ('every bad and worthless man'). The term beliyya'al ('worthlessness, wickedness') is the same label applied to the sons of Eli (2:12) and to Nabal (25:17, 25) — it marks a person as a violator of social bonds and covenant norms. These men claim the plunder as exclusively theirs because they fought while the others rested. Their concession — 'each man can have his wife and children' — is technically generous (they could have claimed even the families), but the narrator's label makes clear that their position is morally defective.

22. The phrase asher hitsalnu ('which we rescued') uses the first person plural possessively — 'we rescued,' claiming the victory as solely their achievement, ignoring both the divine promise and the collective effort.

23. David's response begins with a prohibition — lo ta'asu khen achai ('you shall not do this, my brothers') — that is both authoritative and fraternal. He calls them achai ('my brothers'), maintaining solidarity even while overruling them. His argument is theological, not tactical: the victory belongs to God, not to the fighters. The clause et asher natan YHWH lanu ('that which the LORD gave to us') reframes the plunder as a divine gift rather than a military earning. The verb shamar ('he guarded, protected') and natan ('he gave, delivered') attribute both safety and victory to God's action. If God gave it, no human faction can claim exclusive ownership.

24. David's rhetorical question — u-mi yishma lakhem la-davar ha-zeh ('and who would listen to you in this matter?') — dismisses their claim as self-evidently unreasonable. He then states the principle: ke-cheleq ha-yored ba-milchamah u-ke-cheleq ha-yoshev al ha-kelim ('like the share of the one going down into battle and like the share of the one sitting by the equipment') — the combatant and the guard receive identical portions. The verb yachdav yachaloqu ('together they will divide') makes equal distribution the rule. The word kelim ('equipment, vessels, supplies, baggage') refers to the gear and provisions that must be guarded — a military necessity, not a luxury assignment.

25. The verb vayyesimeha ('he set it, he placed it') indicates a deliberate legislative act — David does not merely suggest a policy but formally institutes it. The combination choq u-mishpat appears throughout the Pentateuch as a description of God's laws given through Moses (Exodus 15:25; Joshua 24:25). By using this phrase, the narrator places David's ruling in the same category as Mosaic legislation.

25. The precedent has roots in Numbers 31:25-27, where Moses divided Midianite plunder between soldiers and the congregation. David's innovation is to explicitly equate the guard detail with the combat force — the one who stays by the baggage shares equally with the one who fights. This principle will endure as Israelite military law.

26. David's distribution of plunder to the elders of Judah (ziqnei Yehudah) is both generous and strategic. The word re'ehu ('his friends, his allies, his companions') identifies these elders as men who supported David during his fugitive years. The term berakhah ('blessing, gift') reframes war plunder as a covenant blessing — David does not say 'here is plunder' but 'here is a berakhah for you.' The phrase oyvei YHWH ('enemies of the LORD') elevates the Amalekite conflict from personal vengeance to holy war — the plunder comes from God's enemies, which makes the gift sacred.

26. This political act builds the loyalty network that will make David king over Judah at Hebron (2 Samuel 2:1-4). Every gift creates an obligation; every elder who accepts becomes invested in David's future.

27. The list of recipient towns begins. Bethel here likely refers to a southern town distinct from the famous Bethel in Benjamin — possibly a variant of Bethul (Joshua 19:4) in the Simeonite territory. Ramoth Negev ('Heights of the South') is a town in the Negev region. Yattir is a Levitical city in the hill country of Judah (Joshua 15:48, 21:14). Each of these towns is located in territory where David operated as a fugitive and where the elders provided shelter or intelligence.

28. Aroer is a town in the southern Judean territory (distinct from the Aroer east of the Jordan in Moab). Siphmoth is otherwise unknown — it appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, suggesting it was a small settlement in David's network that did not survive as a significant town. Eshtemoa (modern es-Semu) is a Levitical city in the Judean hills (Joshua 15:50, 21:14). The inclusion of Levitical cities alongside unknown villages shows the breadth of David's alliance network.

29. Racal (or Rachal) is another town known only from this passage. The Jerahmeelites and Kenites are the same groups David claimed to raid when deceiving Achish (27:10) — in truth he was raiding Israel's enemies while protecting these allied peoples. Now he rewards them with plunder from the very Amalekites who threatened them all. The Kenites were descendants of Moses' father-in-law (Judges 1:16), traditionally allied with Israel and living in the Negev. The Jerahmeelites were a clan affiliated with Judah (1 Chronicles 2:9). David's gift-giving honors the real alliances he maintained while appearing to serve the Philistines.

30. Hormah ('Destruction') is a significant town in the southern Negev with a history reaching back to the conquest period (Numbers 21:3; Judges 1:17). The name itself commemorates Israel's early victory there. Bor-ashan ('Well of Smoke' or 'Cistern of Smoke') is likely the same as Ashan in Joshua 15:42. Athach is unattested elsewhere and may be a variant of Ether (Joshua 15:42) or a small settlement lost to history. The list continues to trace

David's network across the southern frontier of Judah.

31. Hebron's placement at the end of the list is climactic. This is the city of Abraham's burial, the future site of David's coronation over Judah, and the political center of the southern tribe. By sending gifts last to Hebron, the narrator (or David himself) gives it the position of honor. The verb hithalekh ('moved about, walked about') in the hitpael stem indicates habitual action over time — David and his men were a mobile force who ranged across all these territories during the fugitive years. The verse functions as a summary: everywhere David had traveled, he now sends blessing. The seeds planted during years of flight produce a harvest of loyalty that will make him king.

31

Summary: *The Philistines engage Israel in battle on Mount Gilboa, and the rout is total. Saul's three sons — Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua — fall in combat. Saul himself is critically wounded by archers and, rather than face capture and humiliation, asks his armor-bearer to kill him. When the armor-bearer refuses in terror, Saul falls on his own sword, and the armor-bearer follows him in death. The next day the Philistines find the bodies, behead Saul, strip his armor, and send word throughout Philistia. They fasten Saul's body to the wall of Beth-shan and place his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth. But the men of Jabesh-gilead — the very people Saul rescued in his first act as king — march through the night, recover the bodies from the wall, burn them at Jabesh, bury the bones under the tamarisk tree, and fast seven days.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the mirror-image of chapter 11. There, Saul burst onto the scene by rescuing Jabesh-gilead from Nahash the Ammonite; here, Jabesh-gilead repays the debt by rescuing Saul's body from the Philistines. The literary structure is an inclusio — Saul's public story begins and ends with the men of Jabesh-gilead. The chapter also records the first explicit suicide in the Hebrew Bible: Saul's falling on his own sword (naphal al-charbo). The narrator offers no theological commentary on the act itself — no condemnation, no approval. The silence is deafening, leaving the reader to reckon with the tragic end of a king who began with such promise. The Philistines' treatment of Saul's body — beheading, armor-stripping, display on the walls of Beth-shan — mirrors what David did to Goliath (chapter 17), creating a grim symmetry: Israel's champion once desecrated a Philistine giant, and now Philistia desecrates Israel's king.*

Translation Friction: *The central translational tension lies in verse 4, where Saul fears the Philistines will 'thrust him through and abuse him' (or 'make sport of him'). The verb hit'allelu (from alal in the Hithpael) can mean 'to deal wantonly with, to make a toy of, to torture' — the same root used for what the Egyptians did to Israel (Exodus 10:2). Saul's fear is not merely of death but of degradation: being kept alive as a trophy, mocked and mutilated. This raises the question of whether Saul's suicide was despair or a final act of royal dignity — the text does not resolve this. Another friction point: verse 12 says the men of Jabesh-gilead 'burned' the bodies (saraph), which is unusual in Israelite practice where burial, not cremation, was normative. Some scholars argue the burning removed the decomposed flesh so the bones could be properly interred; others see it as an emergency measure to prevent further Philistine desecration. We render saraph straightforwardly as 'burned' and let the translator's note address the anomaly.*

Connections: *The Jabesh-gilead connection to chapter 11 forms the most prominent literary link — the men Saul once delivered now deliver what remains of him. David's lament over Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1 immediately follows this chapter, and the burning/burial at Jabesh will be revisited when David honors the men of Jabesh-gilead in 2 Samuel 2:4-7. The fastening of bodies to the wall of Beth-shan anticipates the Gibeonite execution of Saul's descendants in 2 Samuel 21, where bodies are again exposed and must be recovered. Saul's armor placed in the temple of Ashtaroth inverts the pattern from chapter 5, where the Philistine god Dagon fell before the captured ark — now it is Israel's king whose spoils adorn a Philistine temple. The death of Jonathan here sets up the covenant loyalty David will show to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, honoring the oath he swore to Jonathan.*

1 The Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell, fatally wounded, on
Mount Gilboa. 2 The Philistines pressed hard after Saul and his sons. The Philistines struck down Jonathan, Abinadab, and
Malchi-shua — Saul's sons. 3 The battle pressed heavily against Saul, and the archers found him — the bowmen — and he was
severely wounded by them. 4 Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through with it, or these

uncircumcised men will come and run me through and make sport of me." But his armor-bearer refused — he was too terrified. So Saul took the sword and fell on it. 5When his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. 6Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all his men perished together on that day. 7When the men of Israel on the other side of the valley and on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. The Philistines came and occupied them. 8The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9They cut off his head and stripped his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the news to the temples of their idols and to the people. 10They placed his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12All the fighting men set out and marched through the night. They took down the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, brought them to Jabesh, and burned them there. 13They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening conjunction u ('and') connects this chapter directly to the preceding narrative — there is no fresh beginning, only the continuation of a disaster already set in motion. The verb nilchamim ('were fighting') is a participle, indicating ongoing action: the battle is already in progress when the narrative camera arrives.

1. The phrase vayyippelu chalalim ('they fell as pierced ones') uses the same root chalal that will recur throughout the chapter. The word carries a sense of violent penetration — these men died from sword, spear, or arrow wounds. Mount Gilboa sits at the southeastern edge of the Jezreel Valley, a strategic position whose loss would expose the entire central highlands to Philistine advance.

2. The verb davaq in military contexts means to pursue so closely that the gap between hunter and hunted collapses. The Philistines are not merely chasing Saul; they have locked onto him. The three sons are named in order: Jonathan (yehonatan, 'the LORD has given'), Abinadab (avinadav, 'my father is generous'), and Malchi-shua (malki-shua, 'my king is salvation' or 'my king is noble'). The irony of these theophoric names — invoking God's giving, generosity, and salvation — against the scene of their violent deaths is a silence the narrator lets speak for itself.

2. Jonathan's death fulfills the narrative trajectory set in motion when he made his covenant with David (chapter 18, 20). He chose loyalty to David over dynastic succession, and now he dies alongside the father whose throne he voluntarily relinquished. The text does not separate Jonathan's death from his brothers' or grant him a special scene — he dies as a son of Saul, on a battlefield, unnamed in any speech.

3. The phrase anashim ba-qashet ('men of the bow') is an appositional clarification of ha-morim ('the shooters') — the narrator specifies that these are archers, long-range killers. Saul is being struck from a distance, unable to close with his enemies. For a warrior-king, this is a particularly degrading way to fall.

3. The crux of the verse is vayyachel me'od. If from chul ('to writhe, tremble'), Saul is terrified; if from chalal ('to be pierced, wounded'), he is already critically injured. The Septuagint renders it as 'he was wounded' (etraumatisthe), supporting the chalal reading. The ambiguity may be intentional — Saul is both wounded and terrified, his body and his nerve both broken.

4. The construction pen yavo'u ('lest they come') reveals Saul's motive: he is acting to prevent a worse outcome, not choosing death for its own sake. The narrator offers no moral verdict on the act — no 'he sinned' or 'the LORD struck him.' This silence is itself significant, as the Chronicler's account (1 Chronicles 10:13-14) will add explicit theological commentary that the Samuel narrator withholds.

4. The armor-bearer's refusal (lo avah, 'he was not willing') uses the same construction that described Saul's own refusal to eat in 28:23. The verb avah implies a deep, dispositional unwillingness — the armor-bearer cannot bring himself to strike the LORD's anointed, even at the anointed's own command. This echoes David's repeated refusal to harm Saul in chapters 24 and 26.

5. The armor-bearer's death mirrors Saul's exactly: vayyippol gam hu al-charbo ('he also fell on his sword'). The phrase vayyamot immo ('he died with him') creates a bond in death that echoes the loyalty oaths of the ancient world — the attendant follows his lord into death. The armor-bearer who could not bring himself to kill Saul can, it seems, bring himself to follow him. The narrator records this second suicide with the same terse silence, offering no commentary.

5. The word gam ('also, likewise') carries weight: the armor-bearer's death is derivative, an echo of Saul's. He does not die for his own reasons but because his master has died. This pattern of the subordinate dying alongside the king will recur in different forms throughout the David narrative.

6. The summary verse functions as an obituary for the Saulide dynasty. The phrase kol anashav ('all his men') likely refers to Saul's personal guard or household warriors, not the entire Israelite army — the flight described in verse 7 implies many soldiers survived. The word yachdav ('together') carries a tragic finality: the house of Saul, which rose together, falls together.

6. This verse forms a structural parallel with the death of Eli's house in chapter 4: there too, father and sons died on the same day, and the ark (symbol of divine presence) was lost to the Philistines. Saul's dynasty ends the way the old priestly dynasty ended — in a single catastrophic day.

7. The verb azvu ('they abandoned') describes the evacuation of entire populations from their cities. This is the catastrophic consequence Samuel warned of in chapter 8: the king who was supposed to protect them has died, and without him the social order collapses. The Philistine occupation of Israelite cities reverses the conquest under Joshua and fulfills the worst-case scenario of the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:49-52).

7. The geographical scope — spanning from the Jezreel Valley to Transjordan — indicates that the Philistine victory at Gilboa effectively cut Israel in half, severing the northern tribes from the south. This fragmentation sets the stage for the divided loyalties of 2 Samuel, where David will rule Judah from Hebron while Ish-bosheth claims the north.

8. The verb leshashet ('to strip') refers to the standard post-battle practice of looting corpses — removing armor, weapons, and valuables. The word chalalim ('the slain, the pierced ones') recurs from verse 1, binding the chapter together. The phrase vayyimtse'u ('they found') echoes verse 3 where the archers 'found' Saul alive; now new seekers find him dead. The participle nofelim ('fallen') rather than the perfect metim ('dead') captures the scene visually: the bodies lie where they collapsed, still in the postures of their dying.

8. The day-after sequence (mimmacharot) creates a gap in the narrative — the night between the battle and the stripping is a silence in which the bodies lay exposed on the mountain. This delay is significant for the Jabesh-gilead narrative that follows: the bodies have been dead at least a full day before the Philistines even begin their desecration, and longer still before Jabesh-gilead can act.

9. The verb lesaser ('to carry good news') is from the root basar, which means 'to announce good tidings.' The same root gives us the word mevaser ('herald of good news') used in Isaiah 52:7. Here the 'good news' is Saul's death — what is gospel for Philistia is catastrophe for Israel. The ironic use of basar anticipates David's reaction in 2 Samuel 1, where the Amalekite who brings the 'good news' of Saul's death is executed for it.

9. The phrase beit atsabeihem ('the house of their idols') refers to Philistine temple complexes. First Chronicles 10:10 specifies the head was placed in the temple of Dagon, while this verse mentions the armor going to the temple of Ashtaroth (verse 10). The distribution of body parts and armor across multiple temples suggests a deliberate parceling of the spoils among different Philistine cult sites.

10. Beth-shan (beit shan) occupied a strategic position controlling the eastern approach to the Jezreel Valley. Its walls would have been visible from a great distance, making the display of Saul's body a message to the entire region. Archaeological excavations at Beth-shan have uncovered both Egyptian and Philistine temple complexes, confirming the city's role as a major religious and administrative center during this period.

10. The word geviyyah ('body, corpse') is a term for the physical frame — the shell left behind when life departs. Its use here emphasizes the materiality of the degradation: this is flesh and bone being nailed to stone. The pairing of armor in the temple and body on the wall creates a grotesque dismemberment of Saul's identity — his warrior self displayed in one place, his physical self in another.

11. The construction vayyishme'u elav ('they heard about him') directs the hearing specifically toward Saul — this is news about a person, not an event. The phrase et asher asu pelishtim le-Sha'ul ('what the Philistines had done to Saul') frames the Philistine actions as something done to Saul personally, not merely to a king or a corpse. For Jabesh-gilead, this is personal: the man who marched through the night to save them (11:11) now needs someone to march through the night for him.

12. The night march echoes Saul's own nighttime march to relieve Jabesh-gilead in chapter 11:11, where he divided his forces and struck the Ammonites 'in the morning watch.' The symmetry is precise: Saul marched through the night to save Jabesh-gilead's living bodies, and now Jabesh-gilead marches through the night to save Saul's dead body. The inclusio is complete.

12. The verb saraph ('to burn') is the same word used for the burning of sacrifices and the destruction of idolatrous objects. Its use here is debated: some scholars see it as evidence of Transjordanian burial customs distinct from western Israelite practice; others read it as an emergency measure. The Chronicler's account (1 Chronicles 10:12) omits the burning entirely, which may reflect later discomfort with the practice or simply a different textual tradition.

13. The word eshel is traditionally rendered 'tree' (KJV) or 'tamarisk' (most modern translations). The tamarisk is a hardy, long-lived tree common in semi-arid regions of the Levant, and its shade made it a natural gathering place. First Chronicles 10:12 reads elah ('oak' or 'terebinth') instead of eshel, suggesting textual variation in the tradition. We follow the Masoretic text's eshel.

13. The seven-day fast marks the conclusion of both the chapter and the book. In narrative terms, 1 Samuel opened with Hannah's tears and fasting at Shiloh (1:7-10) and closes with the men of Jabesh-gilead fasting at Jabesh. The book is framed by grief, by people who pour out their anguish before God. Hannah's grief produced Samuel; Jabesh-gilead's grief honors Saul. Between those two acts of mourning lies the entire experiment of Israel's first king.