

Saul and David, Samuel and the Psalms

The following are the collected references for the LifeCenter Torah Network summer 2012.

Part I: Saul

סֵפֶר דְּבָרִים Deuteronomy 17:14-20

Here we find the commandment that predicts the necessity of a strong, centralized government—namely, a constitutional monarchy. The king is required to be Jewish from birth; he is cautioned against excessive luxury, excessive womanizing, and dependence on foreign imports for energy resources (transportation, military might, etc.). Sound familiar? His first commandment is to wage war on oppression (namely, Amalek); his last is to write a sefer Torah and keep it with him always.

שִׁפְטִים Judges 19

This is the story of the concubine at Giv'a (Gibeah), the Benjaminite city that conducts itself as inhospitably Sodom did. The rape and murder of one undefended female traveler points to the decay of Jewish society in the time of the Judges; if society is to be judged by the experience of its victims, then Jewish society is no better than its Canaanite neighbors. The national outrage over the woman's death—or more cynically, by the gruesome media exposure of her death—causes eleven tribes to rise up against Giv'a, while the tribe of Benjamin defends its city against the outside aggressors. Civil war erupts, and the cycle of violence inflicts huge casualties on the avenging eleven; the surviving aggressors wipe out nearly the entire tribe of Benjamin—cities razed, civilians destroyed—in an attempt to defend themselves. Horrified at the damage they have done, the eleven tribes turn their guilt outwards to "punish" the city of Yavesh Gil'ad for professing "neutrality" and refusing to join them in the battle to avenge the woman's murder; in a bitter irony, the 600 male survivors of Benjamin are encouraged to kidnap hundreds of defenseless Jewish girls in an attempt to repopulate their tribe. The lack of a central government capable of meting out consequences and enforcing Torah norms are destroying the Jewish people from within; as the book concludes, "There was no king at that time, and every person would do what his perspective lead him to believe was right..." with disastrous consequences! (From Dr. Tikva Frymer-Kensky's [Reading Women of the Bible](#), in the segment "The Bad Old Days.")

King Saul will make reparations. He is the descendant of one of the survivors of Giv'a and an abductee/rape victim from Yavesh Gil'ad; he will be crowned in the



rebuilt Giv'a, and will give the city a new identity as Giv'at Shaul, the seat of his monarchy. When he focuses media outrage on a Jewish cause, he will do so with a modicum of good taste; he will unite the tribes in battle instead of dividing them into "them" and "us." Instead of wantonly destroying Yavesh Gil'ad, he will save it from outside aggressors. Shaul (Saul) has been handpicked by God for his charisma, his good looks, and his formidable appearance: he will be an inspiring figurehead for the Jewish people to rally around. His violent mood swings provide him with the energy and purpose to threaten the enemies of his people—and to levy equally fierce threats against his fellow Jews if they fail to unite under his banner!

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 8

The Jewish people, aware that the Prophet Samuel will not be able to lead them longer, fear a return to anarchy after he is gone, as has historically been the case whenever a great *shofet* (Judge) dies. They demand that Shmuel (Samuel) confer with God to find them a king, to judge them like all the other nations. Samuel is offended that this new position will not only involve military responsibility, which he and Torah law predicted, but also judicial authority with religious overtones—an affront to his own failure to meet their needs. God assures the insulted prophet that the people still love him and have not rejected him. "It is Me whom they have rejected as King over them!" the Holy One grumbles. Nevertheless, although the demand is not phrased tactfully or piously, the request is a sensible one—as the end of the Book of Judges has made clear—and it is granted.

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 9

Shaul ben Kish ben Aviel, Saul the Benjaminite, is picked by God to lead his people. He is well over six feet tall and commands respect instantly by virtue of his mighty stature. In a somewhat poignant prophecy, he happens by Shmuel (Samuel) as he searches vainly for some lost donkeys. His search will be ultimately unsuccessful, and his family begins to worry that, far from finding the wayward creatures, their son Shaul has lost himself.

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 10

Shaul is incredulous when Shmuel tells him that he has been chosen king. For a brief while, the spirit of God is able to channel the energy within him to fits of joy and hope ("prophecy") about what the future may hold for him and his people. Nevertheless, the smiles and surprised expressions on the faces of his neighbors when they see him dancing with the itinerant Carlebach hippies ("prophets") deflate the bipolar Shaul's confidence in himself and prevent him from even telling his family what has transpired in the house of the Shmuel. Shaul hides among the baggage when Shmuel calls the people together to crown the king; unlike Moses and Jeremiah, he does not step forward when called at last to his duty. The people may mistake this reticence for modesty, but Shaul's lack of confidence will one day be his undoing. Despite his best efforts, Shaul is brought forward and crowned, to the delight of the onlookers, who approve of his statuesque build and authoritarian

bearing. He is wise enough to turn a deaf ear to his detractors, knowing that only deeds, rather than words, will prove his fittingness to lead.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 10:25-11:15

In Shaul's finest moments, he reverses the tragic story of Giv'a and Yavesh Gil'ad as played out in the days of his grandfather. He unites the Jewish military powers, saves a great Jewish city from destruction, and redeems their national pride in the face of a sneering enemy who never expected that twelve bickering tribes would or could unite around a common cause. With this, he proves his right to the throne, and, in a final moment of humility and heroism, he refuses to punish his detractors, showing his soldiers and courtiers how unnecessary is the act of revenge against one's fellow-Jews.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 13-14

Haste and doubt sow the seed's of Shaul's downfall, but when the Pelishtim (Philistines) threaten Israel, he and his sons continue to defend the Jewish people. Here again Shaul reverses another terrible trend from the time of the Judges; he makes a foolish vow in battle, whose consequences are terrible and unjust. Unlike Yiftach (Jephthah), however, Shaul does not keep his vow when he discovers its terrible outcome, and his is the last of the hasty vows made by Jewish leaders in war. The question is left open, however: if the people have the power to direct the king away from his divine vows, is this power safe for them or for him?

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 15:1-9

In a crucial test of leadership, Shaul fails to recognize and honor God's desire to eliminate the parasite culture of Amalek. His own political taboos convince him to spare the war criminal who is most responsible for the devastating attacks on Jewish farms; although he is a master military strategist, he is too weak of a leader morally to insist that the people respect God's orders not to loot the enemy camp as part of the battle. Like many ancient near Easterners, Shaul falls into the trap that enough sacrifices will propitiate any divine grievance. He never understands what he has done wrong or how his failure to see the bigger picture has doomed him and any descendants who emulate his example to ignominy.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 1:20

The prophet Shmuel's birth is filled with unanswered questions and incomplete destinies. Why does he—the last of the *Shoftim*, the great detractor of the monarchy—treasure such affection and pride for King Shaul, and why does Shaul's failure seem to affect the great prophet as much as the barren king?

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 15:10-35

Shmuel parts ways with his mentee Shaul, but cannot bring himself to withdraw his public expression of support. No one in Israel but these two men can know how fragile is Shaul's perch on the throne of Israel.

Part II: David

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 16

Self-confidence has always been Shaul's greatest challenge; now, with the support of God and mentor both withdrawn, Shaul sinks into a deep depression. He does not suspect that the music therapist hired by his servants from the field of Beit Lechem is the very prodigy for whom God is waiting to succeed him, and that this job will provide David ben Yishai with his first political experience in the court of Giv'at Shaul. But if even the downtrodden king holds young David in such high esteem, why is it that his own family scarcely remembers his existence?

תְּהִלִּים כב' Psalm 22: David's Mother

Verses 22:10-11 and 27:10—composed when his friends and comrades have betrayed him—show in David's cry for help the story of a lost mother and an unwanted child, a handsome and talented Joseph figure whose very existence is perceived by his brothers as a threat to their patrimony. Irrevocably parted from his dead mother, held aloof from his cold, distant father by his jealous older brothers, the spiritual and talented David seems to have been raised by God alone.

תְּהִלִּים ח' Psalm 8: David in the Wilderness

Young David, sent alone into the wild to care for his sheep, sees the divine in nature and dedicates his life towards being a part of it.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 17

“Whose son is this boy?” Shaul sees his plucky little harpist in a new light when, on a workaday mission for his family, David steps into the spotlight and slays Goliath. There is no turning back from this moment of triumph, and his pastoral existence is ended for all time.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 18

When David takes Prince Yehonatan (Jonathan's) place in court, Shaul realizes for the first time that he is looking at his successor—his usurper. After plotting David's death in a moment of rage, he tests the young man by offering him a marriage to the eldest princess. David, for better or worse, realizes that not all is well with his master the king, and demurs.

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 19

Shaul begins to speak openly in court of executing the dangerously ambitious David. He is frustrated by the interference of his own children: Prince Yehonatan, David's best friend, who openly defends David's innocence, and Princess Michal, the youngest princess, who loves David and has married him. When David flees to Shmuel for protection, the spirit of prophecy protects him—but not for long.

תְּהַלִּים נֹט' Psalm 59: Accused!

“They lie in wait for my soul, fierce men have gathered against me, but I have committed no crime and sinned no sin, Hashem! They run and prepare themselves for no fault of mine: awake to help me, and look! ...At the evening, let them return, howling like dogs as they go about the city. Let them wander about to find food, and rest if they have not their fill! But I will sing of your power in the morning, my defense and my refuge in days of trouble.”

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 20

Aware that the king has lost his reason and will stop at nothing to see his challenger dead, David and Jonathan make an undying pact of friendship as David flees Giv'at Shaul forever. Yehonatan implicitly pledges loyalty to David's crown, asking for a pact of friendship between David's descendants and his own—the likeliest rivals for David's throne—for all time. Now David must run for his life, unarmed and without even the most meager provisions, away from everything he has ever known.

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 21

David claims to be on a secret mission for King Shaul and thus obtains food and arms from the priests at Nov. In his fear and universal mistrust, David attempts to flee to the last place Shaul will ever look for him: the Pelishti (Philistine) city of Gat. Of course, as an Israelite captain in Peleshet, he find himself in more danger there than before!

תְּהַלִּים נו' Psalm 56: Captured in Gat

“They live here, hiding from me, counting my steps, waiting for my soul.... God, you have counted my wanderings, collecting my tears in your bottle—is it not in your book? When I cry to you, let my enemies turn back: this I am sure, because God is with me...”

תְּהַלִּים נד' Psalm 34: Escaped!

“I will bless God at every moment; his praises should be continually in my mouth!... Evil will slay the evil, and those that hate the righteous will be destroyed, but God will redeem the soul of his servants, and no one need be shamed who trusts in him.”

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 22

David's family rallies around him in the caves of Adullam. Debtors and malcontents of all sorts eagerly join the band, and David finds himself captain over a group of over 400 miscellaneous outlaws. Informed by the prophet Gad, David and his men do not flee over the border a second time, but make their stand within the land of Israel itself. However, when Shaul hears that the David is raising men in his own lands, he wreaks terrible vengeance on every priest and citizen of Nov for arming and providing for the “rebels.”

תְּהַלִּים נב' Psalm 52: Against Doeg the Edomite

If the tragedy at Nov is not David's fault, whose is it? David rails against the alien who volunteered to massacre the priests, calling down divine judgment on him, not only for the bloodshed he has perpetrated, but the pride with which he speaks of his actions and demands rewards for his loyalty. "Why do you brag of the evil you have done?" David cries in rage. "You who love such devouring speeches—God will devour you, too!"

שְׁמוּאֵל א Samuel I 23

God tells David to marshal his men to defend the city of Ke'ila from Pelishti invaders, and David begins his lifelong practice of consulting the divine before going into battle. However, despite the selfless nobility of David and his band, the residents of Ke'ila will not harbor outlaws against the king's wishes; they have lost their secrecy and gained no allies. King Shaul is encouraged to pursue David and his men on a harrowing chase through the wilderness of Yehuda. From the forest of Zif to Giv'at Chakhila, from the Arava to the Division Rock, the king pursues the rebels to within an inch of death. Only a fleeting meeting with his best friend in the forest—Prince Yehonatan, who abandons the chase at the first turning—brings strength to David from God. "Fear not," Jonathan promises him. "You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be your trusted lieutenant. This I know, and my father knows." In the end, however, Shaul's wild goose chase exposes the northern frontiers to Pelishti attack, and the king must hurry away to defend his legitimate subjects from slaughter.

תְּהַלִּים נד' Psalm 54: Spies from Zif

"Hear my prayer, God, and listen to the cries which I utter. Strangers have risen up to seek my life!" David prays in haste and puzzlement, begging God to save him from a danger he did not even know existed.

תְּהַלִּים נה' Psalm 55: David's Former Comrades

"It was not an enemy who taunted me (I could have borne that), and not even someone who hated me and wanted to aggrandize himself in my place (I can at least hide from that one), but you, man! My equal, my companion, my friend!" David is bitterly disappointed in the turning of his friends, from the cities he saved to the court he frequented: their presence in the ranks of those who call him traitor. "Their words were softer than butter, but war was in their hearts."

תְּהַלִּים סג' Psalm 63: The Desert Psalm

"My soul thirsts for you, God, like my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, weary, without water. I have glimpsed a vision of you in holiness, your strength and your power."

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 24

Shaul returns from war with 3,000 men at his back to trap David and his men in Ein Gedi. Ironically, after days of fruitless searching, the king goes to relieve himself in the very cave in which David and his men are hiding. David, however, refuses to let his men goad him into avenging himself on his implacable enemy, and instead lets God's anointed king leave safely. Shaul is so impressed by David's loyalty that he breaks off the attack for once. He weeps in shame and in gratitude, and begs David to maintain his family line and not destroy Shaul's descendants when he ascends the throne. David, however, aware that these generous moods of Shaul's are but short-lived, takes this momentary breath of peace as an opportunity to take shelter in the fortress before moving on again.

תְּהִלִּים נ"ז Psalm 57: In the Cave

"My soul is among lions, and I lie down this those who are aflame. Their teeth are swords and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted, God, above the heavens, and your glory over the whole earth. They have prepared a net for my footsteps; my soul is doubled over and bent, but as they dug a pit in front of me, they fell into it! _!"

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 25

David, guarding the vast estates of Naval in Carmel, asks the master of the house to entertain his men at the harvest feast in payment for their faithful services. Naval has no intention of wasting his provisions on outlaws, so without consulting his harvesters—who are devoutly thankful for the protection of David's soldiers and are amazed beyond words at the guards' abstention from poaching and looting—or his wife—who knows that outlaws, when set at naught, will take payments in blood rather than feasting—the gentleman refuses the request. David is saved from a human rights catastrophe by the speedy intervention of Avigail, Naval's clever wife, who placates his fury with rich provisions and gives voice to the Northern opinion that David is all but king over Israel already. In the aftermath of this bloodless victory, David marries the newly-widowed Avigail as well as another maiden of Yizra'el (Jezreel) who strikes his fancy. Shaul, believing his daughter abandoned, marries Princess Michal to Palti ben Laish of Galim.

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 26

The same Zifim who betrayed David the first time he hid in their forest now again stir up Shaul's anger against him. This time, David does not wait for Shaul to find his cave, but takes his nephew Avishai to sneak into Shaul's camp, where they slip past Avner's guards to remove the king's water jug—the means of his life—and his spear—his means of defending it. Again, Shaul is touched and humbled by David's refusal to do him harm, with clear opportunity and severe provocation; again, he blesses David with success and decamps without doing him harm.

תְּהַלִּים לַט' Psalm 39: The Psalm of Silence

David refuses to complain, either of God's justice or the king's. When men all around him spur him on to harsh words and harsher judgments, David keeps his tongue between his teeth. "I will guard my ways from sinning with my tongue; when the wicked man still stands before me, I will hold my peace!"

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 27

With no trust in Shaul's supposed clemency and spies from Zif, David finally enacts his plans to leave Israel and become a vassal of the Philistine king Achish—the same Achish from whose hands he escaped in the first year of his outlaw days. However, the break between King Shaul and his most promising young captain is now well known, and Achish grants David asylum for himself and his band of 600, hoping to use David's military knowledge and animosity towards Shaul for his own needs. David gladly accepts the city of Tziklag as payment for armed services to be rendered; he spends the last year of his exile accepting commissions from King Achish to raid Israelite and Kenite settlements. Achish, however, has no means of discerning that David's highly profitable raids are being conducted against Amalekites, Geshurites, and other Philistine allies!

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 28

All the lords of Peleshet gather for a mass offensive into the valley of Yizra'el, and Shaul finds himself facing his own death.

שְׁמוּאֵל א' Samuel I 29

David, well aware that his Pelishti hosts are planning to massacre his people, marshals his men to join the ranks of Achish, hoping to make a sneak attack from the middle of the Pelishti lines. However, the other Pelishti lords are not as trusting as Achish, who naively thinks that David will fight Shaul exactly as Shaul fought him. David's men are forbidden from joining the muster; they return home in disappointment only to discover that the Amalekites of the south have burned their city and carried off their wives and children! David and his men furiously pursue the raiders into the Negev, where they rescue their families and amass a great treasure to distribute among the farmers and villagers of Yehuda who sheltered them in happier days. Thus distracted in the south, David is unaware that the north of Israel has been overrun by an unstoppable Pelishti force; the tragic King Shaul and the heroic Prince Yehonatan lie dying on Mount Gilboa, the remnants of their last stand.

Part III: King David

שְׁמוּאֵל ב' Samuel II 1

David is devastated to learn of his best friend's death and that of Shaul, rightful king of Israel. This is no victory for him, but an occasion of bitter lamentation.

שְׁמוּאֵל ב Samuel II 2

The tribe of Judah crowns David king in Chevron, and David sends offers of peace and friendship to Yavesh Gil'ad, whose inhabitants buried Shaul and his sons. However, Avner, Shaul's general-in-chief, has other plans, and he crowns Ish-Ba'al (a.k.a. Ish-Boshet) in Machanaim. Avner and Yoav—David's nephew and new general-in-chief—attempt to avert civil war by a gladiatorial contest, but all the unfortunate “contestants” are killed in the “game,” and war erupts regardless. In the first major battle of the new war, Asah'el, David's youngest and least illustrious nephew, unwisely sets his sights on Avner; Avner is forced to kill in self-defense, earning him the undying hatred of Yoav and Avishai, Asah'el's elder brothers.

שְׁמוּאֵל ב Samuel II 3

When Avner has a fling with Ritzpa, King Shaul's former concubine, Ish-Boshet, affronted by Avner's “possession” of a royal woman, takes the implication that Avner believes himself to be the real power behind the throne: a serious challenge to Ish-Boshet's authority. Unimpressed by his supposed crime, Avner accuses Ish-Boshet of monstrous ingratitude and resentfully swears to defect to David's cause. In the wake of this quarrel, Ish-Boshet is unable to refuse David's demand for the restoration of Michal, his first wife; the irony of this must be especially bitter for Ish-Boshet, who spends so much energy to keep Avner from aggrandizing himself with the king's women, only to be upstaged by David yet again in the matter of his sister. David hails with joy Avner's overtures of fealty, his embassy to the elders of Israel—and the tribe of Benjamin specifically—and the good news he offers to bring to a peace conference. The peace conference succeeds in ending the civil war, but ends in tragedy as the noble Avner is wickedly betrayed by Yoav and his brother, who ambush him and kill him to avenge the death of their brother Asah'el. David is furious with his nephews for their treachery, but does not feel he can discipline them without decimating his own high command. David is the chief mourner at a kingly funeral for Avner in Chevron, which helps reassure his subjects that the assassination was not authorized by their new king.

שְׁמוּאֵל ב Samuel II 4

Ish-Boshet is assassinated by Ba'nah and Rechav, two sergeants in his own army who expect a rich reward from King David for avenging him against the son of his enemy. David is horrified at their bloody deed and has them both executed for murder; Ish-Boshet is buried in Avner's tomb in Chevron.

תְּהִלִּים כ"ז Psalm 27: David's Hope

War is imminent, and David tries to calm his fears and get his priorities in order. “If I stay on your path, I will not be my own worst enemy,” he tells God. “I used to believe that I would see the goodness of your divine plan in my lifetime... I still can hope!”

תְּהִלִּים כ"ח Psalm 28: No Vengeance

David pleads with God to punish those who acted in his name with cruelty and dishonesty. “Give them according to their deeds,” prays David. “So that I am not tempted to even the balance myself!”

שְׁמוּאֵל ב׳ Samuel II 5

The elders of Israel invite David to formally assume the crown over all Israel; David takes Yerushalayim and move his capital there. There, the king sires more sons and daughters than he himself can raise and dutifully beats back the Pelishtim from the borders of Israel.

שְׁמוּאֵל ב׳ Samuel II 6

Two views of kingship collide when Princess Michal has her final quarrel with her estranged husband King David as David moves the ark from Giv'a to Yerushalayim.

תְּהִלִּים כ׳ Psalm 24: The Triumphal March

This is a classical victory march, heralding the successful return of the army and the ark to Yerushalayim. The call-and-response structure with a chorus of priests or Levi'im will make this song particularly easy to arrange for the Levitical choir in the Temple.