

“THE LORD HAS REJECTED YOU AS KING OVER ISRAEL”: SAUL’S DEPOSAL FROM THE THRONE

YISCA ZIMRAN
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Adopting the methodology of New Criticism, this article presents a close reading of the way in which Saul’s deposal from the monarchy is portrayed and explained in the extant text of Samuel.¹ The

¹ For a discussion of the book in its extant form, see W. Brueggemann, “Samuel, Book 1–2: Narrative and Theology,” *ABD* 5:965–73 (966–68); J.P. Fokkeman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (4 vols.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 1:9–12; M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985); A.F. Campbell, *I Samuel* (FOTL; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 1. For a review of this method, see A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 111–12; D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 20–22. K.J. Dell (“Incongruity in the Story of Saul in 1 Samuel 9–15: A Methodological Survey,” in G. Khan and D. Lipton [eds.], *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Robert Gordon* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 49–64) combines a diachronic and synchronic approach. On the book’s compilation and editing, see, e.g., M.H. Segal, *The Books of Samuel* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1956), 6–28 (Hebrew); H.W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964), 130–34; P.K. McCarter, *1 Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 12–30; J.W. Flanagan, “Samuel, Book of 1–2: Text, Composition, and Content,” *ABD* 5:957–65 (958–61); M. Garsiel, “The Book of Samuel: Its Composition, Structure and Significance as a Historiographical Source,” in E. Ben Zvi (ed.), *Perspectives on Hebrew Scripture VII* (Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts 15; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2011), 148–73. For the positive representation of Saul’s kingship created as a result of editing, see S. Abramsky, “The Representation of the Monarchy in Samuel and its Historical Background,” *Beit Mikra* 20 (1975), 87–128 (97) (Hebrew); D.J. McCarthy, “The Inauguration of Monarchy in Israel: A Form-Critical Study of 1 Samuel 8–12,” *Interpretation* 27 (1973), 401–12 (411–12); A. Bartal, *The Kingdom of Saul* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982), 154–59 (Hebrew); B.-Z. Luria, “Saul’s Kingdom,” *Beit Mikra* 37 (1992), 24–32 (Hebrew). For alternative approaches, see R. Rezetko,

analysis is guided by the premise that studying the final form allows the figures and events depicted in the book to be understood not only as part of that historical sequence described therein but also as part of the book's thematic stratum, and an embodiment of various subjects repeated throughout the work.² *Inter alia*, the book of Samuel addresses the issue of leadership by adducing the benefits and drawbacks of its various aspects and identifying an ideal system. Thus, on the basis of the proposed methodology, I will analyze the figure of Saul.

While various literary sources can be distinguished among the later editorial strata in the book—sources that, on occasion, preserve perspectives that differ from that which is created by their compilation into the final text—these sources will not be the focus of the present discussion.³ Nor shall I discuss the text's historical background or investigate whether and how the events depicted in the book actually took place. I do acknowledge, though, that the way in which the text has been shaped presents a perspective concerning certain events that may at times differ from how those events might have been described at an earlier stage.⁴

I will focus instead on one particular view of the monarchy that is reflected in the chapters dealing with Saul—namely, the binding authority that stands over the king. Other facets of the biblical attitude towards kingship deserve separate attention.⁵

The issue concerning Saul's deposal arises from his having been depicted as the ideal king at the beginning of his reign (1 Sam 9:2; 10:23–24).⁶ His representation, on several occasions, as the one chosen by God (cf. 1 Sam 10:24; 24:10; 2 Sam 1:14; 21:6) reinforces

“David over Saul in MT 2 Samuel 6:1–5: An Exercise in Textual and Literary Criticism,” in A.G. Auld and E. Eynikel (eds.), *For and Against David: Story and History in the Books of Samuel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 255–71 (255–56); D. Edelman, “Saul Ben Kish, King of Israel, as a ‘Young Hero’?,” in J.M. Durand et al. (eds.), *Le Jeune Héros: Recherches sur la Formation et la Diffusion d'un Thème Littéraire au Proche Orient Ancien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 161–83 (173–83).

² A.F. Campbell, *I Samuel* (FOTL; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 23. For a survey of the themes discussed in Samuel, see, e.g., Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 65–68; D.G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary, 8; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 4–48 and the references cited there.

³ M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1985), 15–16; M. Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

⁴ Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition*, 4.

⁵ See, e.g., A.R. Johnson, “Hebrew Conceptions of Kingship,” in S.H. Hooke (ed.), *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 205–35 (205–14).

⁶ M. Elat, *Samuel and the Foundation of Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998), 105 (Hebrew).

the need to deal with the issue.⁷ The abrupt transition from Saul's rule to that of David, together with the affinity between the two, also creates a similar need.⁸

RESEARCH SURVEY

The factors that led to Saul's rejection as king have long been discussed by scholars. Some remove the tendentious editorial strata in order to examine the historical reasons that may have stood behind Saul's deposal.⁹ Many others accept the text at face value, maintaining that his downfall was a result of the way in which he dealt with the war with Amalek (1 Sam 15:10–11; 28:16–18). Among those who adopt this reading, some simply read the text as saying that Saul did not obey God's command.¹⁰ Others emphasize the histor-

⁷ M. Elat, "Saul at the Apex of His Success and the Beginning of His Decline: The Historiographical Significance of 1 Samuel 13–14," *Tarbiḥ* 63 (1994), 5–25 (18) (Hebrew).

⁸ For the former, see, e.g., S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (trans. A. Barber; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 406; Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 72–75; idem, "The Relationship between David and Michal, Daughter of King Saul," in M. Garsiel et al. (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, vol X, *Presented to Shmuel Vargon* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011), 117–33 (118) (Hebrew). See the repetition of the term מַלְכִי in relation to David and Saul in 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam 5:2; 6:21; 7:8. Note, however, the series of antitheses between the two figures, as pointed out by Garsiel (*First Book of Samuel*, 107–37). Scholars are divided over how to best understand the representation of Saul in Chronicles. See Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 405–11; Y. Amit, "Saul in the Book of Chronicles," in M. Bar-Asher et al. (eds.), *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, its Exegesis and its Language* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 3–15; S. Zalewski, "The Chronicler's Attitude Towards Saul," *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* 4 (1998), 55–70 (Hebrew); S. Abramsky, "Return to the Story of Saul in the Books of Esther and Chronicles," in S. Ettinger, Y.D. Gilat and S. Safrai (eds.), *MILET: Everyman's University Studies in Jewish History and Culture* (2; Tel Aviv: Everyman's University, 1983), 1:39–63 (45–46, 52–53, 56) (Hebrew). Regardless, it is clear that the Chronicler does not provide a reason for Saul's rejection. On 1 Chr 10:13–14, see Amit, "Saul in the Book of Chronicles," 7–8.

⁹ Cf. Bartal, *Kingdom of Saul*, 18–19; A. Demsky, "The Confrontation Between Samuel and Saul and the Question of the Juridical Authority of the King," in Z. Talshir, S. Yona and D. Sivan (eds.), *Homage to Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute/Ben-Gurion University Press, 2001), 98–111 (111) (Hebrew).

¹⁰ Cf. S. Yonick, *The Rejection of Saul as King of Israel* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1970), 67; Z. Weisman, *Saviours and Prophets: Two Aspects of Biblical Charisma* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2003), 82 (Hebrew); R.W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (1st ed. 1983; WBC, 10; Waco, Tex.: Word, 2008), 153, 155. For further studies, see D.M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (New York: Continuum, 1980), 42–43, 56.

ical background.¹¹ In contrast, some scholars attribute significance precisely to Samuel's words to Saul in 1 Sam 13:13–14 following Saul's first misdemeanor.¹² Some also regard his deposal as a consequence of the protracted deterioration of his reign.¹³ D.M. Gunn uniquely proposes that Saul's fate was the result of the divine decision to prove to the people how problematic it can be having a human king.¹⁴

As I shall endeavor to demonstrate below, it is more likely that Saul was rejected due to the war against the Amalekites and its links with the events in the remainder of his life. In this article, I shall not simply draw attention to the reasons explicitly stated in the verses but will seek to reveal the essential elements that led to his deposal, as well as its justification. This was the direction taken by H.W. Hertzberg in his commentary on the book of Samuel, and I shall seek to elaborate on his view and refine it by shedding light on the surprising historical turning point in Saul's deposal as king.¹⁵ During the course of the discussion, I shall address other questions, such as whether Saul was rejected simply because he sinned, and if so, whether a single transgression was sufficient grounds for his deposal, and why other kings were not rejected even though they too transgressed.¹⁶

¹¹ Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 108. See also U. Simon, "Saul and Jonathan: Two Forms of Leadership," in N. Ilan (ed.), *A Good Eye: Dialogue and Polemic in Jewish Culture* (Tova Ilan Jubilee Volume; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 433–62 (461–62) (Hebrew).

¹² Some scholars argue that chs. 13 and 15 depict the same event. See, e.g., A. Biram, "Saul's Rise to the Throne and the Crisis of the Kingdom," in *Oz le-David: Kovetz mehkarim be-tanakh mugash le-david ben-gurion bimelet lo shiv'im va-sheva shanim* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1964), 211–26 (223) (Hebrew); H.P. Smith, *Samuel I & II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 129–30; A.G. Auld, *I & II Samuel* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 166. For a contrasting view, see Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 107; S. Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 195–97 (Hebrew). The way in which the events are portrayed, however, suggests that we are dealing here with two separate occasions that exhibit certain affinities concerning Saul's mode of leadership. While the house of Saul loses its guaranteed right to the throne in ch. 13, the sentence becomes even more severe in ch. 15, when the kingship is taken from Saul himself and given to someone else while he is still alive. See Klein, *1 Samuel*, 155; Garsiel, "Relationship between David and Michal," 133 n. 48. Cf. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 67. Cf. Y. Amit, "The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind': On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992), 201–12 (209).

¹³ Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 77–93.

¹⁴ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 123–25.

¹⁵ Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 133–34.

¹⁶ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 43–45; Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 181.

THE WAR WITH AMALEK

1 Sam 15:2–3 recounts how Saul was commanded—by Samuel in God’s name—to “‘attack Amalek and proscribe all that belongs to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses.’”¹⁷ In other words, Amalek was to be destroyed in his entirety—family, estate, and property.¹⁸ The verses are formulated in such a way as to highlight the precise nature of the injunction and the imperative to fulfill it: the prophet’s command is quoted as direct divine speech—a comparison with 1 Sam 10:1 and 15:17–19 making its distinctive character clear. The command itself also commences with a reference to **עֲבֹאוֹת**—a designation of God linked to His “militaristic” attributes¹⁹—, which anticipates the specific orders that will be contained in the ordinance. An allusion then follows to Amalek’s war against Israel after the exodus, justifying the command by anchoring it to a specific historical context. The decree of total proscription is clarified by the unequivocal prohibition on sparing Amalek and his possessions, as well as by the use of a merismus.²⁰ The configura-

¹⁷ Cf. Z. Zemarion, “Saul and Amalek,” in B-Z. Luria (ed.), *Sefer Prof H.M.I. Gevaryahu: Mehqarim ba-miqra u-ve-mahshevet yisrael mugash lo behagio le-seyva* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1991), 1:116–20 (118) (Hebrew). Quotations from scripture are taken from the NJPS.

¹⁸ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 46, 48–53; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:88; A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 78 n. 35; Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 198; Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 167. But cf. Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 120; Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition*, 53. In the biblical text, the root **חרם** can signify both the consecration of an object or person to God as well as the destruction of that object or person. See D. Yellin, “The Full Conronym in the Bible,” *Lešonenu* 5 (1938), 276–94 (292–93) (Hebrew); N. Lohfink, “**חרם**,” *TDOT* 5:183–88; *HALOT*, 1:353–54, s.v. **חרם** §1; M.Z. Kaddari, *Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006), 352, s.v. **חרם** §1 (Hebrew); *DCH* 3:317–18, s.v. **חרם** §1. Klein (*1 Samuel*, 148) adduces both meanings. See also R. Achenbach (“Divine Warfare and YHWH’s Wars: Religious Ideologies of War in the Old Testament,” in G. Galil et al. [eds.], *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History* [AOAT, 392; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2012], 1–26 [16–26]), who draws attention to the development that the concept of proscription underwent over the course of time. Cf. the way in which Yonick (*Rejection of Saul*, 44–45) and Lohfink (*TDOT* 5:193–99) understand the verse. Malamat (*Mari*, 70–79) links the biblical **חרם** with the Akkadian *asakku* in the Mari texts; cf. Lohfink, *TDOT* 5:190.

¹⁹ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 29–32, 61; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:87; Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 197; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 148. But cf. J.P. Ross, “JAHWEH *š’ba’ôṭ* in Samuel and Psalms,” *VT* 17/1 (1967), 79–92 (82–83). For differing interpretations of this divine epithet, see A.A. Anderson, *1 Samuel* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1989), 86, 102; *HALOT* 3:994–96 (996), s.v. **עֲבֹא**, §1; *DCH* 7:65–69 (68), s.v. **עֲבֹא**, §1.

²⁰ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 49–51. For the merismus as a way of indicating totality, see W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 321–23.

tion of vv. 2–3 makes it clear that this war differs from other wars that Saul had fought in the past.²¹ Vv. 4–6 describe the preparations Saul made for the battle, creating the expectation that the proscription command will be fulfilled; Saul assembles his warriors and then separates the Amalekites, who are destined to die, from the Kenites who dwell in their midst.²² The roots שמ"ע and פק"ד in v. 4 suggest the implementation of the decree, since they had already occurred in vv. 1 and 2. V. 7 depicts how—ostensibly—Saul fulfills the command: “Saul destroyed (ויד) Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt.”²³ The presence of the root נכ"ה in v. 7—which corresponds to the והכיתה in v. 3 (“Now go, attack Amalek”)—creates the impression that the order has been obeyed. This perception is reinforced by a second merismus describing the geographical territory in which the war took place.²⁴

Despite the detailed description of the decree and the initial impression that vv. 4–7 create, the passage depicting the war indicates that Saul did not carry out all that God had commanded. Firstly, v. 8 demonstrates that while the Amalekites were killed during the battle, their king survived. Secondly, v. 9 represents Saul as violating all the particulars of the command. The ordinance “proscribe (והחרמתם) all that belongs to him” (v. 3) is countered by the statement “They would not proscribe them (ולא אבו) (החרימם),” the verse ending with a description of what they did in fact proscribe: “. . . only what was cheap and worthless.”²⁵ Likewise, against the order “Spare (תחמל) no one,” v. 9 explicitly notes, “Saul and the troops spared Agag (ויהמל שאול והעם) . . .”²⁶ The

²¹ Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 395.

²² Bartal, *Kingdom of Saul*, 90.

²³ Cf. Gen 25:18. Havilah appears to be in the Arabian peninsula (see Gen 10:29; W.W. Müller, “Havilah [place],” *ABD* 3:82). The wilderness of Shur lies on the border with Egypt (Gen 16:7; Exod 15:24). Despite the impression given by the verse, according to 1 Sam 30:1—and in line with the broad perimeters specified in this verse—Saul does not seem to have killed all the Amalekites who lived in this territory. See Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 199; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 150; Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 63.

²⁴ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:88. Cf. 1 Sam 15:7 with 1 Sam 27:8; 30:3. For the contradiction between these two verses, see Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 119.

²⁵ Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 200. See also M.Z. Kaddari (*Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*, 93, s.v. בזה §1; 574, s.v. מאס §1), who derives נמבזה from the root בזה and נמסה from the root מא"ס in the sense of “despised.” See also the correction—based *inter alia* on the LXX—suggested in *HALOT* 1:117, s.v. בזה §1; 2:606–7, s.v. מסס §1.

²⁶ In Arabic (and Syriac), the root حمل (*h-m-l*) signifies “carrying, bearing” (see *BDB*, 328 §1). This verse may contain a word play on the two meanings of the root. While this may explain the irony in v. 9 and the fact that this rationale is supplemented by that of sacrificing them to God (v. 15), the command “not to spare” anything or anyone was nonetheless violated. Simon (“Saul and Jonathan,” 459) and Y. Elitzur, (*Israel and the Bible: Studies in Geography, History and Biblical Thought* [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999], 114 [Hebrew]) suggest that the root חמ"ל may

detailed instruction “men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses” in v. 3 is also replaced by the inventory of “the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, and all else that was of value” and Agag the king.²⁷

Vv. 8–9 level additional criticism against Saul and the Israelites by depicting them as failing to kill Agag and some of the Amalekites’ livestock because they showed them *hemla*.²⁸ In so doing, however, they violated the express command **לֹא תַחַמֵּל**. The fact that Agag and the “choicest” of his livestock were spared raises doubts about the purity of Saul, as well as the people’s intentions and trustworthiness.²⁹ The critique is underscored by the repetition of the root **ט"ב** in the description of the livestock that were not butchered. The fact that the verses here indicate that the command was “fulfilled” in a manner that directly opposed its specifications makes clear how important the violation of the divine decree was to the chapter.

Indeed, in the sequel of the narrative (vv. 10–11), Saul is removed from the throne.³⁰ The juxtaposition of the divine order, its “implementation,” God’s decision, and the fact that Samuel’s outburst is unable to change the latter, reinforce the centrality and significance of divine determination and the factors that led to it.

THE ROOTS OF SAUL’S BEHAVIOR

The factors that led Saul to violate God’s order are described in three ways. The first is recounted by the narrator (v. 9), while the other two form part of Saul’s response to Samuel (vv. 15, 20–21).

In v. 9, the narrator presents Saul and the people as acting together as a single unit.³¹ Herein, the decree was contravened by the sparing of Agag and the choicest livestock. As noted above, this depiction carries a note of irony. In v. 15, Saul asserts that it was the people who sought to avoid proscribing everything in its totality, with Saul choosing not to include himself among them. He only associates himself with them again at the end of the verse, in the account of the remainder of the animals that *were* proscribed. He adds to the charge made in v. 9 that the people spared the beasts in

carry the sense of “economic prosperity” here. Even if this is true, this was certainly not the original intention of the command not to “spare” anything or anyone; it even magnifies the people’s guilt. At the same time, it removes the contradiction between the “sparing” and the fact that it was the “choicest” items that were spared.

²⁷ See Luria, “Saul’s Kingdom,” 30; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:89–90.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Sam 15:3 with 1 Sam 22:19. The link reflects another covert criticism of Saul’s *hemla*: see Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 122.

²⁹ Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 199. See 1 Sam 12:4, which contains an implicit criticism of David.

³⁰ Saul was deposed twice at Gilgal—the place where the monarchy was inaugurated (1 Sam 11:14–15). See Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:95, 110; Demsky, “Confrontation,” 106.

³¹ Cf. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 51.

order to sacrifice them to God.³² Had the purpose of the proscription been the consecration of the spoils to God, this act would have been warranted. The people would have fulfilled the divine command and the lack of reference to the intention to sacrifice the animals in v. 9 would be unproblematic. However, several factors make this understanding of the decree difficult. Firstly, the content and structure of v. 3 demonstrate that the *herem* alluded to in the divine command carries the sense of destruction.³³ Secondly, v. 9 makes clear that the people did not want to proscribe anything (ולא אבו החרימם) thus the decision to leave the animals alive was *a priori* a violation of the command to spare nothing.³⁴ However, the addition of the motive of sacrificing the animals also serves a rhetorical purpose, resolving the discrepancy between the sparing and the nature of the livestock. This explanation could have answered the difficulty regarding the purity of the people's intentions and given a better account of their behavior. In this light, v. 15 reflects a tension within the description in v. 9 and an inner-discrepancy between Saul's various declarations. A dichotomy also exists—created by Saul between himself and the people—that is likewise inconsistent with the depiction in v. 9.

In vv. 20–21, Saul sets himself apart from the people even more clearly. In direct contrast to the order that appears in the earlier verses, he refers to his own role in “fulfilling” the command before that of the Israelites, presenting his sparing of Agag as being in compliance with the decree—this “obedience” being underscored by the account of his proscription of the rest of the Amalekites. These verses also highlight the disparity between Saul, who kills the Amalekites, and the people, who save some of the livestock from slaughter.³⁵ Saul claims that “the troops took from the spoil some sheep and oxen . . . to sacrifice to the LORD . . . at Gilgal” (v. 21). Here, he abandons the first account of the war, which included the reference to the sparing of the livestock, and resolves the discrepancy between the people's motives and actions in v. 15. Despite the advantage of the formulation in vv. 20–21, it contradicts the earlier verses both in its description of the relationship between the people's actions and those of Saul and also concerning their motives. Finally, Saul's claims are incommensurate with the

³² Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 108; cf. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 47.

³³ Malamat, *Mari*, 78 n. 37.

³⁴ Cf. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 49–50. Compare v.12 in the LXX.

³⁵ Some biblical texts present the war waged by the people and army as “the king's war” (cf. 1 Sam 5:20; 8:1; 2 Kgs 15:29; Dan 11:15). In these instances, the action that is taken must be ascribed to the king and the army irrespective of the styling of the verses. In 1 Sam 15:20–21, however, both the king and the people are mentioned and clearly distinguished. This fact indicates that when the text states that Saul performed a certain act alone, the people were indeed not party to it. Historical reality is irrelevant to this issue, since the issue derives from the “design” of the text, i.e., its configuration and purpose.

formulation and substance of the divine injunction, as clearly demonstrated by Samuel's words in v. 22.³⁶

The presence of three separate versions of the event casts doubt on the veracity of Saul's assertions, particularly if we accept his confession in v. 24 at face value.³⁷ Likewise, the three stages delineate the long and winding path Saul took before he arrived at the point of admitting his guilt.³⁸ In light of these facts, we must analyze his statements if we are to comprehend the reasons why he violated the divine command.

HEEDING THE PEOPLE RATHER THAN GOD

1 Sam 15 portrays Saul as complying with the will of the people. Despite the conflict between their wishes and God's command, Saul's behavior in this chapter is governed by his willingness to bow to human desires.³⁹ This is clear from his words in v. 24, the veracity of which is evident from their similarity to the narrator's statement in v. 9.⁴⁰ It is also manifest in the formulation of the verses in the chapter, as well as their content. As I shall demonstrate below, the text employs the root ש"מ"ע eight times, the majority of these bearing the sense of "obeying" the command given.⁴¹ It appears in conjunction with the noun קול to indicate the demand to implement the divine decree (vv. 1 and 22)—as part of the reproof for the violation of the latter (v. 19)—in Saul's declaration that he had carried out the edict (v. 20) and his confession that he had chosen the people's will over that of God (v. 24).

A unique usage of the expression occurs in v. 14, where Samuel's "hearing" of the bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen testifies to the fact that Saul has failed to "obey" the command to destroy them. In v. 4, the root ש"מ"ע occurs in the *Pi'el*, a rare stem usage that signifies a military "gathering."⁴² This distinctive usage augments the expectation that the divine decree will be fully observed, expands the incidence of the root in the chapter, and helps

³⁶ Elitzur, *Israel and the Bible*, 115.

³⁷ Amit, "Glory of Israel," 208–10; Y. Zakovitch, "The Tale of Naboth's Vineyard: I Kings 21," in M. Weiss (ed.), *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 354–77 (384–88). Cf. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 46–54.

³⁸ Bartal, *Kingdom of Saul*, 89–96.

³⁹ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 66–67.

⁴⁰ In this regard, whether יראתי denotes fear (Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:104) or honor/respect (Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 53) is irrelevant, since both senses reflect the significance Saul ascribes to the attitude the people display towards him. On the reliability of the narrator's account, see, e.g., Amit, "Glory of Israel," 204–5.

⁴¹ This meaning elucidates the repeated usage of the root קו"ם in vv. 11, 13.

⁴² See HALOT 4:1570–75 (1573), s.v. ש"מ"ע *Pi'el* §1; U. Rütterswörden, "שמע," TDOT 15:277; DCH 8:453–469 (465), s.v. שמע §1. Cf. 1 Sam 23:8.

elucidate its importance for understanding 1 Sam 15. This impression is reinforced by the presence of other terms from the semantic field of “listening”: the root קש"ב (“heed”: v. 22), אזני (“ears”: v. 14), קול (“voice”: vv. 2, 14 [twice], 19, 20, 22 and 24). To these may be added the verbs related to speech, such as אמ"ר and דב"ר.⁴³ This linguistic repetition creates the impression that Saul transformed his heeding of God into listening to the voice of the people—and thus failed to fulfill the divine decree.⁴⁴

This failure to perform what was expected of him forms the primary grounds for the criticism leveled against him. V. 22 reveals the significance of heeding God’s instruction via both its content and its terminology, repetitively employing the synonymous roots החפץ ליהוה בעלות וזבחים כשמע בקול יהוה הנה: קש"ב and שמ"ע—the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in *obedience* to the LORD’s command? Surely, *obedience* is better than sacrifice, *compliance* than the fat of rams.⁴⁵

An examination of the contents of the divine command, which deals with the war with Amalek, indicates a further criticism of Saul. The second half of v. 2 parallels Deut 25:17 in both content and formulation:

Deut 25:17

זכור את אשר עשה לך
עמלק בדרך בצאתכם
ממצרים

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt . . .

1 Sam 15:2

כה אמר יהוה צבאות
פקדתי את אשר עשה
עמלק לישראל אשר שם
לו בדרך בעלתו ממצרים

Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I am exacting the penalty⁴⁶ for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made against him on the road, on their way up from Egypt.

⁴³ A. Frisch, “For I Feared the People, and I Yielded to Them (1 Sam 15, 24)—Is Saul’s Guilt Attenuated or Intensified?,” *ZAW* 108 (1996), 98–104 (99–100).

⁴⁴ R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 93–94; Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 197.

⁴⁵ For the argument that vv. 22b–23a did not originally form part of the chapter, see C. Gilvad, “Samuel’s Rebuke of Saul (1 Sam 15),” *Beit Mikra* 24 (1979), 142–48 (Hebrew). But cf. Biram, “Saul’s Rise to the Throne,” 225; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:99–105.

⁴⁶ The root פק"ד in this verse may signify “punish” (cf. NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB) or parallel זכ"ר. For the link between these two roots, see Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 389 (cf. Jer 15:15; Ps 8:5). Both meanings are attested in the biblical texts. See Kaddari, *DBH*, 872–73.

This parallelism is expanded by the order to kill the Amalekites only after all the other inhabitants of the land have been defeated (Deut 25:19), as is consistent with the account in 1 Sam 14:46–48.⁴⁷ Deut 25:17–19 presents the war with Amalek as a divine injunction imposed upon Israel, its formulation creating a close connection with Exod 17:8–16, where it is depicted as God's own battle:

Exod 17:14–16

ויאמר יהוה אל משה כתב
זאת זכרון בספר ושים
באזני יהושע כי מתח
אמחה את זכר עמלק
מתחת השמים
ויבן משה מזבח ויקרא
שמו ה' נסי
ויאמר כי יד על כס יה
מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדר
דר

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!”

And Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi.

He said, “It means, ‘Hand upon the throne of the Lord!’” The LORD will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages.

Deut 25:19

והיה בהניח יהוה לך מכל
איביך מסביב בארץ אשר
ה' אלהיך נתן לך נחלה
לרשתה תמחה את זכר
עמלק מתחת השמים לא
תשכח

Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

If Deut 25:19 and Exod 17:14–16 in fact constitute the foundation of the command to destroy Amalek completely, the war against Amalek was God's war and Saul should have acted in his name—which he failed to do.⁴⁸ Moreover, because the war with Amalek

⁴⁷ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 59. The war with Amalek is also described in Judg 3:12–13; 6:1–6:33; 1 Sam 14:48; 30:1–30.

⁴⁸ See Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 33–36; Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 197; Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition*, 60–61. For another critique, see Frisch, “For I Feared the People,” 102.

was intended to firmly establish God's status, violation of the decree directly impinged upon His status.⁴⁹

HEEDING THE PEOPLE

The fact that Saul listens to the will of the people is not significant only because it stands in complete opposition to obeying God, but also because it forms an independent element within the narrative.⁵⁰ Heeding the people indicates the importance Saul attributes to the Israelites—and to human considerations in general—in the chapter.⁵¹ This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the root ש"מ"ע in the biblical texts reflects sovereign relations and determines the relationship between the figure in authority and the person who is subject to him.⁵²

Saul's attitude towards the people is displayed in his various actions. Thus, for example, in v. 9 he is depicted as standing with the Israelites: "Saul and the troops spared Agag and the best of the sheep . . . (ויחמל שאול והעם)"—unusual royal behavior.⁵³ Verse 12 describes Saul's erection of a monument (דָּ) —prior to the offering of sacrifices that Saul recalls—to commemorate his deeds among the Israelites.⁵⁴ In v. 24, Saul confesses that he listened to the people because he was afraid of them, while in v. 30, after acknowledging his sin and seeking to repent, he entreats Samuel to show him due respect in front of the Israelites: "But [Saul] pleaded, 'I did wrong. Please, *honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel, and come back with me until I have bowed low to the LORD your God.*'"⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 41; Simon, "Saul and Jonathan," 457–58.

⁵⁰ Zemarion ("Saul and Amalek," 118) maintains that Saul did not kill Agag because he was afraid of the kings of the other nations. If this argument is correct, it adds a further human factor to Saul's deliberation as to whether or not he would fulfill the divine order. See also Elitzur, *Israel and the Bible*, 115.

⁵¹ Scholars regularly regard Saul as a charismatic figure with unique features that are augmented by God's Spirit, whose presence enables him to lead the people. Cf. Bartal, *Kingdom of Saul*, 106. While the Israelites must nonetheless recognize him as a leader (*idem*, 107; Weisman, *Saviours and Prophets*, 89), human acknowledgement must not take precedence over divine election.

⁵² For a slightly different formulation, see U. Rüterwörden, *TDOT* 15:257–59. For a prominent example, see Deut 21:18–21.

⁵³ Cf. 1 Sam 13:16; 14:2, 14. The disparity between the singular verb at the beginning of the verse and the plural verbs at its end may attest to the transition from the initiative taken by Saul to the reluctance demonstrated by all the people. See Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 199.

⁵⁴ The term דָּ serves on numerous occasions in the biblical texts to signify a memorial of an event or person. Cf. 1 Sam 18:18; R.C. Dentan, "Hand," *IDB* 2:520–21; J. Licht, "דָּ," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 3:463–64 (Hebrew); Klein, *1 Samuel*, 151.

⁵⁵ See Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 204; K. Dell, "Incongruity in 1 Samuel 9–15: A Methodological Survey," in G. Khan and D. Lipton (eds.), *Studies on*

This interpretation of the formulation of this verse gains further support when one compares it with 1 Sam 12:3, a verse that contains similar syntactical elements. This correspondence also highlights the substantive difference between the two verses. In 1 Sam 15, Saul asks that Samuel “honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel”—i.e., human beings. In 1 Sam 12, on the other hand, Samuel asks the people to testify against him “in the presence of the Lord and in the presence of His anointed one”—while stressing the importance of God for the people.⁵⁶ Comparison with 1 Sam 2:29–30 also heightens the meaning of 1 Sam 15:30. These verses contain the reproof of Eli, in which the honor Eli gives to his—human—sons and that which should be given to God stand in opposition to one another. This antithesis indicates the impropriety of respecting humans more than God, and so illustrates the meaning of the human respect Saul seeks in 1 Sam 15.

GOD'S AUTHORITY OVER THE KING

Saul's attitude towards the people what was led him to violate the divine command delivered via Samuel. On a more fundamental level, it was also unbecoming of royal conduct—as indicated by Samuel's statement to Saul. Vv. 17–19 record that Samuel conveys God's message to Saul, reflecting God's authority over Saul as monarch; this authority is undermined by Saul's heeding of the Israelites.⁵⁷ V. 17 stresses that Saul could not behave like a private

the texts and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in honour of Robert Gordon (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 49–64 (59). In contrast to his previous request in v. 30, Samuel fulfills Saul's wish. The divergence in the two cases may derive from the fact that Saul tore his garment before the second, this symbolic act indicating the beginning of his realization of his punishment. See U. Simon, “1 Kings 13: A Prophetic Sign—Denial and Persistence,” *HUCA* 47 (1976), 81–117 (86–87). From Samuel's perspective, the decision had already been made, his view of the kingship was thus no longer relevant and Saul himself was no longer in office. Alternatively, the words יהוה אלהיך in v. 30—which do not appear in v. 25—may suggest that Saul recognized Samuel's religious authority. According to Fokkelman (*Narrative Art*, 2:107–8), this is the reason for the tension between the two figures in this chapter, as indicated by vv. 14–26. This interpretation is undermined by the fact that the phrase יהוה אלהיך has already appeared earlier in the chapter. Elitzur (*Israel and the Bible*, 116) alternatively suggests that because Saul does not seek forgiveness in v. 30, Samuel offers it to him. R. Polzin (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History Part Two: 1 Samuel* [Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993], 144) argues for the reverse direction. In addition to adducing this inconsistency, Klein (*1 Samuel*, 154) argues that Samuel's response to Saul in this verses demonstrates to the people the close link between the prophet and the king. Frisch (“For I Feared the People,” 99, n. 3) also raises a number of possibilities.

⁵⁶ Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 163.

⁵⁷ Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 58–59.

individual because he was king. It further makes clear that because God was responsible for Saul's appointment to the throne, he was therefore sovereign over him—as also demonstrated by v. 18. At this juncture, the repeated reference to God in these verses should also be noted. In v. 17, He appears as the one who decides who will be the royal candidate. In v. 18, He constitutes the figure of authority at the time the injunction is given, v. 19 relating to the violation of the order.⁵⁸ These emphases also constitute the launching point of the chapter as a whole: “Samuel said to Saul: ‘I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over His people Israel. Therefore, listen to the LORD’s command!’” (v. 1).⁵⁹

It is also important to note that the formulation of the beginning of v. 17 creates a close link with 1 Sam 9:21: “Saul replied, ‘But I am only 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 do you say such things to me?’”⁶⁰ This affinity creates a dissonance between the two views embedded in v. 17: Saul’s and that which opposes Saul’s.

SAUL’S INVESTITURE

On several occasions, 1 Sam 9–10 presents Saul as not wishing to ascend the throne.⁶¹ In 9:21, his reluctance derives from his feeling that his family background does not make him worthy of such an honor.⁶² The premise that a person’s lineage influences his candidacy for an office is based on the pre-supposition that the king’s identity and authority over the people is determined by

⁵⁸ For the similarities between the two clauses in vv. 17 and 18, which create a substantive link between them, see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:97.

⁵⁹ Anointing was performed by the sprinkling of oil on an object or person, signifying their election and consecration, generally to God. See, e.g., P. Neeman, “Saul’s Enthronement,” *Beit Mikra* 12 (1976), 94–110 (105–6) (Hebrew). Anointing reflects the authority that God bestows upon the king. See K. Seybold “מִשָּׁח,” *TDOT* 9:47, 50–51; cf. the critical discussion in Elat, *Samuel and the Foundation of Kingship*, 91–98.

⁶⁰ Saul is responding to Samuel’s statement, “‘And for whom is all Israel yearning, if not for you and all your ancestral house?’” (1 Sam 9:20). This hints at Saul’s kingship, with Saul’s words indicating that he himself understands this to be the allusion. The fact that 1 Sam 15:17 relates to 1 Sam 9:21 was noted early on by Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 201; Elat, *Samuel and the Foundation of Kingship*, 84; Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 175. None of these discussions, however, explore its significance.

⁶¹ For the relationship between chs. 9 and 10, cf. Bartal, *Kingdom of Saul*, 55 and the references cited there; Smith, *Samuel I & II*, 59, 72.

⁶² Saul’s family also plays a significant and positive role at the enthronement ceremony (10:20–22). Interestingly, Judg 8–9 also adduces familial elements in a similarly dual fashion. On the first occasion, the reference accentuates Abimelech’s inferior status (Judg 8:29–30), while on the second it highlights the advantage given to Abimelech in his nomination for the throne (Judg 9:1–2).

human and social considerations. When he is inaugurated, Saul “hides among the baggage” (10:22)—an expression signifying hiding intended to convey his attempt to avoid being given the position.⁶³ In the wake of his behavior in 1 Samuel 9, it is reasonable to understand how, in his humility, Saul regarded his enthronement as witnessing to his personal qualities and the people’s attitude towards him, and therefore hid.⁶⁴

Saul’s conduct in these chapters resembles that of a number of leaders at their investiture to a new office before they had imbibed the proper definition of their role and their relationship with God. Illustration of the affinity can strengthen my interpretation of Saul’s behavior in 1 Sam 9–10. Moses, for example, did not desire to be appointed leader because of his personal traits: “But Moses said to the Lord: ‘Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue’ ” (Exod 4:10). The premise that human attributes and suitability for the job were the parameters for electing a leader to be sent by God embodies the view that tests the leader on the basis of human criteria.

However, God made clear to Moses that his qualities did not constitute the grounds for his election. Rather, this decision rested solely on divine election, and was commissioned by God rather than Moses himself, who was merely the person being sent. This reproof is not only clearly indicated in God’s word in vv. 11–12 but is also elucidated by a comparison of the occurrences of the noun **אנוכי** in the discussion between God and Moses in vv. 10–12. In v. 10, it refers to Moses and his limitations: **ויאמר משה אל יהוה בי אדני לא איש דברים אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מאז דברך אל עבדך כי וכבד פה לשון אנכי**—“But Moses said to the LORD: ‘Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’” In the continuation of the dialogue, however, God makes clear to Moses that He is the more important figure in the context of his commissioning: **ויאמר יהוה אליו מי שם פה לאדם או מי ישום אלם או חרש או פקח או עור הלא אנכי יהוה ועתה לך ואנכי וכי תדבר**—“And the LORD said to him, ‘Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say’” (Exod 4:11–12).

⁶³ Cf. Segal, *Books of Samuel*, 80. According to Radak on 1 Samuel 10:22 (*Mikra’ot Gedolot haKeter: 1–2 Samuel* [ed. M. Cohen; revised and augmented scientific ed.; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2001], 51), “He is hiding amongst the supplies—because he was fleeing from the office.” But cf. the midrash he quotes at the end of this passage. The latter resembles that which was quoted by Rashi (in *Mikra’ot Gedolot*, 51), apparently deriving from *Tanbuma Buber*, Vayikra 4 (Vilna, 1885), although the text is not identical (see esp. n. 4).

⁶⁴ Elat, *Samuel and the Foundation of Kingship*, 105; cf. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 298.

Jeremiah responds to his prophetic calling in similar fashion: **וַאֲמַר אֵלֶּהָ אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הֲנֵה לֹא יָדַעְתִּי דְבַר כִּי נֶעַר אֲנִי**—“Ah, Lord GOD, I don’t know how to speak, for I am still a boy” (Jer 1:6). Jeremiah acknowledges his human weaknesses and describes himself as **אֲנִי**. His reference to his personal capacities as indicating his suitability, or lack thereof, for the office resembles the commissioning of both Moses and Saul. God’s answer thus clarifies that He gives the criteria for Jeremiah’s commissioning and that Jeremiah will not speak on his own, human initiative but rather God will put the words that he needs into his mouth. In v. 7, God explicitly orders Jeremiah not to say **נֶעַר אֲנִי**—“I am still a boy”—telling him that his powers of speech are of no relevance to his appointment: “But go wherever I send you and speak whatever I command you.” The recurrence of **אֲנִי** and the root **דב** in Jeremiah’s statement and God’s reply demonstrates that God’s words are a direct response to those uttered by Jeremiah. The continuation also highlights God’s authority over Jeremiah and the source of his speech: “Have no fear of them, for I am with you to deliver you—declares the LORD. The LORD put out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth.”⁶⁵

Gideon also behaves in a similar way to Saul when God commissions him and explains their relationship: “The LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this strength of yours and deliver Israel from the Midianites. I herewith make you My messenger’ ” (Judg 6:14). Gideon bases his refusal, however, on his inability to deliver the message and also on his socio-familial status: “He said to Him, ‘Please, my lord, how can I deliver Israel? Why, my clan is the humblest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s household’ ” (v. 15). Judges 6 constitutes a prominent and explicit example of someone declining a position of leadership based on an inability to recognize divine commissioning—a circumstance elucidated by the fact that Gideon does not recognize the divine person who stands before him, nor acknowledge God’s power to deliver (vv. 13, 17–24).⁶⁶

Saul’s conduct in chs. 9–10 consequently reflects the weight he attributes to human regard for the monarch.⁶⁷ This stance even led him to disobey God’s command.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Saul’s

⁶⁵ This correspondence is restricted by the fact that, being prophets, Moses and Jeremiah had no independent status but were explicitly God’s envoys. The king, on the other hand—as Saul is presented in 1 Sam 9–10—was an autonomous human ruler who was expected to accept God’s authority and the legitimacy of his post on the basis of his election by God and submission to Him while in office.

⁶⁶ For other points of similarity between the two men and additional references, see Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 76–83.

⁶⁷ Cf. Simon, “Saul and Jonathan,” 462.

⁶⁸ This highlights the link with Achan’s speech concerning what had been proscribed in Josh 7 (Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 83–84). Like Saul,

stance—whether conscious or unconscious—annuls the importance and significance of God's choice of the king. Recognition of that fact would have precluded using human suitability as the key element in determining royal appointments—although, of course, this might sometimes have been present.⁶⁹ Likewise, although the verses relate to Saul's positive attributes, these are not presented as the reason for God's choice of him (9:16–17).

The implications of Saul's view of the monarchy as presented above, and the fact that his appointment to the throne was made in spite of his objections, partly explain the criticism these verses level towards Saul's stance. This is also evinced by the repeated stress on the divine source of his election (9:15–17; 10:1, 9, 24), including the casting of the lots (10:20–22).⁷⁰

In light of the above, it is evident that when Samuel recalls Saul's refusal of the royal appointment (1 Sam 15:17a: הלוֹא אִם קָטָן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶתָּה—“You may look small to yourself”), he is presenting Saul's attitude towards the monarchy. In the second half of v. 17, Samuel provides what—as God's agent—he regards as the legitimate view (רֵאשׁ שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה וַיִּמְשַׁח יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל)—“you are the head of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king over Israel”).⁷¹ The latter accentuates the divine anointing, which cements the requirement to obey God's command and recognize Him as the ultimate, binding authority. The stance reflected in Samuel's word in v. 17 is consistent with other verses in the chapter, which serve to describe the divine character and

Achan's guilt was exposed by the casting of lots. His actions undermined the impression that the proscription was intended to create—i.e., that the war was God's war. Saul, who viewed himself as having been elected on the grounds of his personal attributes, likewise infringed upon God's authority and reign.

⁶⁹ Cf. 1 Sam 9:2–21; 10:23, 24. See Neeman, “Saul's Enthronement,” 104–5. Saul resembles Eliab, David's older brother, in appearance (1 Sam 16:7). 1 Samuel 16 levels explicit criticism against the focus on outward appearance, which may be interpreted as a veiled critique of the emphasis laid upon human factors in the account of Saul's investiture (Klein, *1 Samuel*, 99; Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 82; G. Moberley, “Glimpses of the Heroic Saul,” in C.S. Ehrlich [ed.], *Saul in Story and Tradition* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 81). See also Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 60; Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 419. Cf. David's decline of the offer of marriage to Merab (1 Sam 18:18) and Michal (1 Sam 18:23), Saul's daughters. Although this exhibits stylistic and substantive similarities with Saul, it is directed against human initiative. While from 1 Sam 7:18 onwards David speaks with God and adduces his shortcomings in social and personal terms, he does not consider them sufficient to refuse the royal appointment. Rather, he emphasizes God's grace towards him and authority over him.

⁷⁰ On the term נִגִּיד (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1), see Elat, *Samuel and the Foundation of Kingship*, 85. For the casting of the lot, see H. Gross, “לְכַד,” *TDOT* 8:3; Simon, “Saul and Jonathan,” 435. Cf. Josh 7:10–18 (S. Ahituv, *Joshua* [Mikra Leyisrael; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995], 126 [Hebrew]).

⁷¹ Cf. Demsky, “Confrontation,” 102.

strengthen the proper understanding of the monarchy that arises from Samuel's statements. Vv. 1, 11, 28 and 35 elucidate the fact that it is God who determines the identity of the king.⁷² He can thus appoint and depose kings at will.⁷³ Samuel's rebuke therefore makes it clear that the human prism through which Saul regards the kingship is not acceptable to God. Moreover, Samuel demonstrates via his reference to the first days of the monarchy that Saul has never corrected his flawed view. Since he maintained the same outlook as that of the very beginning of his reign, and because this led him to violate the divine command in such a serious fashion, he was deposed from office.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

In the above discussion I have examined the reason for Saul's deposal as presented in the extant text of Samuel. The discussion indicates that Saul's core stance towards the kingship—reflected in his behavior in the war with Amalek—constituted the key factor in his rejection. Saul's flawed perspective ascribed significance to human attitudes to the monarchy and so regarded human beings as possessing binding authority over the king. In many cases, the human figure is in fact the king himself. In others, it is the people or certain figures within the community. This stance puts a distance between humanity and God, prompts the monarch to act aggressively, and emphasizes the people's relationship with the king and their attitude as determining the status and respect accorded to him. At the same time, it can also prompt the monarch to refuse to serve in office because he considers his appointment to be dependent on personal qualities and attributes. This position is reflected in the accounts of Saul's investiture and the event that occurred on the eve of his fall. The sin that led to his rejection thus lies not in this or that transgression but in his fundamental attitude towards the authority to which the king is subject. It is thus not only Saul himself who is rejected but also the notion of kingship that he embodies in his behavior.

⁷² For v. 1, see Yonick, *Rejection of Saul*, 56; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 2:86. V. 29 underscores the disparity between humanity and God—despite the tension between this determination and that which is reflected in vv. 11, 35. See Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel*, 196; Amit, "Glory of Israel, "; L.S. Tiemeyer, "When God Repents . . ." (master's thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988), 15–19 (Hebrew); B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1980), 278–80. Cf. W. Brueggemann, *ABD* 5:968.

⁷³ Cf. Smith, *Samuel I & II*, 98 (esp. 90–103 concerning 1 Sam 13).

⁷⁴ Cf. Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 76. The issue here is the relationship between the king and God within the framework of the monarchy rather than a general undermining of divine authority. Therefore, no contradiction exists between Saul's behavior in the chapters analyzed and his religious punctiliousness—to which numerous scholars have drawn attention (cf. Biram, "Saul's Rise to the Throne," 224; Luria, "Saul's Kingdom," 30).