formulated requiring the utter proscription unto death and destruction of the life and property of the Canaanites (see Deut. 7:1–5, 24–26). It is this rule that Samuel applies to the Amalekites, who were not part of the seven native Canaanite nations (see Deut. 7:1), in combination with the rule to exterminate the inhabitants of surrounding cities who might incite the people to idolatry (see Deut. 13:13–19, where also the term *ḥerem* is used [v. 16], and which follows an exhortation not to "spare" the life of an idolator in v. 9, in connection with individual inciters; notably, that passage refers to Israelite compliance as "heeding the LORD," *tishmaʿ be-kol YHWH* [v. 19]).[6]

In this light, we may reconsider the actions and words of Saul and suggest that while Samuel articulates the absolute Deuteronomic rule at the outset, Saul's behavior reflects another stream of tradition, which did not destroy all persons and property and could even choose to sacrifice the latter later, at the shrine, or as a special votary offering to the Lord (i.e., as a personal act of devotion above and beyond what was required by the law). The clash between Samuel and Saul would thus be a clash either between two types of treatment of property in holy warfare or over Saul's interpretation of the rule (he spared the best of the livestock in order to sacrifice it separately to the Lord).[7] Saul's version is rejected; "obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). His action seals his fate.

There is therefore much pathos in the haftarah—first, because Saul's sin is not a flagrant rejection of divine authority; and second, because his repeated confessions and appeals for divine forgiveness are rejected. The reader is confronted with the austerity and stringency of God's demands and the required brutality of the Israelite nation. Mercy is prohibited; no one and nothing may be "spared." The war against the Amalekites is thus presented as a just war, punishing an offense centuries old. Rejection or reinterpretation of the absolute orders is absolutely forbidden. Whether as an actual event or exemplary (literary) case, 1 Sam. 15:1–34 confronts the reader with a fierce and uncompromising theology. Its annual liturgical recitation demands repeated moral and theological reflection.

According to one rabbinic tradition, variously formulated, Saul himself began this process and tried to undermine the divine order through halakhic and moral reasoning (cf. B. Yoma 22b; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:16).[8] He argued, on the basis of the biblical rule requiring a heifer to be slain to atone for an unknown homicide (Deut. 21:1–9), that innumerable animals would be necessary to atone for the deaths of Amalek and that these animals were innocent. Moreover, he added, even if the adults were guilty of death, why include the children in the proscription? A divine voice then reproved him with the words of Ecclesiastes, "Do not be overly righteous" (7:16). The answer challenges the moral soul of the tradition.

TEXT AND COMMENTS

15 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! [2] "Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I am exacting the penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them on the road, on their way up from Egypt. [3] Now go, attack Amalek, and proscribe all that belongs to

טו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׁאוּל אֹתִי שָׁלַח
יְהוָה לִמְשָׁחֲךָ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־עַמּוֹ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה: ס
2 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת פָּקַדְתִּי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה
עֲמָלֵק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם לוֹ בַּדֶּרֶךְ בַּעֲלֹתוֹ
מִמִּצְרָיִם: 3 עַתָּה לֵךְ וְהִכִּיתָה אֶת־עֲמָלֵק
וְהַחֲרַמְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלֹא תַחְמֹל עָלָיו

1 Samuel 15:1–3. In the opening verses, Samuel refers to Saul as king and then tells him to attack the Amalekites and "proscribe all that belongs to him" (v. 3). According to an old tannaitic tradition, the Israelites were commanded to do three things when they came into the Land: establish a king; build the Temple; and destroy Amalek (Tosefta Sanhedrin 4:5; Sifre Deuteronomy 67). The sequence of the last two items is reversed in B. Sanhedrin 20b, and compare Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim* 1:2.

3. proscribe That is, put to death; compare Lev. 27:28–29: "Of all that anyone owns, be it man or beast or land . . . , nothing . . . proscribed for the LORD may be sold or redeemed; every proscribed thing is totally consecrated to the LORD. No human being who has been proscribed can be ransomed: he shall be put to death" [Transl.]. See the discussion in Content and Meaning.

him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!"

⁴Saul mustered the troops and enrolled them at Telaim: 200,000 men on foot, and 10,000 men of Judah. ⁵Then Saul advanced as far as the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the wadi. ⁶Saul said to the Kenites, "Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt." So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites.

⁷Saul destroyed Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt, ⁸and he captured King Agag of Amalek alive. He proscribed all the people, putting them to the sword; ⁹but Saul and the troops spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value. They would not proscribe them; they proscribed only what was cheap and worthless.

וְהֵמַתָּ֞ה מֵאִ֣ישׁ עַד־אִשָּׁ֗ה מֵֽעֹלֵל֙ וְעַד־יוֹנֵ֔ק מִשּׁ֣וֹר וְעַד־שֶׂ֔ה מִגָּמָ֖ל וְעַד־חֲמֽוֹר׃ ס

⁴ וַיְשַׁמַּ֤ע שָׁאוּל֙ אֶת־הָעָ֔ם וַֽיִּפְקְדֵם֙ בַּטְּלָאִ֔ים מָאתַ֥יִם אֶ֖לֶף רַגְלִ֑י וַעֲשֶׂ֥רֶת אֲלָפִ֖ים אֶת־אִ֥ישׁ יְהוּדָֽה׃ ⁵ וַיָּבֹ֥א שָׁא֖וּל עַד־עִ֣יר עֲמָלֵ֑ק וַיָּ֖רֶב בַּנָּֽחַל׃ ⁶ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר שָׁא֣וּל אֶל־הַקֵּינִ֡י לְכוּ֩ סֻּ֨רוּ רְד֜וּ מִתּ֣וֹךְ עֲמָֽלֵקִ֗י פֶּן־אֹֽסִפְךָ֙ עִמּ֔וֹ וְאַתָּ֞ה עָשִׂ֤יתָה חֶ֙סֶד֙ עִם־כָּל־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל בַּעֲלוֹתָ֖ם מִמִּצְרָ֑יִם וַיָּ֥סַר קֵינִ֖י מִתּ֥וֹךְ עֲמָלֵֽק׃

⁷ וַיַּ֥ךְ שָׁא֖וּל אֶת־עֲמָלֵ֑ק מֵֽחֲוִילָה֙ בּוֹאֲךָ֣ שׁ֔וּר אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־פְּנֵ֥י מִצְרָֽיִם׃ ⁸ וַיִּתְפֹּ֛שׂ אֶת־אֲגַ֥ג מֶֽלֶךְ־עֲמָלֵ֖ק חָ֑י וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעָ֖ם הֶחֱרִ֥ים לְפִי־חָֽרֶב׃ ⁹ וַיַּחְמֹל֩ שָׁא֨וּל וְהָעָ֜ם עַל־אֲגָ֗ג וְעַל־מֵיטַ֣ב הַצֹּ֣אן וְהַבָּקָ֡ר וְהַמִּשְׁנִים֩ וְעַל־הַכָּרִ֨ים וְעַל־כָּל־הַטּ֜וֹב וְלֹ֤א אָבוּ֙ הַחֲרִימָ֔ם וְכָל־הַמְּלָאכָ֛ה נְמִבְזָ֥ה וְנָמֵ֖ס אֹתָ֥ה הֶחֱרִֽימוּ׃ פ

Spare no one   The Hebrew verb suggests a harsher command: "have no pity." See Deut. 13:9. The writer returns to this word to describe Saul's disobedience (1 Sam. 15:9).

    4. Saul mustered the troops and enrolled them   The narrative is tightly textured. Not only is the theme of "hearing" or "heeding" *(shamaʿ)* repeated throughout the text (vv. 1, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24), but it also appears through puns. Thus the initial command was to hear or "listen to" *(shemaʿ)* the divine word (v. 1), and Saul proceeds immediately to "muster" *(va-yshamaʿ)* the troops (for Rashi, this verb suggests an act of summoning; for Kimhi, it indicates the gathering of troops). Similarly, Samuel says that God remembers or requites *(pakadti)* the crime of the Amalekites (v. 2; the verb serves double duty here), and this feature is picked up in the reference to Saul's enrolling the troops *(va-yipkedem).*

    at Telaim   Thus NJPS; compare Kimhi, who reads *ba-telaʾim* as referring to "a place name, even though it is formulated with a definite article" (one would have expected *be-telaʾim,* but compare *ba-karkar* in Judg. 8:10). Telem is a site in the Negev (Josh. 15:24). Alternatively, the word refers literally to the "lambs" with which the military census was taken. Animals were used so as not to count people directly (for the danger, and the use of *pakad* to mean counting for a census, see 2 Samuel 24). This sense is discussed in B. Sanhedrin 20b and adduced by Rashi. Targum Jonathan renders "he (Saul) numbered them with the lambs for the Paschal offering," thereby giving this understanding and providing a dating of the event.

    6. Saul said to the Kenites   He told them to withdraw "from among the Amalekites," to recompense their kindness to Israel in the wilderness. The precise events are uncertain; possibly the reference is to the service that the Kenites provided as desert guides (see Num. 10:29–32). Some Kenites presumably encamped among the Amalekites. The association of these two tribal groups is also found in Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:20–21). There we have the doom oracle against Amalek, stating that "its fate is to perish forever," whereas the "abode" of the Kenites *(keini)* will "be secure" and "your nest [*kinekha*] be set among cliffs." Their name predicts their fate.

    9. what was cheap and worthless   Hebrew *kol ha-melaʾkhah nemivzah ve-names ʾotah.* The phrase is difficult and undoubtedly miswritten. This use of the noun *melaʾkhah* is unusual and seems to mean "cattle" (see Kimhi, and Gen. 33:14). The noun *nemivzah* looks like a mistake (or variant; so Rashi and Kimhi) for *nivzah* (cheap); *names* (worthless) is rendered in the masculine form, and the feminine is expected; and *ʾotah* (it) makes no sense here. The Septuagint allows us to reconstruct the Hebrew to the more sensible *kol melaʾkhah nivzah ve-nimʾeset* (whatever was cheap and despised).

③