

And the idea of the total extermination of his enemies appals him:

SAUL: "I did not crave my making; did not solicit
To be a ruler - - - What have I done
Since then? What left undone? I've sacrificed;—
And had I not apology? I spared the King
Of Amalek."

ABNER: "He had made women childless, Samuel said,
And so his mother should that day be childless.

SAUL: "Have not we all who draw the sword so done?
Shall not Philistia's mothers curse again
Our arms that shall bereave them? Shall
Not Israel's nations do the like and howl
By hill and valley their young darlings slain?
Thrice helm thy head, for soon will at it beat
Such storm of curses, both from sires and mothers
As thou has never seen the counterfeit of,
Not even when darts came at thee thick as hail."

Saul's chief offence then in the opinion of those of his own day, consisted in what to most men of a kindly disposition seems the exercise of his one redeeming virtue, his clemency in sparing the king. Otherwise his works were strenuous enough to satisfy the most exacting. Cruelty in plenty there was, but it was warfare in the open, and certainly not so repelling as the treatment of Saul's seven descendants, and of Uriah, by his great successor. But Saul in the midst of this had glimpses of the truth that, if a mere man can be merciful, a God might be more so than his own handiwork.

SAUL: "Too late! Is there no pardon in the world?
Why I myself dispense forgiveness, even
To culprits who have forfeited their lives.
Is not thy God as merciful as his creatures?"

SAMUEL: "He mercy shews to thousands who do keep
His great commandments."

SAUL: "They who keep them need
No mercy."

Even those on whom the rich gift of faith is not bestowed, and who only see the carrying out of hard unchangeable laws