

1 Samuel 13 - Saul Intrudes into Office of Priest; Saul, Israel Helpless Before Philistines

III. Samuel and Saul narrative (8:1—15:35)

(6) Saul usurps priestly prerogatives while awaiting Samuel at Gilgal before battle with the Philistines (13:1-23)

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1 Saul was 30 years old when he began to reign, and he ruled for 42 years over Israel.

1 Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

- The Hebrew literally reads: "Saul was ... years old when he began to reign and he reigned ... two years over Israel."

- The first problem is around Saul's age when he began his reign. No other text of Scripture give us his age at this time. The NASB, NIV and ISV have "30"; the NASB previously had "40."

— We know Saul reigned about 40 years (Acts 13:21)

— If he was 30 or 40 years old when he began his reign, he would've been 70 or 80 when he died in battle on Mt Gilboa (1 Sam 31). This seems old in view of the account of his death.

— The account of his anointing by Samuel pictures a young adult with a measure of maturity (9:2)

- The second problem is the length of Saul's reign

— If the number refers to the entire length of Saul's reign, which is customary in these types of lists (Cf. 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42; 2 Kings 8:17,26, et al), the missing number should probably be "42"

— In the number refers to the years of Saul's reign in which the events of this chapter occur, the number should probably be "2"

— The KJV states “two years”; the NASB, NIV and ISV all have “42”

2 Now Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel, of whom two thousand were with Saul in **Michmash** and in the hill country of Bethel, while a thousand were with Jonathan at **Gibeah** of Benjamin. But he sent the rest of the people away, each to his tent.

2 Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent.

2 Saul chose for himself 3,000 men from Israel. There were 2,000 with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. He had sent the rest of the people home.

2 Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.

- “...Michmash” - five miles northeast of Gibeah

- “...Gibeah” - Saul’s hometown and his capital

- Having learned from his recent experience with the Ammonites, Saul set about to create a standing army of 3,000 trained troops—2,000 under his direct control and 1,000 under his son Jonathan

— These were stationed at Michmash and Gibeah respectively, in an effort to clear out the Philistines from the area and make this population more secure

3 And **Jonathan** attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in **Geba**, and the Philistines heard *about it*. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!”

3 Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of *it*. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.”

3 Jonathan attacked the Philistine garrison in Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land: “Listen, Hebrews!”

3 And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

- “...Jonathan” - “The Lord has given”

- “...Geba” - “the hill”

4 And all Israel heard the news that **Saul** had attacked the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel **had become repulsive** to the Philistines. Then the people were summoned

to Saul at Gilgal.

4 All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal.

4 All Israel heard the report, "Saul has attacked the Philistine garrison and Israel has also become repulsive to the Philistines." Then the people were summoned to Saul at Gilgal.

4 And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

- "...Saul" - note how Saul took the credit for his son Jonathan's victory at Gibeah in order to impress the people and get them to follow him

- "...had become repulsive" - *ba ásh*, to stink, to have a bad smell

5 Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, **thirty thousand chariots** and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

5 Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

5 The Philistines assembled to fight against Israel with 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and people as numerous as the sand on the seashore. And they advanced and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

5 And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.

- Jonathan's victory at Geba provoked the Philistines, who massed their forces across the steep valley that separated Geva and Michmash

- "...thirty thousand chariots" - though the Hebrew reads "30,000 chariots," this would appear to be problematic because it would mean there were five chariots for every charioteer

— The Hebrew words for "30,000" and for "3,000" look almost alike. The one could easily be mistaken for the other when the text was being copied.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people kept themselves hidden in caves, in crevices, in cliffs, in crypts, and in pits.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in distress (for the people were in difficult circumstances), the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in crags, in tombs, and in pits.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

- Reminder...God purposed King Saul to defeat this fierce enemy (9:16)

7 And *some of* the **Hebrews** crossed the Jordan *into* the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him, trembling.

7 Also *some of* the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he *was* still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

7 Hebrews went across the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead, but Saul remained in Gilgal, and all the people followed him, trembling.

7 And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

- "...Hebrews" - for an Israelite to refer to other Israelites as "Hebrews" is highly unusual — It may have been a derogatory term used by Saul because he did not respect his own people [Wiersbe]

- After a preliminary encounter at Geba (v3), halfway between Michmash and Gibeah, the Philistines (with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers and innumerable foot soldiers) pushed the Israelite troops eastward all the way to Gilgal

— The Philistines must have been strong to threaten Israel's eastern territory since Philistia was Israel's neighbor to the west

8 Now he waited for seven days, until the appointed time that Samuel *had set*, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him.

8 Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him.

8 Saul waited seven days for the appointment set by Samuel. When Samuel did not arrive at Gilgal, as the people began to scatter from Saul,

8 And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

- Saul waited for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice as he had been told to do two years earlier (10:8)

— The vast host of the Philistines began to assemble and the longer Saul waited, the more dangerous his position became

- If he were to strike immediately, he could defeat the enemy, but his delay only gave them opportunity to become stronger
- As the seventh day ended, and Samuel had not yet shown up, Saul's soldiers began to desert their God and countrymen

9 So Saul said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

9 So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

9 Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering and the peace offering to me," and he offered the burnt offering.

9 And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

- On the seventh day, the day Samuel was to arrive, Saul could wait no longer and unlawfully took on himself the priestly task of offering community sacrifice

— Saul felt increasing pressure to stop waiting on God and act, even if it meant disobeying God; Saul surrendered to his impatience, failing to trust God's ways and timing

— Fearful that the mass desertion of his soldiers continue (Cf. v8), he decided to slay the sacrificial animals before engaging the enemy and to attack, rather than to wait for Samuel to come offer the sacrifices

— Saul's impatience (and unbelief) led him to go ahead without Samuel

— This was a violation of Samuel's orders (10:8)

— Contrast Saul's rebellion against Samuel the prophet with David's submission to Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12:1-15)

— One option would have been for Saul to ask for the Lord's help in prayer, as Hannah did

— Ritual was evidently very important to Saul; this suggests he had a very superficial relationship with God

Saul's failure was in his appropriating to himself priestly duties, which may have been associated with pagan kingship, but were without divine sanction. This was inappropriate for him or any king of Israel.

10 But as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him *and* to **greet** him.

10 As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him *and* to greet him.

10 Just as he finished offering the burnt offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to meet and greet him.

10 And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

- "...greet" - "bless"

Verses 11-12 record Saul's excuses as he tried to put the blame on Samuel and the people. "I forced myself!" he told Samuel, but the prophet knew the truth. This was the beginning of the end: if God could not trust him in this little matter, how could He trust him with the kingdom?

11 But Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Since I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come at the appointed time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash,

11 But Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash,

11 Samuel said, "What have you done?"

Saul replied, "When? I saw that the people were scattering from me, that you didn't come at the appointed time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash.

11 And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash;

12 I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I worked up the courage and offered the burnt offering."

12 therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering."

12 I thought, 'The Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal but I've not sought the favor of the LORD,' so I forced myself to offer the burnt offering."

12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

- Saul failed to accept responsibility, instead he blamed others (the deserting troops and the tardiness of Samuel), but these were simply excuses for sin

13 But Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly! You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for the LORD would now have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

13 Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established

your kingdom over Israel forever.

13 Then Samuel told Saul, "You have acted foolishly. You haven't obeyed the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever,

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

14 But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought for Himself **a man after His own heart**, and the LORD has appointed him ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

14 But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

14 but now your kingdom won't be established. The LORD has sought for himself a man after his own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as Commander-in-Chief over his people because you didn't obey that which the LORD commanded you."

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

- Because of this deed, Samuel said, Saul's dynasty would come to an end ("Your kingdom will not endure" [NIV]), and that of another man would take its place, a man after God's own heart, the one destined to be the most famous king in all of human history!

- "...a man after His own heart" - a phrase which followed David his entire life; David is always referenced as a king "after God's own heart" (Cf. 16:1)

The severity of God's judgment on Saul must be seen in the light of God's holiness. As in the instance of the people's careless handling of the ark at Beth Shemesh, so Saul had now violated the holy standards of the Lord by disobeying the Law of Moses (Lev 6:8-13) and the word of His Prophet Samuel (10:8).

The king of Israel was the Lord's lieutenant. Any disobedience to his Commander-in-Chief was an act of insubordination that threatened the whole administrative organization of God's kingdom on earth. Saul failed to perceive his identity and responsibility under God; he assumed more authority than was his.

Had Saul obeyed on this occasion, God would have placed his descendants on his throne for at least one generation, if not more (v13; Cf. 1 Kings 11:38). Perhaps Saul's descendants would have reigned in a parallel kingdom with the king from Judah [Pentecost]. Perhaps they would have served with David [Wiersbe]. Now Saul's son would not succeed him.

Eventually God would have raised up a king from the tribe of Judah even if Saul had followed the Lord faithfully (Gen 49:10). That king probably would have been David.

15 Then Samuel set out and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul counted the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.

15 Then Samuel got up and went from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul mustered the people present with him, about 600 men.

15 And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men.

Saul had mustered over 300,000 men to rescue the people of Jabesh Gilead and then cut it down to 3,000. Now his force numbered only 600. The Philistine army was “as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude” (v5), a simile also used for the army Gideon faced (Judges 7:12)—and at 600 men, Saul’s army was twice as large as Gideon’s! The difference wasn’t so much the size of the army as the strength of the leader’s faith. Gideon trusted God for victory and God honored him; Saul disobeyed God and God punished him.

16 Now Saul, his son Jonathan, and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash.

16 Now Saul and his son Jonathan and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash.

16 Saul, his son Jonathan, and the people present with them remained in Geba of Benjamin, while the Philistines camped in Michmash.

16 And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin: but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.

- Saul led his troops from Gilgal to Geba, where some of the Israelite soldiers camped

- As a result of his disobedience, Saul began to struggle; his son Jonathan, who sought to follow the Lord faithfully, became increasingly successful

17 Then raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual,

17 And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual,

17 Raiders went out of the Philistine camp in three companies. One company turned in the direction of Ophrah, to the land of Shual,

17 And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way that leadeth to Ophrah, unto the land of Shual:

18 and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

18 and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

18 one company turned in the direction of Beth-horon, while the one company turned toward the border that overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the desert.

18 And another company turned the way to Beth-Horon: and another company turned to the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

- Having taken Geba from the Philistines (v3), Saul and Jonathan, after the incident with Samuel at Gilgal, were once again attacked by the Philistines from Michmash. The Philistines divided themselves into three companies of raiding parties, surrounding Saul's capital city:

— One turned north of Micmash toward Ophrah

— The second southwest toward Beth Horon

— The third east toward Zeboim (the Jordan Valley)

- The rest of the over-confident Philistine army remained at Michmash

19 Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, because the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears."

19 Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears."

19 No blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel because the Philistines thought, "This will keep the Hebrews from making swords or spears."

19 Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears:

- The main physical advantage the Philistines enjoyed was their ability to smelt iron; this gave them a strong military advantage over the Israelites

— The Philistines had apparently learned sophisticated metallurgy from the Hittites or other Anatolian peoples with whom they had come in contact as part of their migration from the Aegean Sea area to Canaan around 1200 BC

— This monopoly on iron works lasted until the time of David, when Israel began to produce iron objects rather freely (Cf. 1 Chr 22:3)

20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe.

20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe.

20 Everyone in Israel would have to go to the Philistines so each person could sharpen his plow, his mattock, his axe, and his sickle.

20 But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.

21 The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the cattle goads.

21 The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes.

21 The charge was one pin for plows, mattocks, three pronged forks, and axes, or for setting the goads.

21 Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

22 So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan.

22 So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan.

22 On the day of battle, none of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan were armed with swords or spears, but Saul and his son Jonathan did have them.

22 So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found.

- Israel had to depend on the Philistines for iron weapons and tools (v20)

— In wartime such services were not available, so only Saul and Jonathan had iron weapons

23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the gorge of Michmash.

23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

23 Now a garrison of the Philistines had gone out to the pass of Michmash.

23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash.