

1 Samuel 13:1-23

Saul Goes to War with the Philistines

The next few chapters recount instances in which Saul fails to follow God's directions. Saul had only been king for two years at this time.

In Chapter 13, Saul waits for Samuel as he prepares for an attack by the Philistines, but when Samuel is late to appear, he "forces himself" to take on the office of priest and offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. Because of this, Samuel says "thy kingdom shall not continue."

In Chapter 14, Jonathan sparks a rout of the enemy, but unwittingly violates a rash and foolish oath that Saul had made. It almost forces Saul to execute his own son Jonathan.

In Chapter 15, Saul spares the Amalekite king and the cattle against the express command of God. Samuel says because of this that God will rend the kingdom from him.

Nevertheless, Saul accomplishes what the people wanted, which was to be a strong military leader. But in the process he is revealed to be vain, foolish and self-absorbed.

Josephus says (Antiqu. I. 6. c. 14. sect. 9.) he reigned eighteen years in the lifetime of Samuel, and twenty two years after his death, in all 40; which agrees with **Acts 13:21**.

- **Acts 13:21** - "And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years."

But some of the rabbis insist Saul had a very short reign, to minimize his reign when compared to David's. (Seder Olam Rabba, c. 13. p. 35. Juchasin, fol. 11. 1)

1 Samuel 13:1-2 - "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, 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."

Some commentators say Saul was foolish to disband his larger army, since he planned to attack the Philistines.

1 Samuel 13:3-4 - "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. 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."

The rabbis say this may not have been planned - Jonathan may have been responding in the moment to a provocation by the Philistines.

But now Saul has to call everyone to come back and prepare for a response from the Philistines.

1 Samuel 13:5 - "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."

The large numbers are probably an exaggeration or scribal error. Still, from Israel's point of view the Philistines were swarming and bristling with weapons of war.

Significantly, the Philistines "pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven."
"Michmash means "hidden," and Bethaven means "house of self-exertion" or iniquity.

The enemy is always tempting us to exert self rather than rest and wait on God. The hidden places where these garrisons lurk must be revealed.

- **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

1 Samuel 13:6 - "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."

Despite now having a king to lead them in battle, the people's faith and confidence collapsed. They ran away to hide.

There is a lesson here about our spiritual warfare. That's why all these battles are recounted for us in the scriptures.

Hiding in holes and caves is not the response of faith. We can't just ignore an enemy garrison in our midst. It doesn't make the problem go away. It just means we'll be tracked down and executed one by one. As Benjamin Franklin said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence: "We must all hang together, or most assuredly, we will all hang separately."

In boldness and unity with the rest of the body, we take the fight to the occupying forces of the enemy within ourselves.

- **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** - "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

- **Ephesians 6:10-18** - "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

In **1 Thessalonians 5:8** Paul mixes it up and talks about putting on faith and love as a breastplate.

Interestingly, we see later that the Philistines purposefully kept smiths and iron weapons away from the Israelites (see **verses 19-22**). Samson had used only a jawbone of an ass. Israel had slingers and possibly archers, but almost no swords. Later David goes up against Goliath after rejecting Saul's armor, using only a sling and pebbles that God provided at hand.

In that battle, David expresses a universal truth about how God brings victory:

- **1 Samuel 17:47** - "And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands."

This points to the invisible weapons and protection God provides in spiritual warfare. We are wearing it because God Himself is:

"He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head" (**Isaiah 59:17**).

1 Samuel 13:8-9 - "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. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering."

Recall that Samuel had previously told Saul to wait for him, and he would arrive after seven days.

- **1 Samuel 10:8** - "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do."

Saul waited until the seventh day, but not to the end of it, or towards the close of it, as he should have done.

The disobedience was not that Saul had intruded into the priest's office, because in this unsettled time when the Tabernacle and Ark are in different locations, normal procedures were suspended. Rather, Saul had not waited. Circumstances and appearances outweighed what Samuel had told him.

Saul's Excuses

1 Samuel 13:11-12 - "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; 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."

"I forced myself..."

The "tyranny of the urgent" is a cruel taskmaster and an enemy of faith.

Saul knew it was wrong, but he felt he had to - forced by circumstances. It sounds reasonable, but that's not the way God works.

This test is especially important to people in authority, because not only are their own lives on the line, but the lives of those they are responsible for.

Patience - waiting on God - is part of our spiritual warfare.

- **Proverbs 3:5** - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own arm of understanding."

- **Psalms 33:20** - "Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield."

- **Lamentations 3:26** - "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

- **Matthew 6:25** - "Therefore I tell you, take no thought for your life..."

Samuel's Response

1 Samuel 13:13-14 - "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. 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."

Although Samuel did not yet know David, who might possibly not even be born yet, God revealed to him that another man had now been chosen to replace Saul.

Probably, if Saul had repented completely, this all could have been averted.

As an example - David immediately confessed when Nathan confronted him about Bathsheba (see **2 Samuel 12:13**).

But Saul makes excuses, and continues in his career to disobey and reign with increasing cruelty and oppression.

To be a person "after God's own heart" means that his purposes and inner desire is in harmony with God's, neither bending to pressures of circumstances or public opinion. But the rabbis also said it means someone whose outward actions reflect the inward state of his own heart, without hypocrisy or hidden agendas.

Humility is also essential:

- **Psalm 51:17** - "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

- **Isaiah 57:15** - "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in a high and holy place, *and* with the oppressed and humble in spirit, to restore the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite.'"

The passage in Acts goes on to describe the choosing of David:

- **Acts 13:22** - "And when he had removed him (Saul), he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."

David was a type of Christ.

If we let Jesus reign in our hearts, then we too can be people "after God's own heart."