

1 Samuel 13 — The Fool

May 1, 2022

Good morning CrossWinds! If you are a visitor, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you. This morning, we are continuing in our study of 1 Samuel. We will be at chapter 13. Before we get to the text, I want to give you an update on what is happening on the facility in Spencer.

As you know, we are remodeling the north side of the north mall. That will be the new home of our Spencer campus. With summer around the corner, things are picking up pace. Instead of working times being Tuesday night and Saturday morning, beginning this week, work

nights are now Tuesday and Wednesday nights plus Saturday morning. We need skilled and unskilled help. For skilled, we need people with experience putting up metal stud walls. They are



going up fast. We are also removing some ceiling tiles. You can also pray that we are able to get some electricians. We are working on getting them in place so we can put the electrical into the walls. Once the electrical is in the walls, we will begin putting up drywall. If you are unskilled like me, your help is still needed.

Here is my challenge. Would you consider helping with the construction in Spencer either once a week or once every other week? If you were able to commit to helping twice a month, it would help us make great progress. As the old saying goes, many hands make light work!

Let's pray and get to the Bible.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."... Psalm 14:1a (ESV)

When talking about atheism, I have quoted that verse. Only a fool can look at the world around us with all of its creativity, beauty, and complexity and think God doesn't exist, that all of this happened by chance.

As I was thinking about this verse, I realized I have subtly misunderstood its meaning. It doesn't say, "The fool says in his mind there is no God." It says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God."

This is far more penetrating. Probably nobody in this room will say in their mind, "There is no God." But as we face life's temptations, economic difficulties, and loneliness, it is easy to say in our hearts, "There is no God. The way my heart feels right now and the way I think about life right now, I am acting like God doesn't exist." According to Psalm 14:1, it is the person who says in his or her heart that there is no God is a fool.

This morning, as we resume our studies on the life of King Saul, we will see him act and think like a fool.

Background

As you will remember, the story of how Saul became king began in 1 Samuel 8. It was in 1 Samuel 10 that Samuel privately anointed Saul as king. While Saul was anointed king, he was a hesitant leader who didn't do his job. He hid his anointing publicly and privately. Samuel anointed Saul to be king again. This time he did it publicly so Saul could not hide. In spite of knowing the lot to be king would fall on him, he was hiding in the baggage. That was not the sign of a fearless leader. After his public anointing as king, Saul went back to the farm and did nothing as a king. It seemed like nothing could kick Saul into leadership. Then, in 1 Samuel 11, the Ammonites attacked the city of Jabesh-gilead. This

was a city that contained some of Saul's relatives. Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had a nasty way of branding the people he conquered. He gouged out their right eyes. It was the threat of his relatives losing their right eyes to wicked king Nahash that finally sprung Saul into action. He galvanized the people behind him. He led a great military victory against the Ammonites, crushing eye-gouging Nahash and his armies.

Last week, in 1 Samuel 12, we studied one of Samuel's speeches to the nation after Saul's amazing victory over the Ammonites.

Saul was finally acting like a king. His rule had begun. Unfortunately, it wouldn't last long. We will see that as we look at the first verse of this chapter, which is a very perplexing verse.

Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel... 1 Samuel 13:1 (ESV)

In other biblical accounts, such as in 1 Kings, when a king takes office, the author typically gives the king's age when he becomes king, then the biblical author tells the number of years a king reigned in office. It appears, that is what the author of 1 Samuel is doing. The problem is Saul's age when he became king and the number of years he reigned as king are not obvious from the Hebrew text. The Hebrew of 1 Samuel 13:1 literally says that Saul was "a son of a year" when he became king. That literally means he was a 1-year-old. It then says Saul reigned over Israel only two years. How could Saul be a year old when he became king and only reign for two years? Saul died in 1 Samuel 31. We have a lot more than two years until we get to chapter 31!

The ESV footnote says, “Some Greek manuscripts say Saul was 30 years old when he became king.” These Greek manuscripts were written much later in history. It was the attempt of some translators making a copy of the Bible in Greek from Hebrew to come up for a more reasonable age for Saul when he began to reign other than the age of one!

Those of you who have the NIV have a completely different translation.

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years. 1 Samuel 13:1 (NIV)

The ESV and the NIV are completely different! How did they get there? Since the original Hebrew of this verse is confusing, the NIV departed from the Hebrew in this verse and based its translation on the Septuagint. That is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament written in the third century B.C. In addition, to figure out how long Saul reigned, they borrowed data found in Acts 13:21, which says Saul reigned over Israel for 49 years. So the NIV borrowed data from the Septuagint and the book of Acts to backfill the data for this verse. In my opinion, that is a dangerous precedent.

Beyond the problem of reading into the verse data that is not found in the verse is we are about to meet Jonathan, Saul’s son. He played a prominent role as a general in Israel’s army. If Saul was only 30 years old when he became king, it is hard to imagine him having a son that was old enough to be a general in the army at that age. If Jonathan was 25 years old when he became a general in the army, that would mean Saul conceived him as a son when he was 5. I don’t think that happened.

Realizing Saul needed to be older than 30 when he became king, the NASB also changed this verse to say Saul was 40 years old when he became king.

Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel. 1 Samuel 13:1 (NASB)

I am not aware of the rationale for why they claim Saul was 40 years old when he became king other than Saul needed to be old enough to have a son named Jonathan that served as a general in Saul's army.

So what are we to do with this verse? Should we leave it faithful to the original Hebrew, as the ESV does, and say Saul was a 1-year-old when he became king and he only reigned for two years or should we start guessing at numbers and borrow numbers from other parts of the Bible or other manuscripts to make better sense like NIV and the NASB do? Which way should we go?

My answer is that we translate it like the original Hebrew reads to stay faithful to the text. Then we need to ask ourselves the question, "If the author of 1 Samuel is not wrong, what is this text saying that I am missing?"

When I ask that question, here is the answer that makes sense to me and other scholars. The biblical expression, "son of a year" is not pointing out Samuel's age when he became king. It is telling how long it took for Saul to get to this point and finally be established as king. Remember Saul's kingship started in 1 Samuel 8. Saul was privately anointed as king but hid. Then Samuel publicly anointed him as king, but he went home and did nothing. It was only when the Ammonites were going to gouge out the right eyes of his relatives that he began acting like a king. That process took a year.

The next part of the verse says Saul reigned two years. At first, that doesn't appear to make sense. Saul reigned as king until 1 Samuel 31. If we read the text a little closer, we find out what happened. In 1 Samuel 15:28, God rejected Saul as king. In 1 Samuel 16, David was anointed as king. Saul functioned as a lame-duck king for the rest of the book until he died. So the account of Saul's reign as king until God rejected him as king is only 1 Samuel 13, 14, and 15, which is two years.

I am pretty sure that is what this opening verse is talking about. I explained this to you because in your Life Groups this week I don't want you confused when you look at different translations of this verse and have completely different words in your Bible. Let's get back to the rest of the chapter.

When we obey God, sometimes things get worse before they get better.

You may remember the people asked for a king to go out before them to fight their battles. They talked about that in 1 Samuel 8:20. The first enemy Saul fought against was king Nahash and the Ammonites who were on the east side of the Jordan River. It was a great victory in which eye-gouging Nahash and the Ammonite threat were completely destroyed.

But you may remember from 1 Samuel 9:16 God chose Saul as king not to deliver the Israelites from the threat of the Ammonites but to deliver them from the threat of the Philistines.



They were located on the coast to the west of Israel.

The key to understanding the rest of this chapter is to remember that when Samuel privately anointed Saul as king, back in 1 Samuel 10, Saul was

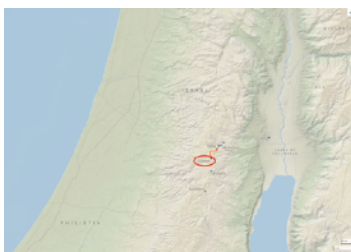
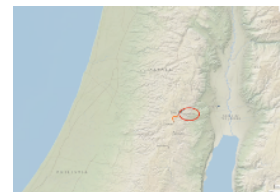
given two instructions from Samuel. First, he was to attack the Philistine outpost at Gibeah, which was located deep inside Israelite territory in Saul's hometown. Second, after attacking the outpost, Saul was to go to Gilgal and wait seven days for Samuel to arrive. At that time, Samuel would give him further instructions on what to do next. At that time, the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit rushed on Saul and empowered him for the task of fighting the Philistines, but he didn't do anything. He flamed out like a rocket that has burned out and failed to launch off the pad. Saul ignored Samuel's command to attack the Philistine garrison at Gibeah.

Now that Saul was clearly and unambiguously established as king, it made sense that the outstanding Philistine problem would be addressed. If our understanding of 1 Samuel 13:1 is correct, Samuel's instructions to attack the Philistine garrison at Gibeah were given to Saul about a year before this chapter took place.

Since we are going to have a war, we begin with numbering the soldiers for Saul's army.

Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. 1 Samuel 13:2 (ESV)

As king, it comes as no surprise that Saul put together an army. He chose 3,000 elite men. Two thousand of those men he kept with himself at Michmash. The remaining thousand he sent with his son Jonathan to Gibeah of Benjamin. Let me show you where these places are located. Michmash is 6.8 miles



north of Jerusalem, strategically situated in the hill

country. The smaller army division commanded by Saul's son Jonathan was at Gibeah of Benjamin. That is 4.3 miles southwest of Michmash. It controlled the route heading north from Jerusalem.

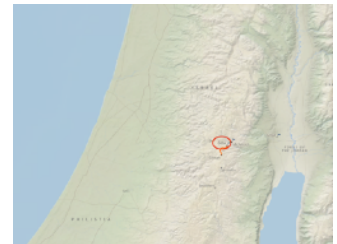
These are central locations in the hill country from which Saul could use his army to respond to a threat in virtually any direction. With the army in place, Saul sent the rest of the people home. The rest of the nation served in the military reserves. The soldiers with Saul and Jonathan were on active duty.

This is also the first time we hear of Jonathan. We will learn more about him as we go further into 1 Samuel. This is his first appearance.

Saul was commanded by God to attack the Philistine outpost at Gibeah. It ended up being Jonathan, his son, that finally carried out the work God gave Saul to do.

Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba.. 1 Samuel 13:3a (ESV)

Geba was located between Michmash, where Saul was with his troops, and Gibeah, where Jonathan was with his troops. Geba and Gibeah are close to one another and sometimes they swapped for one another so for all practical purposes they are so close they are in the same location.



Thankfully, somebody finally got around to doing what God clearly told Saul to do more than a year before, attack and destroy the Philistine outpost. At least Jonathan did what his father failed to do.

Before we breathe a sigh of relief and celebrate Jonathan's obedience to God's word, how do you think the Philistines reacted when they heard their military outpost was destroyed by the son of the new king?

...and the Philistines heard of it... 1 Samuel 13:3b (ESV)

The news traveled fast. It went down the hills to the west on the coastal plain where the rest of the Philistines were located. It doesn't take a genius to guess that they would retaliate and declare war. Before we get to the Philistine retaliation, we are brought back to Saul.

...And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." 1 Samuel 13:3c (ESV)

I think the reason Saul was hesitant to attack this Philistine outpost for the last year was that he knew there would be massive retaliation. To prepare for that retaliation, he called out the army reserves. He did that by blowing the trumpet. This was a ram's horn. In those days, when people heard a ram's horn being blown, they had a similar reaction to us when we hear an air raid siren! Everybody immediately dropped what they were doing, picked up their weapons, and ran to the horn. It was time for war.



And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines... 1 Samuel 13:4a (ESV)

Interestingly, even though Jonathan was the one who attacked and destroyed the Philistines at Geba, it was Saul that received all the credit for his son doing what he should have done. I am sure that is the way Saul wanted the story told. The seriousness of what happened was no surprise to anyone. As far

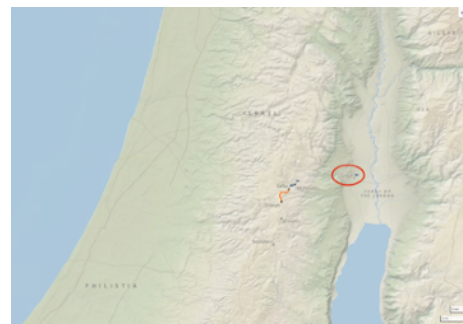
as the Philistines were concerned, the Israelites stank like rotten fish. There was no love for the Israelites, only hatred. The way the Philistines felt about the Israelites is similar to the way the average American feels about Russia today.

Before we go further in the story, it is worth pausing to make an observation. **Sometimes obeying what God tells us to do will lead to short-term difficulty.** Jonathan followed the instructions God gave his father. Now life was falling apart. The nation was going to war. Things were not getting better. They were getting worse, much worse. As the reader, we know the ultimate result will be God delivering his people from their Philistine enemies. At the moment, for the Israelites, life was falling apart around them because Jonathan obeyed God's word.

Isn't that the way it works in our lives too? A tough test is coming up in school. You don't cheat when others in the class choose to cheat. When you get the test back, you have an average grade, but the cheaters have a good grade. Your GPA goes down. Sometimes when we obey God's Word in the short term, things get worse instead of better. Maybe you run a production plant. You don't pad your numbers to make them look better when supervisors in other plants do. To the board, your plant doesn't look as good as other plants. Obeying God ends up leading to some short-term difficulty. When we obey the Lord, things sometimes get worse before they get better. That was the way it worked for the Israelites. Expect that will sometimes be the way it works for us.

And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. 1 Samuel 13:4b (ESV)

Why Gilgal? Gilgal was to the east



down in the Jordan Valley. It was away from the Philistines to the west. Gilgal was also where Samuel recently called the people to renew the kingdom. More importantly, it was the place where a year or so earlier Samuel told Saul to wait for him once the initial attack against the Philistines at Gibeah took place.

Remember what Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 10:8?

“Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.” 1 Samuel 10:8 (ESV)

It seems like Saul remembered those instructions and followed them.

Remember Saul had an army of 3,000 chosen men plus he called out the military reserves. Now, in your mind’s eye, move back up the hills and look down the hillside to the west; you can see the Philistines coming to fight. How many do you think were coming?

And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. 1 Samuel 13:5 (ESV)

The Philistines came in massive numbers. They had ten times more chariots than the Israelites had enlisted soldiers — 30,000 chariots! Each chariot had two-three soldiers. That is 60,000-90,000 soldiers! Chariots were the ancient version of a tank. The Philistines had another 6,000 in the cavalry. When it came to foot soldiers, they had more than could be counted. Israel was about to get crushed. It was hopelessly outgunned and outnumbered.

When the Philistines arrived, they moved right into Saul’s fortress at Michmash, the very spot Saul vacated to head to Gilgal. That is insulting! If you

were an Israelite, and you saw that many Philistines gathered to destroy you, would you freak out? I bet you would!

When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. 1 Samuel 13:6–7 (ESV)

Now the consequences of destroying the Philistine outpost at Gibeah are all too clear. The Israelites were in serious trouble. It is almost comical to see what the people did. Everyone started hiding. They hid in caves, holes in the ground, behind rocks, in tombs, and down wells. When you are willing to get into a tomb to hide with dead bodies, you know people were scared and desperate! At least Saul hadn't run away. He was still at Gilgal. I don't think that was a statement of his courage. I think he was as petrified as everyone else. He just didn't want to leave Gilgal because that is where Samuel said he would meet him. At this point, without Samuel's help, Saul didn't know what to do.

While we are here, there is a lesson to learn and apply to our lives. What was God doing in Saul's life at this point? Was God trying to ruin Saul in this trial or was God trying to grow Saul in this trial? What do you think? How Saul handled this trial would determine the outcome.

God tests us to see what we trust under stress. God was not trying to ruin Saul. He was testing Saul. God was going to reveal what Saul trusted in when his world fell apart. Would Saul trust and obey God's word when it was hard to follow or would he depart from God's word and follow his own wisdom and path?

This is not the first time we see God testing people in the Bible. We see it a number of times. For example, do you remember when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar on Mount Moriah? That was God testing Abraham. Did Abraham obey God's word and sacrifice his own son even though the outcome made no sense to him or did Abraham break God's word and make his own way? Thankfully Abraham obeyed God's word. He went to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah and God provided a ram to take his son's place. Then Abraham was blessed by God for passing the test. Saul was in a similar situation. The world was falling apart around him. Trusting and obeying God's word when it is hard and doesn't make sense would result in a blessing. If he broke from God's Word and went his own way, it would not end well.

God didn't just put Abraham and Saul in these kinds of tests. From time to time, God will put us in those kinds of tests.

Where was Saul to find the strength to pass the test? Last week in 1 Samuel 12:24 Saul was told to make sure he considered the things God had done in the past, that is, remember the way God rescued his people from great adversity in the past in order to help them faithfully follow God in the present. That is what Saul should have been doing at this point when he was under pressure --- remembering God's faithfulness to rescue his people in the past. He wasn't to just look at the overwhelming circles around him but to look to the faithful God who protects and loves his people. That is not just what Saul was to do in that day, but it is what we are to do every day. Remember God's

faithfulness to his people in the past to help us securely rest our confidence in God when we face tough trials in the future.

He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel... 1 Samuel 13:8a (ESV)

Saul started off well. He waited seven days at Gilgal, just like Samuel told him to wait. Each day he waited, the Philistine advantage grew. Their numbers kept increasing. But to Saul's credit, he waited. I am sure each day he was asking around the camp, "Has anyone seen Samuel? Has anyone seen Samuel?" Sometimes time passes fast. I am sure that week dragged on. Each day Saul hoped for Samuel's arrival but his hopefulness ended in disappointment. While Saul kept waiting for Samuel, I am sure his soldiers kept asking him what they were to do. "Saul, you are the king. What is our strategy?" Without Samuel, Saul didn't have an answer. This didn't look good.

But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. 1 Samuel 13:8b (ESV)

This was not good. Saul and his army were already hopelessly outnumbered. With Samuel not arriving and Saul not providing direction and leadership, people were abandoning Saul left and right. All this waiting for old Samuel was only making things worse! At the end of the seventh day, it felt like Samuel had forgotten them. Saul needed to act, and he needed to act now. Look what Saul did.

So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. 1 Samuel 13:9 (ESV)

We read this verse we might find ourselves saying, "Finally, Saul took some action! Wasn't he supposed to do that as a king?" The problem is that offering the burnt offering and a peace offering was not Saul's role. Samuel told

Saul that was the prophet's role. Samuel was the only one authorized to make those sacrifices.

We may look at this situation and say, "What alternative did Saul have?" His army was dispersing. Soon nobody would be left. The Philistines would walk in, take over the land, and slaughter the people. That is the only future Saul could see.

As soon as Saul finished the offerings, guess who showed up.

As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came... 1 Samuel 13:10a (ESV)

I suspect that Saul was initially relieved to see Samuel. He thought Samuel was not going to show up at all. Samuel had dealt with the pesky Philistines before. Surely Samuel would know what to do in this situation. I think Saul was relieved to see Samuel when he went out to greet him probably with a hug.

...And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. 1 Samuel 13:10b (ESV)

Can you picture the smile on Saul's face when he saw Samuel? As we learned last week, for all of his life Samuel was a good leader. He never failed the people. He always had good wisdom and knew what to do in tough situations. Saul's smile quickly faded when he heard old Samuel's words.

Samuel said, "What have you done?"... 1 Samuel 13:11a (ESV)

Like the voice of God calling to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after the couple failed their test and ate the forbidden fruit, old Samuel's voice cut like a knife deep into Saul's heart.

Saul was confused. What did he do wrong? Instead of asking about his sin and repenting of his sin, Saul immediately began justifying his sin. He blamed his sin on the people and circumstances around him instead of taking responsibility for what he had done. This is called blameshifting.

...And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." 1 Samuel 13:11b–12 (ESV)

Blameshifting is not owning and repenting of my sin. It is blaming my sin on something or someone else. Saul isn't the only one who did this. We do it all the time. We are tired or our spouses speak to us with an edge in their voice then we yell at them. Instead of owning our sin and confessing our sin we say, "It is your fault! I wouldn't yell at you if you didn't make me so angry!" That is blameshifting. It is blaming our sin on others instead of owning it and repenting of our actions. Let's see how Saul tried to blame his sin on other people and circumstances.

1. The army was scattering. "If I didn't act soon, the army would be gone." The problem with this excuse is the Israelites were already far outnumbered even with a full army. A dwindling army did not justify his sin. It was a lame excuse for his disobedience.

2. Samuel did not arrive on time. The "You" in this verse is in the emphatic tense. Saul blamed his sinful choice on Samuel for being late. This is another poor excuse. Samuel not arriving on time didn't justify disobedience to God's clearly revealed word. Saul's sin was not Samuel's fault.

3. The Philistines mustered at Michmash. That was only 10 miles away from Gilgal. Saul claimed the threat was close. The danger was imminent. If he didn't do something, it would be too late. That is true. The threat was close, but that didn't justify sin.

4. Saul claimed he forced himself to offer the burnt offering. He claimed he really didn't want to disobey God's word but he forced himself to disobey God's word. This is another poor excuse. God is large and in charge. He never puts us in a situation where we have to sin.

You may agree with Saul. You may be sympathetic to Saul's situation. Here is what we can learn.

The way to fail a test from God is by believing that in emergencies God's word can be disobeyed. It was the prophet and the priest's job to offer sacrifices. It was never the king's job. Emergency situations didn't justify disobedience. Saul felt it was acceptable to break God's word when under pressure rather than that this was an opportunity to live in faith and keep God's word. Saul failed the test. God put him in a stressful situation to see what he would do and obeyed his own wisdom rather than God's word.

Saul would fail a similar same kind of test only two chapters later. Look what Samuel said to him about the importance of obeying God's word instead of trying to find excuses to turn away from God's word.

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15:22 (ESV)

My friends, God will occasionally put us in hard times. We will also face stressful situations. God is not testing us to ruin us. He tests us to build our faith

and improve us. In those times, the fastest way to fail the test is to think our own reason is more trustworthy than God's Word. Look what Samuel said to Saul.

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly..." 1 Samuel 13:13a (ESV)

Remember, "the fool says in his heart there is no God." The fool doesn't say in his mind there is no God. The fool believes God exists. In his heart, he acts like God doesn't exist by taking matters into his own hands instead of trusting and obeying God's Word.

...You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you... 1 Samuel 13:13b (ESV)

According to Samuel, that is what a fool does.

...For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 1 Samuel 13:13c (ESV)

According to Samuel, had Saul obeyed God's word and passed this test, his kingdom would have been embraced by the Lord and established forever. Since Saul failed to obey God's Word, his kingdom would not continue. That means Saul's son, Jonathan, would not be king. King Saul would not produce a dynasty. Even though Jonathan was a worthy leader and a godly man, he would not be the one to follow in his father's footsteps as king. While God won't totally reject Saul as king until 1 Samuel 15, as a consequence of not trusting, obeying, and keeping God's word at this time his son would not be king.

It turns out that more important than fearing the Philistines would have been a healthy fear of God. God is to be more feared than the enemies around us. There is no way we can rationalize or justify disobedience to his word when we face tough circumstances.

But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." 1 Samuel 13:14 (ESV)

What lessons can we learn from Saul's sin?

1. The obvious answer is that **obedience to God's Word is incredibly important, especially when it is difficult.** Many times in stressful situations, when it seems to obey God's Word is the hardest and most unwise thing to do, that is a test from God to see if we will rely on our own wisdom or if we will submit and obey him. Will we pass those tests like Abraham or fail like Saul? Let me give you some examples. As Christians, the Bible tells us to save sex for marriage. Most of the people who come into my office for premarital counseling know the Bible says sex is to be saved for marriage but are living together. They tell me that is the way they are saving money for the wedding. They rationalize disobedience. According to Samuel and David, that is living like a fool. It is better to save yourself for your wedding night, pass the test, and be blessed by God than to fail the test. Society encourages the independence of children and it is expected that children will disrespect and disobey their parents. Yet, the Bible tells us children are to honor their fathers and mothers. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you. If you are a teenager rebelling against Mom and Dad and making life difficult for them, that is living like a fool. It is better to pass the test of obedience to parents and honor God and then receive his blessing than to fail the test. The Bible tells us to worship the Lord with our money. We are to give sacrificially, joyfully, proportionately, and cheerfully. It is so easy to say, "I can't afford to give." That is acting like a fool. It is

acting like God is not involved in life. Maybe times are lean because God is testing us to see what we will do with our money?

Let's get back to the text.

And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin... 1 Samuel 13:15a (ESV)

Samuel was pretty upset with Saul. He just left. The rest of the people left Gilgal. They headed to Gibeah in preparation for the battle against the massive horde of Philistines that was crawling over one another like an ant hill.



...And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. 1 Samuel 13:15b (ESV)

Talk about scattering! There was just one in five of the original army left. Everybody else deserted Saul. I am sure Saul was discouraged. I am sure he felt incredibly outnumbered. Remember what Samuel told the people what they were to do when they faced these kinds of challenges. They were to consider their history. They were to remember the past and how God provided for them protected them against incredible odds in the past then know he would protect them against incredible odds in the future. Saul had 600 men compared to the 30,000 chariots, 6,000 in the cavalry, and soldiers without number on the side of the Philistines. Compared to the past, these odds didn't look too bad. In Judges 7, we read how God thinned the army of Gideon down to 300 men. Those 300 men were used by God to defeat 120,000 Midianites. God likes those kinds of odds. That way everyone knows it was God who gave the victory and not the leader's strength or wisdom.

Saul was trembling. The people were trembling because they forgot their history! God loves to rescue his people against really bad odds.

Isn't that an application for us? Nothing has changed. God will, at times, allow difficulties into our lives. There are times when God allows the bottom to drop out so we cannot save ourselves. He does that to teach us he loves us. He does that to teach us he is watching out for us. He does that to teach us he will rescue us.

Israel's Troubling Circumstances

And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. 1 Samuel 13:16 (ESV)

Let me help you picture the scene. Geba and Michmash are close to one another. According to the legend on my map, they are slightly more than a mile apart.



What kept the Philistines and the Israelites apart was a deep ravine. On the map, you can see it as a dotted blue line.

Let me give you a picture of it. These armies could look at one another but couldn't easily get to one another.



The next verse tells us what Saul, Jonathan, and the army of 600 men saw in the Philistine camp.

And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. 1 Samuel 13:17–18 (ESV)

In other words, the Philistines sent raiding parties into the rest of the country to the north, west, and east. Saul and his small band of soldiers were

powerless to stop them as the raiders stole, destroyed and killed in the rest of the country. Now it gets worse.

Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.” But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. 1 Samuel 13:19–21 (ESV)

The Philistines did not allow the Israelites to have blacksmiths even to sharpen their farm implements. The Israelites had to travel to the Philistines to sharpen the cutting edges on their wooden plow, a mattock --- which is a type of pickax, or an ax for wood. In addition, the prices of sharpening these implements were exorbitant, even higher than the price of diesel fuel at the gas pump.

So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. 1 Samuel 13:22 (ESV)

This was not good. There were only two swords in the army, one for Saul and one for Jonathan. The rest of the people were equipped with sticks and rocks. The picture the author of 1 Samuel wanted us to have is of the massive difference between the Philistine army and the Israelite army. The Israelites had only 600 men equipped with sticks and rocks. The Philistines had 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and soldiers without number. They were fighting with steel blades and protected by steel armor.

And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash. 1 Samuel 13:23 (ESV)

The battle was about to begin. What happened next? We will find out next week! While the Philistines had every visible and tactical advantage on their side, they didn't have the most important thing on their side, which is God. While the

Israelites had almost nothing, they had the most important thing they needed, which was a God that is committed to rescuing his people. If they remember their history they knew something amazing was about to happen.

Applications

Before we leave, let's briefly look at some applications to take away. The center of this chapter was the test of Saul's faith that revealed the flawed character in his heart. What can we learn from this chapter about God testing us?

1. **Expect God will test us to reveal our hearts.** Will we trust and obey God or will we break God's Word to follow our own wisdom?
2. **God tests us with delays.** God tested Saul by having him wait for Samuel at Gilgal for seven days. God may test us by forcing us to wait to do the right thing.
3. **God tests us by putting us in situations where obedience is hard.** God tested Saul by putting him in a stressful situation with the Philistines.
4. **God tests us by seeing what we do with our sin when we are caught in our sin.** Saul blameshifted his sin on everyone else. He didn't take responsibility for his sin so he could confess and repent.
5. **Jesus is the one who passed all the tests from God that we fail.** Jesus passed the tests of the temptations in the wilderness and the cross. He is the king worthy of following who can help us in our time of weakness.

While we should expect tests from God that are intended to build our faith not ruin our faith, the truth is that we will not pass all those tests. The good news is we have Jesus who passed all the tests that came his way from the father. He

is our hero. He is our savior. He is the one we trust. He is the one to whom we cling because he loves us and died for us. Amen!



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