

1 Samuel 13

At this period of time, Israel was a subjected people in a subservient, submissive relationship with the Philistines much like the Roman's oppressive rule over the Jews in their earlier history.

Saul gathered his army. How many were in this powerful Israelite army (v. 2)? Saul had established a standing army of three thousand trained troops—2,000 under his direct control and 1,000 under Jonathan. And that was a big enough army for Saul; he sent the rest of the volunteers home.

Who was Jonathan (v. 2)? Saul's oldest son.

What aggressive action did Jonathan take (v. 3)? Jonathan took his detachment and successfully attacked the Philistine garrison ... in Geba, north of Jerusalem. He attacked confident that God would be on his side even in the face of insurmountable odds. He considered the Philistines to be an insult to his God. He was a man of great faith in his great God.

How did Saul respond (vv. 3-4)? Saul claimed he had attacked the Philistine outpost. Plainly, Saul was taking the credit for Jonathan's bold attack on the Philistine outpost.

What does that tell us about Saul? This is a bad sign in the heart and character of Saul. His own sense of insecurity will not allow any of his associates (even his own son!) to receive credit. A classic leadership mistake.

How did the Philistines respond to Jonathan's attack (v. 5)? The attack incited the Philistines to prepare a huge army for all-out war.¹

What did the Philistine army consist of (v. 5)? Three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The balance of power was heavily skewed in favor of the Philistines.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger of defeat at the hands of the huge Philistine army, what did they do (vv. 6-7)? They responded to the challenge with great cowardice. They hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. They deserted! They were afraid. They had been under the yoke of the Philistines for so long that breaking free seemed almost impossible; the Philistines possessed every advantage.²

How did Saul respond to the impending Philistine attack (vv. 7-9)? As Saul waited for Samuel at Gilgal (10:8), more and more men were missing at each roll call. The seventh day began, but still Samuel failed to appear. With his forces diminishing and with war impending, Saul panicked and disobeyed Samuel the mediator who told him to wait for his arrival and, moved by expediency, he offered the burnt offering himself, even though he had no authority to do so. Saul was a king, not a priest, and only priests were to offer sacrifices. Saul had no business doing what only a priest should do. Even if Samuel was late, that did not justify Saul's intruding into the duties of the priestly office.³

Samuel arrived and confronted Saul. How would you describe Saul's response (vv. 11-12)? Saul's response was a classic example of excuse making and failure to trust God.

Blame shifting at its finest -- *"You did not come at the set time. You see Samuel, it was really your fault. If you would have come earlier, I wouldn't have needed to do this."*

How did Samuel respond to Saul's excuses (v. 13)? Despite all the excuses, all the reasons, all the blaming of someone else, Samuel puts it plainly: *"You acted foolishly. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you."* God commanded him to do something, and he did the opposite. The bottom line is still the bottom line.

What was Samuel's verdict (v. 14)? He pronounced God's judgment on Saul. What appeared to be valid excuses did not change the fact that Saul had disobeyed God. For this he would lose the kingdom. Saul's dynasty would come to an end. God had already found another man to take his place, one after His own heart.⁴

How should Saul have responded? All Samuel wanted to hear was confession and repentance. He was not looking for reasons or excuses.

It's easy for us to pick on Saul with our perfect hindsight but if the truth be known, there's probably a little bit of Saul in each of us. Have you ever wanted to do things your way, made excuses to God, tried to manipulate God, rationalized your sin, failed to wait on God? **Based on this model, how does God expect us to respond?** With hearts quick to repent and confess. No excuses. Much like David's response when confronted with his sin by Nathan (2 Samuel 12). There is forgiveness readily available with God, but it is only given to the humble of heart (1 John 1:9).

Had he realized it, Saul could have gained much by the presence of a seasoned prophet like Samuel alongside him, ready to give guidance, instruction and, if necessary, rebuke. Above all, Samuel was an intercessor who knew the Lord's mind, and saw prayer answered. Samuel would indicate the right way, and all Saul had to do was follow. He could have leaned hard on Samuel and he would have found reassurance. In the event, this was exactly what Saul could not bring himself to do.⁵

It would be easy to say that the kingdom was taken from Saul because of his sin. And on one level, that was certainly the case. But it was more than that. After all, didn't David sin also? Yet God never took the kingdom from David and his descendants. **What was the difference?** Because the issue was bigger than an incident of sin, the issue was being a man after God's own heart.

1 Sam 16:7 *"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

Psalms 51:16-17 *"You do not delight in sacrifice, or burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart."*

What does it mean to be a man after God's own heart? How can I become a person more like that?

While Saul and his men were encamped at Gibeah, what were the Philistines doing (vv. 16-18)? The Philistines, encamped a short distance away at Micmash, began sending out raiders in three different directions. The purpose of these Philistine raiders was not to engage the Israelites in battle but to plunder and pillage the land and demoralize its inhabitants.

What was one major consequence of Philistine rule over Israel for so many years (vv. 19-22)? The Philistines had been in such complete control for so long that they had removed every blacksmith from Israel. The Hebrews had to come to them to get their farm implements sharpened. Only a few men had swords. Things looked grim indeed.⁶

By carefully guarding their military technology, the Philistines kept the Israelites in a subservient place. The only way the Israelites could ever win was to trust in God for everything!

¹ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 305.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 306.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel, 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 93.

⁶ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 306.