

1 Samuel 13

- Last week we noticed a pattern in Samuel's narrative of Saul's early time as king
 - The pattern serves to introduce Saul while foreshadowing where the nation was headed under his leadership
 - The pattern consisted of three parts in Samuel's narrative
 - He begins with a warning to the people about seeking a king instead of the Lord
 - Secondly, Samuel explains Saul's exploits emphasizing his humble heart
 - Finally, Saul is called into a climactic battle to demonstrate the Lord was working through him to care for God's people
 - We've gone through this pattern once already in the earlier chapters
 - And we've started the second go 'round
 - In Chapter 12 last week, we finished the lesson hearing Samuel's second warning to the people
 - The second warning was more intense
 - Samuel describes Saul as the king whom you have chosen, that you asked for
 - In other words, the people have made their bed and they are about to lie in it
 - And a king won't save the people from God's judgment when they disobey the covenant
 - Both the people and the king will be swept away
- Chapter 12 formally ends the period of Judges in the history of Israel
 - Now the people are ruled by a king
 - But the prophets will still be a part of the scene
 - Kings will not have the word of God

- And as kings go wrong, it will fall to prophets to keep them and the people honest
- And herein lies the key problem with Israel's demand of a king
 - Kings are people too, and like all men they will sin
 - When the people sinned in the past, the Lord spoke through a prophet to judge the people
 - They could listen to the word spoken through the judge, repent and be rescued from God's judgment
 - In that way, the Lord was judging His people, and by the counsel of God's word, the people were rescued from their own sin
- But what happens when the person speaking the word of God is no longer the most powerful person in the land?
 - What happens when a sinful king begins to lead the people away from God?
 - What will such a man say to a prophet who comes to give him counsel and correct him and the nation?
 - Do we think a monarch will receive such critique gladly?
 - It would take a very humble, godly sort to receive the rebuke of a prophet
 - And most kings aren't that sort
- So from this point forward, Israel has made it much more difficult for the word of God to counsel them away from destruction and into obedience
 - God will remain faithful, so He will continue to send prophets to the king and to the people
 - But more often than not, the prophet will not be heard
 - Instead, the king, who doesn't like his power to be challenged or his sin to be rebuked, will lead the people in persecuting the prophets
 - Such that most prophets will be martyred as a result
 - Culminating in Christ's own death

- There's a bit of irony in all this
 - Samuel gave Saul his power
 - And as Samuel anointed the king, he declared that the people were wrong to want him
 - Suggesting to Saul that he shouldn't even have the job
 - And at first, Saul didn't want the job
 - But then he took it knowing that this was an unwise move
- So Saul should have determined to lean heavily on Samuel's counsel and rebuke
 - Had he done so, God's word spoken through the prophet would have still been front and center
 - And the people and their king might have avoided the problems Samuel warned would come
 - But of course that doesn't happen
 - Saul becomes the instrument to fulfill the prophecy spoken against him and Israel
- Speaking of Saul's downfall, let's move back to Samuel's three part pattern
 - The next part covering Saul's exploits begins in Chapter 13

1Sam. 13:1 Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty two years over Israel.

1Sam. 13:2 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.

1Sam. 13:3 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."

1Sam. 13:4 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.

- For such a simple statement, there is a remarkable amount of controversy surrounding v.1 of this chapter
 - The controversy begins in the original Hebrew manuscripts

- The original manuscripts are all missing numbers of Saul's age and all but the final number of the years he ruled
- In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls are missing v.1 altogether
- In the Hebrew manuscripts that do include v.1, the words read:

Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign, and he reigned . . . two years over Israel."

- This is the only verse in scripture to address Saul's age when he began to rule
 - So without the missing number, we're left guessing about Saul's age
 - The NASB proposes 30 years old
 - Other versions propose 40 years old
 - Some versions simply show nothing in keeping with the original Hebrew
 - That leads to the first controversy
- The second controversy is how long Saul reigned
 - We know he reigned longer than 2 years but how much longer?
 - But what number do we place in front of the 2?
 - Well, in Acts 13:21 we're told

Acts 13:21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

- So Acts says Saul reigned for 40 years
 - So where does the "2" enter in?
 - Perhaps Saul reigned 42 years and the time given in Acts 13 was merely rounded down
 - Or perhaps Saul reigned exactly 40 years as Acts says
 - In which case we conclude Samuel was recording the number of years Saul had been ruling when the events of Chapter 13 came to pass

- And if you believe Samuel was giving the total number of Saul's reign, then you introduce a third controversy
 - When did the events of Chapter 13 take place?
 - Did they happen early in the 42 years or later? It's hard to know
- There are various attempts to resolve these mysteries
 - I've looked at these various explanations, and I have my opinion
 - I believe the second part of v.1 was intended to time the events of Chapter 13
 - So it reads correctly to say 2 years
 - The events of Chapter 13 happened 2 years into Saul's reign
 - Therefore, Saul's total reign was 40 years just as Acts 13 says, not 42 years as the NASB concluded
 - That leaves only the controversy over the age of Saul
 - Some translations conclude Saul was thirty when he began to rule
 - They take this view primarily because if Saul ruled 40 years, then he died in battle at age 70, which is fairly old
 - This camp finds it hard to imagine that anyone older than 70 could have entered into battle
 - Plus a younger age of 30 seems to fit better with the description of a young Saul in the earlier chapters of 1 Samuel
 - But other translations like the NASB favor an interpretation of 40 years old
 - They take this view because of v.3 in this chapter
 - In v.3 we're told that Jonathan leads an army into battle, which means he must have been at least 20 or older
 - If Saul began to rule at the age of 30 and this battle happened two years into Saul's reign...
 - Then Saul would have fathered Jonathan at age 12

- So the most reasonable conclusion is that Saul began to reign at age 40
- And he had been ruling for 2 years when the events of Chapter 13 took place
- The point in all this is that Saul hasn't been in charge for very long before the problems start to develop
 - The events of the chapter begin with Saul sending a warning shot across the bow of the Philistines
 - Two years after Saul takes rule, he decides to put the Philistines on notice that the land belonged to Israel
 - On a plain a few miles north of Jerusalem, the Philistines had stationed a garrison of troops
 - They occupied this territory to keep an eye on the Israelites and to defend the entry to the coastal plains of the Philistine cities
 - Saul wanted to clear the area of Philistines, so he takes 3,000 men and splits them into two groups
 - Saul leads one group of soldiers coming from Michmash 1.5 miles to the north
 - While a second group led by Saul's son, Jonathan, approached from 3 miles away in the south from Saul's hometown of Gibeath
 - It's a classic pincer move
 - Jonathan's troops finish the battle, destroying the garrison
 - The word then gets back to the Philistine cities on the coastal plain
 - Saul knows there will be a retaliation, which was his intent when he provoked them
 - So in v.3 we're told he blows a trumpet to call Israel to arms for the ensuing battle
 - And the people show up in response to the call of the king

1Sam. 13:5 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.

1Sam. 13:6 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.

1Sam. 13:7 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.

- And the Philistines respond
 - They bring a force of 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen while the number of the foot soldiers was innumerable
 - If Saul wanted to provoke the Philistines, he succeeded beyond all expectations
 - The Philistines have brought everything and the kitchen sink
 - They enter in Michmash and wait to engage Saul
 - On v.6 my translations says the people saw they were in a “strait” but the word in Hebrew means simply afflicted or distress
 - The Israelites gathered in Gilgal, which is next to Jericho in the Jordan river valley on the far eastern border of Israel
 - They are distressed to hear that the Philistines had gathered such a large force
 - Some responded to their fear by hiding in caves, cellars, cliffs and bushes
 - Others were running from the fight going east over the Jordan river into Gad
 - But Saul stayed with what remained of his trembling troops in Gilgal
- This is the turning point in Saul’s time as king

1Sam. 13:8 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.

1Sam. 13:9 So Saul said, “Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.

1Sam. 13:10 As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him.

1Sam. 13:11 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,
1Sam. 13:12 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."

- We're told that Saul waits seven days according to a time set by Samuel
 - This reminds us of instructions Samuel gave Saul immediately after his anointing in Chapter 10

1Sam. 10:5 "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying.

1Sam. 10:6 "Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man.

1Sam. 10:7 "It shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you.

1Sam. 10:8 "And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do."

- This first trip to Gilgal for sacrifices took place at the end of Chapter 11
 - But apparently Samuel had given Saul these instructions again in preparation for their battle against the Philistines
 - So Saul knew how this was supposed to go down
 - Saul knew Samuel would follow him to Gilgal after seven days
 - After the seventh day, Samuel arrives to lead Saul and the people in making sacrifices to the Lord
 - These sacrifices would make a way for the Lord's intercession on behalf of the people
 - But in v.8 we're told that Saul notices his troops are dwindling throughout the week
 - And we can easily imagine the scene
 - Each morning Saul wakes up and inspects his camp only to find more men missing

- As the week goes on, he begins to worry about how he can win this battle
- It may remind us of a previous military leader who saw the Lord reduce the number of his army down to 300 (Gideon)
- Toward the seventh day, the wait has become unbearable and the worry reaches a climax
 - Saul must be thinking to himself, why does the king have to wait on an old man to help win a battle?
 - It makes the king look weak and indecisive
 - After all it's just a process of cutting up animals and burning the meat on a fire
 - Hardly rocket science
- So before the end of the seventh day, Saul can't take it any longer, so he commands that the people bring him the animals for the sacrifice
 - And Saul, a Benjamite, offers the sacrifices for the people
 - In making the sacrifice himself, Saul is violating the prophet's orders
 - This isn't a matter of the Mosaic Law, because there is no tabernacle at Gilgal
 - This is simply a matter of obeying the word of the Lord
 - We can see how seriously the Lord took obedience to the word of the prophets by the example of a later king, Hezekiah
 - King Hezekiah was called to cleanse the temple
 - And he followed the instructions of the prophets to the letter

2Chr. 29:25 He then stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets.

- A command from a prophet was a command from the Lord
- So to disobey the prophet meant to disobey the Lord

- More specifically, Saul was placing his authority over that of the prophet and the word
- Saul had no reason to act in this way
 - The seventh day was not yet concluded
 - The Lord and his prophet had not failed in their promise
 - It's interesting that Saul was determined to conduct the sacrifice yet not worried about doing so in accordance with the Lord's word
 - This calls into question what Saul thought about the sacrifice in the first place
 - It appears to be merely ritual to him
- Sure enough, as soon as Saul had finished conducting the sacrifice, he looks up to see Samuel approaching
 - Samuel challenges Saul asking, what have you done?
 - The question alludes to much more than merely the sacrifices
 - It points to much more serious consequences for Saul
 - Saul offers an excuse to Samuel, which is that Samuel took too long
 - And then Saul says that he feared the Philistines would attack while the people were without the protection of the Lord
 - Again, it seems that Saul views the sacrificial program as winning the Lord's protection
 - Would the Lord have allowed the people to be destroyed if Saul was still waiting for Samuel when the attack began?
 - The answer you offer depends on your faith in God's word
 - Would the Lord keep His promises?
 - Does the Lord have the power to protect His people regardless of Samuel's timing?
 - If only Saul had recognized his period of waiting was a test of his heart rather than a test of his patience
- Samuel's response is immediate and unforgiving

[1Sam. 13:13](#) 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.

[1Sam. 13:14](#) "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."

[1Sam. 13:15](#) 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.

- Samuel's response may seem harsh, but it's appropriate when you consider the meaning of Saul's actions
 - Samuel says Saul has not kept the commandment of the Lord
 - The commandment was the one spoken to Saul through Samuel
 - The command was to wait for the prophet because the Lord expected the prophet to do the sacrifice
 - The king didn't have the authority to sacrifice, for that is not the role of a king
 - So when Saul made this mistake, he was indicating that the word of God was not his authority
 - Instead, Saul was becoming his own authority
 - And the moment he tried to rule Israel outside God's authority, he forfeited his authority to rule
 - In fact, Samuel says that Saul could have had the kingdom over Israel forever
 - That statement leaves us scratching our heads, because we know that the rule over Israel couldn't remain with a Benjamite
 - But remember, Samuel is speaking about what was humanly possible
 - From Saul's point of view, there was nothing preventing his family from having a dynasty...except his own sin
 - And therefore, the fall of Saul was inevitable
 - So we can hear Samuel's words as a theoretical possibility, not a theological possibility

- Saul was always going to sin and forfeit the kingdom
- And as we said in the beginning of this story, Saul becomes the exception to prove the rule
- Because of Saul's choice to dismiss the authority of the Lord's word, his kingdom will not endure
 - In fact, the Lord has already sought to identify your successor among the people
 - This successor will be a man after God's heart, which means this man will have the goal of pleasing the Lord
 - And with that goal, he will endeavor to rule the people knowing that the Lord is the true ruler working through the king and His prophets
 - Unlike Saul who, in just two short years, has come to believe he has the authority on his own to rule the nation
 - Remember, we said that the chief problem with a king ruling God's people is that human kings don't take criticism kindly
 - And Saul has just received stinging criticism
 - He's been fired, except the Lord will allow him to remain on the throne for many years
 - The decades between this moment and Saul's death offer the Lord time to prepare the next king to receive the throne
- Meanwhile, Samuel leaves Saul alone on the battlefield without the Lord's blessing for the battle with the Philistines
 - Saul counts his army and finds only 600 men
 - The number 6 in scripture is the number of fallen sinful man
 - And it couldn't be more appropriate for the fallen king's army to have only 600 men
 - Saul takes his meager army up to Geba, about 1.5 miles from the Philistine army

1Sam. 13:16 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.

[1Sam. 13:17](#) And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual,
[1Sam. 13:18](#) and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

- After Samuel leaves, Saul, Jonathan and the 600 men went back up to Geba
 - Immediately, we see Saul beginning to falter as king
 - He no longer has the midas touch
 - Because the Lord is no longer blessing Saul
 - Saul is still acting as king
 - But the Lord has no interest in propping him up before the people
 - The Philistines are still waiting for their confrontation with Saul
 - But Saul is hiding, daring not to enter into battle against such a superior foe
 - So the Philistines venture out in three directions
 - They head out north, east and west looking for Saul
 - Fortunately for Saul, he's hiding south of the Philistines so he isn't found
- As these raids continue, Samuel explains to his readers that the Philistines had a distinct advantage over the people of Israel

[1Sam. 13:19](#) Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears."

[1Sam. 13:20](#) So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe.

[1Sam. 13:21](#) The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes.

- The Philistines knew how to smelt iron but the Israelites had not yet developed the skill to make iron tools
 - And the Philistines declined to share their blacksmith techniques with the Jews

- Yet they would sell them some iron tools
- So when the Israelite's tools needed repair or sharpening, they were forced to return to the Philistines for blacksmith services
 - And merely sharpening a tool was two-thirds of a shekel, which was a a inflated price
 - This was a costly monopoly, as Samuel reports
 - All this meant that the Philistine armies had a decisive advantage in war since they had iron swords and shields

1Sam. 13:22 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.

1Sam. 13:23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

- Only Saul and Jonathan have swords made of iron
 - The Lord has left Saul to lie in the bed he made in disobeying the Lord
 - Saul has only 600 men
 - They have no armor or weapons
 - Only the king and his son have decent weapons
 - Remember what got Saul into trouble in the first place?
 - He was impatient and worried that his army would become insufficient to win the battle
 - Now because of his impatience, Saul has found himself in exactly the place he worried about
 - His lack of obedience to God's word brought about the very outcome he assumed he had to fix through disobedience
- And at this point, the Philistines decide to mass for battle
 - All this bad news doesn't mean the Lord will leave His people unprotected
 - This is an important detail to the story of Saul
 - Saul's unfaithfulness will not result in the Lord becoming unfaithful to His people

- But He is making a point to Israel
- He raised up Saul as king as an exception to prove the rule
 - The rule I'm speaking about is the prophetic promise God made to provide a king from the tribe of Judah to rule Israel
 - Ultimately, that king will be Christ
 - But before then, other men of Judah will rule
- Saul is the exception to show what happens when God's people are not content to wait on the Lord and obey His word
 - The people ran ahead of the Lord in demanding a king before the Lord's anointed was ready to rule
 - Remember, David was barely born when the people demanded a king
- So the Lord provided a temporary solution – Saul – who was an exception to the rule proving the error of seeking to act outside God's word
 - By his sin, Saul has proven true the rule that only Judah can rule Israel
 - Ironically, the Lord used Saul's example of running ahead of the Lord into disobedience to remind the people of their mistake in demanding a king early
- Yet the people still need God's leadership and mercy or else they will be destroyed by their enemies
 - And the Lord will remain faithful to His word
 - So even as Saul has erred, the Lord will work to care for His people
 - But He does so through someone other than Saul
 - Once again, David simply isn't ready to rule yet
 - So the Lord must work with someone else for a time
- And that person is Saul's son, Jonathan

[1Sam. 14:1](#) Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side." But he did not tell his father.

[1Sam. 14:2](#) Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men,

[1Sam. 14:3](#) and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the Lord at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.

[1Sam. 14:4](#) Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.

[1Sam. 14:5](#) The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba.

- Earlier in Chapter 9, the Lord declared to Samuel that Saul would be the one who would free Israel from the Philistines
 - And now we learn it will be a member of Saul's family to fulfill that promise
 - Saul seems to be staying in his hometown resting comfortably with no intention of engaging the enemy
 - He has his 600 bodyguards protecting him
 - And he seems content to just hide
 - Interestingly, Samuel notes that the descendants of Eli's sons were still operating the tabernacle in Shiloh
 - Why mention this detail here?
 - First, notice that Samuel mentions both sons of the disgraced priest Phinehas
 - The first son, Ahijah, inherited the position of high priest after the death of Phinehas and Eli
 - But the other son, Ichabod is mentioned too...why?
 - Remember, Ichabod means the glory has departed
 - So Samuel wants to connect Saul with the discredited family of Eli

- Just as the glory of the Lord departed the tabernacle during the time of Eli's family, so had Saul's reign lost its glory
- These two families are the perfect bedfellows in Samuel's story
- While Saul sits in comfort in his home, his son is not content to sit still
 - Without telling dad, Jonathan decides to act to win the battle
 - He goes alone with only his armor bearer
 - An armor bearer is like a caddie to a golfer, holding his important weapons and armor
 - So forget Saul's 600, and Gideon's 300...Jonathan is about to fight the multitudes of the Philistines by himself
 - This is faith indeed
 - The Philistines are in Michmash while Jonathan is coming up from Geba
 - Separating these two sites was a steep wadi canyon running east-west
 - And this is the path Jonathan plans to take in launching a surprise attack against this incredibly powerful army
- Why would Jonathan engage in this suicide mission?

1Sam. 14:6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few."

- The simple answer is faith
 - We'll study Jonathan's victory next week
 - But it's already easy to see that Saul's son will become an example of faith to contrast with his father's failure to trust in God's word