

1 Samuel (Sh'mu'el Alef)

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Chapter 13

1 Saul (Sha'ul) was as a son of one year¹ when he began to reign,² and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

2 Saul chose three thousand men of Israel,³ of which two thousand were with Saul in Michmash (Mikmas)⁴ and in Mount Bethel (hills of Beit-El) and a thousand were with Jonathan (Y'honatan)⁵ in Gibeah (Giv'at)⁶ of Benjamin (Binyamin); and of the rest of the people he sent each one to his tent.

3 And Jonathan⁷ smote the garrison⁸ of the Philistines (P'lishtim) that was in Geba (Giva), and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul caused the shofar to be blown throughout all the land,⁹ saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

¹ This phrase has been ascribed to being a copyist error, but perhaps it means that he was like a baby for the first year of his reign, having no idea how to conduct himself as the king. After all, when news came to him of Nahash's attack on Jabesh-gilead, Saul was ploughing in the fields like a common farmer.

² Some translations say that Saul was thirty, and some say he was forty, when he began to reign. He reigned for forty years. He died in battle, so that would make him either seventy or eighty when he went to battle. Both ages are improbable, so I tend to go with him being forty years old when he began to reign.

Rehoboam, at age forty, was described as young and tender, and therefore more easily led astray by others. Forty makes his age more in line with having a son old enough to be an officer in the army. As for going to battle at age 80, he may have initially meant to be there just to give orders, rather than to wield a sword, but after Samuel prophesied his demise, he probably went there with a sense that he would rather die on the battlefield than cowering behind a castle's walls.

³ Saul forms the core of his military might. These men were likely chosen to train as officers, while using some as bodyguards, scouts, and couriers.

⁴ Saul initially set up his headquarters in Michmash and scattered his men around the hills near Bethel. Michmash was reknown as the best place in Canaan for producing wheat. He abandoned it when the Philistines advanced on him and retired to Gibeah, where he had the firm support of his relatives.

⁵ Jonathan was evidently his father's pride and joy, for him to have put him in charge of one third of his chosen men.

⁶ Gibeah is identified in modern times as Teleil el-Ful, an artificial mound that is located four miles north of Jerusalem.

⁷ Jonathan was reportedly nicknamed "Gazelle," as he was lithe and fast on foot, having the epitome of what Israelis consider an athletic warrior physique. He evidently was also very clever and daring. He was highly skilled with the bow, according to the Scriptures.

⁸ **H5333**

נצב נציר

netsiyb netsib

4 And all Israel heard it said that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines¹⁰ and also that Israel had become a stench unto the Philistines.¹¹ And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.¹²
5 Then 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;¹³ and they came up and pitched camp in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven (Beit-Aven).
6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were distressed), then the people hid themselves in caves and in thickets and in rocks and in high places and in pits.¹⁴

nets-eeb', nets-eeb'

From H5324; something stationary, that is, a prefect, a military post, a statue: - garrison, officer, pillar.

H5324

נצב

na^h tsab

naw-tsab'

A primitive root; to station, in various applications (literally or figuratively): - appointed, deputy, erect, establish, X Huzzah [by mistake for a proper name], lay, officer, pillar, present, rear up, set (over, up), settle, sharpen, stablish, (make to) stand (-ing, still, up, upright), best state.

The word used for garrison could be referring to a governor or officer, or a flag or a standard, or the outpost itself. It could be that Jonathan merely stole or struck down the Philistines' flag or standard, much like Gideon destroyed the asherah pole in his family village, as it was offensive to his patriotic feelings, but the word used for smote indicates a strong blow, so it could have been that he either assassinated the Philistine officer who collected the taxes, and perhaps some other Philistines as he made his entry into the compound and then his escape, or he and his boys may have destroyed the whole garrison.

I don't think that it was the latter, as he did not occupy the garrison. I think that he killed the officer in charge of the garrison and took down some other Philistines at that time. This act would qualify as smiting the garrison and it would certainly be adequate for the Philistines to declare war on the Israelites.

⁹ The lookout posts would be within hearing distance of each shofar that was sounded, so that the alarm would be sounded from post to post across all the territories.

¹⁰ Saul is given the credit for Jonathan's strike, as Jonathan was under his authority. Jonathan may have acted without his father's knowledge, and Saul may not have been happy about his move, but he had to accept the responsibility for what an officer under his command had done. Jonathan possibly went ahead without consulting his father, as Saul did not feel that he had enough men to fight the Philistines. He retreated to Gilgal to wait for more men to join him.

¹¹ Becoming a stench to the Philistines means that the Philistines were outraged and furious over their tax collector being killed, and they wanted to take revenge on all Israel for it. It was not just a matter of seeing a necessity to bring the Israelites back under control. There was high emotion involved, and they were probably set on genocide.

¹² Gilgal was east of Jericho, quite a distance from where the Philistines set up their post at Michmash. Boosting Saul out of where he had hoped to headquarter made a statement that they weren't going to let him entrench himself in the land. At least, that was their intention.

¹³ This group included mercenaries. Even some Hebrews were among the number, some possibly because of fear, and some evil Israelites who had no conscience about bullying and robbing their own people.

7 And some of the Hebrews went over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.¹⁵ As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 ¶ And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were deserting from him.¹⁶

9 Then Saul said, Bring me a burnt offering and peace offerings.¹⁷ And he offered the burnt offering.¹⁸

¹⁴ When the Armenians were sent on a forced march from Turkey to Syria, they were often raided by bandits who wanted to rape their women. They dug pits in the sand for their daughters, and put them in there, and tossed a basket or blanket over their heads, to hide them. The Israelites probably had to do similar things for their women when the raiders descended on them.

They would have also dug cellars in their homes and pits in secluded places, with water and other supplies on hand to tide them over when the raiders came. The Philistines were aware that the Israelites were doing this, so they must have found some of them.

¹⁵ Some Israelites became refugees, trying to put distance between themselves and the Philistines, to delay what seemed to be the “inevitable.” There is no record of there being any holds in those regions strong enough to deter the Philistines, if they had the chance to come after them. The Israelites would have had to travel further, outside of Canaan, if the Lord had not intervened for them.

¹⁶ The delay was a sifting time. It sifted Saul, to show the people that he looked good on the outside, but was flawed on the inside. They loved him for his superficial qualities, and their misguided admiration was right in line with their shallow judgment in thinking that they needed a king, instead of depending solely on the Lord.

It was not inevitable that Saul would fail this test. He had the power of choice, but he chose wrong.

This test of waiting on the Lord’s timing was also for the purpose of sifting the people, like Gideon’s 300 whom the Lord chose to work victory through against great numbers of the enemy. Because he interrupted the sifting process, he ended up with more soldiers than what he was supposed to have, and some of them, though they fought well, were not supposed to be part of his core group whom he could count on to always be faithful to the Lord, first of all, and to him, if he turned out to be a true man of God.

¹⁷ Saul presumed to disobey Samuel’s order to wait for him. The order that God set up was for the king to take direction from His prophet, who had proved himself to be a moral, just, and faithful man, worthy to take direction from, and whom God backed up in that everything that Samuel prophesied came to pass.

Samuel didn’t take it upon himself to try to tell the king everything that he was supposed to do. It was Saul’s responsibility to wait on the Lord for direction about how to do his job, but he was supposed to ask Samuel for advice about the most important things. How to deal with the Philistines certainly was one of the top things that he needed to get advice about from Samuel.

Saul also presumed to perform a type of sacrifice that was the sole prerogative of a priest. Being a king does not give a person the right to do anything that they want to, and that is the main lesson of this chapter. Even a king must submit to God.

¹⁸ Saul deluded himself that he was honouring God, but really, his motive was that he was catering to the religious expectations of the people, so that he could keep them under his control. A king needs to rely on God to keep his kingdom under control, and he does that by honouring God in God’s way. God says that He honours those who honour Him. Waiting for God is one way of honouring Him, even if it means staying still when a person’s circumstances seem to be screaming at them to do something.

10 And it came to pass that as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering,¹⁹ behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him that he might bless him.²⁰

11 Then Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were leaving me and that thou didst not come within the days appointed²¹ and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash,

12 therefore, I said, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD. I forced myself,²² therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

13 Then 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 the LORD would have established thy kingdom over Israel for ever.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not stand;²³ the LORD has sought a man after his own heart²⁴ unto whom the LORD has commanded that he be captain over his people because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.²⁵

¹⁹ Many times, if people had waited one more minute, they would have seen God move on their behalf, but they gave up too soon and took matters in their own hands, and acted out of their flesh. Always wait one more minute, and if God doesn't show up, wait another minute, and then another, and another, until the Lord decides that we've waited long enough. If we occupy ourselves by thanking Him in the situation and praising Him, it makes the waiting a lot easier. Yes, have a praise party while waiting on the Lord to come through. It's fun, and it stomps the guts out of the enemy who has been trying to prevent God's blessings from reaching us.

²⁰ Saul disobeyed the Lord, but he still wanted to be blessed. It is human nature for a person to ignore God and do things their own way, but have the nerve to expect God to bless them anyway.

A lot of people disregard God many times, but think that they are going to go to Heaven because they haven't committed what they regard as major sins, and if things don't go the way they want them to here on Earth, they blame God for letting them down, without thought of how they have let God down. Or, if they feel that they are being punished for their sins, they resent God for it, though they know that they deserve it. If God were to punish anyone for all their sins, it would be far more than what any living person has ever experienced.

²¹ Saul put the blame for his sin on Samuel, because he didn't come right when he said he would. Being a whiner or a blame shifter, not taking responsibility for one's choices, is never an attractive attribute in a person.

Samuel was a man of his word, so if he didn't show up at the appointed time, he had a really good reason for it. God delayed Samuel, so that He could give Saul this test about waiting for Him, instead of being presumptuous and doing what was right in his own sight. This was one of the things that had caused trouble for Israel for hundreds of years – they did what was right in their own sight, instead of always consulting the Law of Moses about how to handle things.

²² This was a lie. He didn't have to force himself to make that offering any more than a man who is falling over the edge of the cliff has to force himself to grab onto a bush on the way down. Saul felt like he was falling over a cliff, losing control, but he wasn't supposed to have that kind of control. He was supposed to trust the Lord and leave the control in His hands. He was supposed to force himself to sit still and wait, regardless of the negativity going on around him. Saul did not repent of what he had done; he justified it.

²³ Saul has forfeited forming a dynasty. The rule of Israel will pass out of his family in just this one generation. Compare God's punishment for Saul's sin with a couple of the kings of Israel who sinned by setting up idols and leading the people into idolatry. God allowed them four generations before He cast down their dynasties.

This indicates that we should put some deep thought into what Saul did, considering how seriously God treated the matter. There is more here than meets the eye in regards to the grievousness of Saul's sin in not waiting for

15 ¶ And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin.²⁶ And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men.

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.

17 And three companies came out of the camp of the Philistines to destroy the land.²⁷ One company turned unto the way that leads to Ophrah (Ofrah) unto the land of Shual (Shu'al).

18 Another company turned the way to Bethhoron (Beit-Horon), and another company turned to the way of the border that looks to the valley of Zeboim (Vadi Tzvo'im) toward the wilderness.

19 Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines had said, Lest peradventure the Hebrews make swords or spears.²⁸

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

21 and when they had nicks in the mattocks and the coulters and the forks and the axes, or to fix a goad.²⁹

Samuel to arrive and make the sacrifice. Was it because Saul had greater advantages of knowing God's will than those other kings, or was it the act itself that was more grievous than worshipping idols?

Perhaps it relates to the degree of pride that came into his heart. Perhaps he thought that he could do no wrong, that everything he did had to be right because he had been anointed of God to be the king. There is a lesson here that, no matter how heavily a person is anointed, no matter how wonderful their accomplishments, no matter how amazing the miracles that God has done through them, they should never think that they can not make mistakes, or that God will overlook their mistakes, so that they don't suffer any consequences from them.

²⁴ A man after God's own heart is one who wants what God wants, which includes, not just results in situations, but also to have character that is pleasing to God. David was this kind of man, and he knew that he could not have noble character, or godly results, without God's help. He was not self-satisfied, nor did he ignore what God wanted when it did not coincide with what he wanted.

²⁵ There is no response of humble acceptance from Saul, as there had been from Eli or Hezekiah when judgment was pronounced on their offspring because of mistakes they made. Instead, Saul starts to become bitter towards God and paranoid.

²⁶ Samuel demonstrates what Saul should do; instead of hiding out at Gilgal, he needed to move in closer to the Philistines and prepare for battle against them.

²⁷ Raiding parties were sent out to rape, torture, murder, plunder, and vandalize. They probably burned the villages and crops to flush out anyone who was hiding in cellars or fields.

²⁸ "Gun control" imposed by tyrants in Biblical times. A just government does not have to fear weapons in the hands of its people. A just government knows that guns in the hands of its people will be used to defend the country against criminals and invasion.

²⁹ This must slowed up crop production, as well as humiliated the Israelites. It was economic and psychological warfare, as well as weapon control.

It also kept tabs on who was independent of mind. Inmates in prisons can find ways to manufacture and sharpen weapons, so it is likely that the Israelites could have sharpened their tools without the help of Philistine smiths, but if they did not show up at expected times to get their tools sharpened, the Philistines probably raided them to see if they had sharpened their tools themselves.

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 except with Saul and with Jonathan his son who had them.

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