

Saul as King – 1 Samuel 13:1-23

Introduction:

Saul has been chosen by God, Samuel and the people to be the first king of Israel. Since the people wanted someone to lead them in battle, one of the first things Saul does is to engage the enemies of Israel, the Philistines, in battle. His first raid is very successful. However, things go bad for Saul very quickly after that. He soon loses the support of the people, and worse yet, the blessing of God. This chapter is very important in the ongoing story of God's care for a very defiant nation. What is set in motion in this chapter will take years to come to fruition, but is the first step towards the greatest king and a foreshadow of the Messianic leader. May we pay attention to what God is saying in this chapter.

Saul Fights the Philistines – 1 Samuel 13:1-7

Verse one is very confusing. Check how various translations handle it:

13 Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, (KJV)

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

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

13 Saul was ... years old when he began to reign; and he reigned ... and two years over Israel. (NRSV)

13 "Saul was fifty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel for twenty-two years." (NEB)

The Jerusalem Bible leaves it right out!

The original Hebrew texts were corrupted, so it is hard to know exactly what the meaning is here. (cf. ESV for literal translation) Those who opt for the "he reigned 42 years in Israel" lean on the note in Acts 13:21 that Saul reigned 40 years and it

is also stated this way in some later Greek translations. Yet to choose this means we may say Saul was 30 when he started to reign, but how, then did he have a full grown warrior son (Jonathan) if he is only 30 years old? Maybe KJV gives the best suggestion by seeing this as the introduction to what Saul does next with no age connected.

1. Using the KJV as our understanding of the text, it appears Saul did little the first year. What, then, did he do the second year of his reign? Does this sound like a wise plan? (some suggest verse 1 means Saul was as naïve as a 1 year old)
2. What does Jonathan do according to verse 3? Who hears about this? What do you expect to happen next?
3. Why does Saul blow the trumpet and spread the news about the attack? What is the message spread throughout Israel in verse 4? What is Saul's plan as he gathers the people at Gilgal?
4. Saul is trying to raise an army, but the Philistines already have one. How large is the army of the Philistines? (v. 5)
5. How did the men of Israel respond when they saw the army of the Philistines? (vss.6-7)
6. Saul may not be a very wise military leader, but he did show one good quality in verse 7. What was it?
7. How do things look for Saul at this point?

Samuel Rebukes Saul – 1 Samuel 13:8-15

8. How long did Saul wait for Samuel (v. 8)? Why that length of time? Did Samuel show up? How did that affect the morale of the soldiers?
9. According to verse 9, what does Saul do? Why?
10. When does Samuel finally show up? (v. 10) What is Saul's response to Samuel's coming (v. 10)?
11. What does Samuel ask Saul (v. 11)? Does he seem pleased?

12. What is Saul's explanation for what he has done (vss. 11-12)?
13. What is Samuel's response to Saul's explanation (v. 13)? What has Saul done that is so bad?
14. What would be the consequences for what Saul has done (v. 14)? What was God looking for?
15. Samuel now left the scene, and Saul was left to deal with this battle alone. How many men did he have with him (v. 15)? How do things look for Saul?

Israel Without Weapons – 1 Samuel 13:16-23

16. The two armies (if you can call Saul's band an army) are about seven kilometers apart – Micmash to Gibeah. What did the Philistines do to add to the distress of Saul's band of soldiers? (vss. 17-18)
17. What other disadvantage did the Israelites have according to verse 19?
18. Where did the Israelites have to go to get their implements sharpened (v. 20)? Why would the Philistines do this?
19. The final description of Saul's situation is found in verses 22-23. What is their predicament? What are their chances of winning?

Conclusion:

The people begged Samuel for a king. He warned them that this was not a good choice, and it amounted to sin against God. Nonetheless, the people wanted a king, so Saul was chosen by God to be the king. Though we have a hard time determining the time line of Saul's reign, it appears he has done little to protect the people from subservience to the Philistines. The Philistines have grown more powerful, commandeering all blacksmiths to work for them, and the Israelites having to pay dearly just to have farming implements sharpened.

When Saul does act, it is very poorly planned. We can assume he sent Jonathan to raid the Philistine outpost, which brought the full force of the Philistine army on them. Thousands of foot soldiers and charioteers were ready to fight. Saul's army has no weapons and are shaking in their boots. In fact, most have disappeared to hide in caves, tombs or water cisterns.

Saul decides what he needs is an intervention from God, like the one they had at the last battle when Samuel called thunder and lightning down on the enemy. Saul has arranged for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices and plead with God for help. But when Samuel does not arrive at the designated hour, Saul goes ahead and acts as a priest. Now God rejects him as king.

Could things get any worse? Was there no hope whatsoever?

There is always hope when God is present. Though the people have sinned (again) God has not given up on them. He will show them that deliverance can come from a few faith-filled people.

In just a few chapters we will meet one who has a heart for God, and he will say, "And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47).