

“Beginning of the End for Saul”

Saul started his life honourably, and in many ways, he continued to be honourable. But, he was hasty, and his haste was to bring about his own demise, both as king and man. In this chapter we see how Saul, with the best intentions in the world, did not adhere to precise instructions given to him by Samuel (and, thus, from God). Holding nothing back, Samuel told the king he had thereby sealed his own destruction, and his kingdom would be passed to another (David, yet to be anointed by Samuel).

This report, of the removal of God’s approval from a man, is a vital lesson for us all today. It tells us several things... that:

God is active in our lives

He expects us to follow what He says, to the letter

When we do not do so, we fall into sin

When we sin God will sometimes remove His approval

That in our lifetime we may never again know His approval

That when this occurs we can expect nothing but trouble

This is no fallacy, or scaremongering. What happened to Saul happened to others in scripture, and what happened to them can happen to us. The only reason we, today, neither acknowledge this, nor expect it to happen, is a sign of our unbelief and lack of understanding of our own condition and the nature of God.

1 Samuel 13

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

The vast majority of people in our churches are *nice* people. They are sociable and do their best to live good lives. Within their ranks are those who are truly saved. They are the true 'Church'. Within *their* ranks, the majority have very little understanding of what their own beliefs are, or how to live their lives in the Lord. In many cases, neither do their pastors. This is observable fact.

That is why we see the inroads in the churches made by charismaticism and other heresies. God's people simply do not know who they are, Who God is, or what He really expects of them. They have been duped by the prevalent teaching that 'God is love' – and nothing but love. Western affluence seems to support the view. Without knowing it, these good people, saved by God, live out their lives not even realising that God does not approve of what they say, think or do.

Some do not realise that God has removed His active presence from their lives, and what they consider to be His loving hand on their lives is actually His disapproval in allowing them to do exactly what they wish! So they earn their money, have their holidays, live without any true sense of holiness and apart-ness from the world, and convince themselves that what they have in this world has been provided by God. So, everything must be alright!

But it is not. God will leave people to their own devices – a fate far worse than being obviously punished and knowing you are being punished. God does this after He has called them to repentance, sometimes many times. He will have talked to them from scripture, in their hearts and minds, and through others sent to jolt their consciences. But, they remain in their sinful pride and never acknowledge their need to repent.

It is my personal estimation that a very large number of fellow Christians are in this position. I take my cue from what happens in local churches today. So, take heed, friends, and do not be lulled into a false sense of security. Saul's fate could be yours. Remember that many in scripture who God punished did things we would probably think were minor acts. To God there is no such thing as a minor sin – each sin merits death and hell. As you read this chapter, then, do not just think of it as a piece of Biblical history. It is more than that, for it reminds us of the sovereignty and lordship of God. What He says is law. What He requires is 100% compliance. Anything less is sin, and sin cannot be tolerated by Him.

Verses 1&2

1 Samuel 13

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1.

“Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

2.

Saul chose him three thousand (men) of Israel; (whereof) two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in Mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.”

Samuel had warned the Israelites – choose an earthly king and you become his vassals! So it was that two years after he became king, Saul picked the cream of the men to be his standing army. Really, they were his personal bodyguards, palace soldiers (though palaces in those days were relatively humble affairs, often no larger or finer than other rich men’s homes). We are not sure from these accounts if Saul built himself a wood and stone house as a palace.

Three thousand men. And none of them had weapons (see later verses)! Not many considering the hordes of enemies surrounding the nation! Two thousand of these were already in Saul’s home territory, a region belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, and near Samuel’s home town of Ramah, just ten miles north of Jerusalem. (It is thought that Michmas is now the modern town of Mukhmas). Some of these came from nearby Bethel (‘house of God’), on the borders of Benjamin’s land in Ephraim (formerly known as Luz). One thousand men were chosen from Jonathan’s home in Gibeah, the town in Benjamite country where Saul was born. The men Saul did not choose were then sent back to their homes. But, as we come to see, their home life was again to be shattered by yet another war.

The Jonathan mentioned here is the son of Saul (featured later in accounts of David). We know from this that when Saul became king, he was old enough to have a grown son, who commanded an army. Jonathan (meaning ‘Jehovah has given’) became firm friends with David, though his own father finally tried to kill David. (A point of interest: David had a nephew who, like himself, also killed a giant of Gath).

Verse 3&4

1.

“And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that (was) in Geba, and the Philistines

1 Samuel 13

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heard (of it). And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

2.

And all Israel heard say (that) Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and (that) Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.”

What happens next must be a while after Saul had chosen his standing army, but we are not given dates. All we know is that Saul sent his son, Jonathan, to strike one of the cities of the Philistines containing a company of soldiers. Geba (or, Gibeah, meaning ‘hill’, and now called Jeba) was like most fortified towns of that period – built on the top of a hill. It was a Levitical city in Benjamite country, so it rightly belonged to Israel anyway. Geba was a steeply terraced place four miles south of Saul’s Gibeah, and very close to Jerusalem. It was next to the lush Wadi Suweinit and to add insult to injury, the northward town of Michmash could be seen from Geba! It was, then, merely on the other side of a wide valley. Because of this we can assume this was a skirmish or raiding party, meant to boost Saul’s status as king, and to show the enemy Israel was ‘back in business’, especially as Saul made sure all of Israel heard about the exploit.

Obviously, the Philistines were not going to take the attack without retaliation. They made it known they held Israel ‘in abomination’... literally meaning a bad smell and abhorrent. Notice how the wicked tend to twist the facts so the ones they offend become the ones with the bad name? Today, look at homosexuals – they have managed, in the space of just a few years, to make upright people into ‘homophobics’, attackers of people with an ‘alternative lifestyle’! Similarly, Christians who adhere to scripture are ‘unloving’ and ungodly.

Israel, then, needed to brace itself against an imminent war with its old enemies. That was why Saul quickly “*called together*” the people to Gilgal. Up to that point Israel had no standing army (apart from the 3000 recently gathered by Saul). Men simply returned home after battles and resumed their trade or calling. When a war arose, they then automatically joined ranks. Saul called these men back to him, to form battle tactics. Only then did Saul realise a mighty flaw in his plans... they had no real weapons to fight with! (See later notes).

Verses 5-7

1.

1 Samuel 13

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Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

“And 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: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.

2.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed), then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

3.

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

What had they done? The people must have bemoaned the day they chose a king – for now he was picking fights with their enemies, forcing them back into another war! Saul was no coward. He would not allow enemies to force him to cower. It is evident from the text that Samuel was in approval and therefore the fight was a godly one.

The battle would have been inevitable, for God never accepts the taking-over of His domain, whether territorial or spiritual. So here we have another lesson for today's Christians: we must never sit back and accept slavery to sin or to those who try to make us toe their line. Some people are 'born fighters' and they enjoy a skirmish. Though I write hard words and will not back down from my spiritual enemy, I personally hate fighting. I do it because I must, not because I like it. Even so, God's enemies are our enemies, and we must not allow them to gain His ground.

The Philistines gathered a colossal army. Then they pitched battle tents near Michmash and waited. They had thirty thousand chariots. This did not necessarily mean 30,000 vehicles of war. The word for 'chariots' also could refer to pairs of horsemen, or soldiers on camels or asses. Whatever the number – there were many of them, just east of Bethel, close to Michmash.

1 Samuel 13

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The sight scared the Israelites witless. They would have seen the army swarming up the valleys to surround them, and their hearts failed them. They ran everywhere – into caves in the mountains, in trees, in crevices, up hills, and in water wells... wherever they could hide. Some even ran to the other side of the river Jordan, into Gad (meaning 'troop') and Gilead, a rocky area near the Arabian flatlands.

This kind of fear is mind-numbing and courts disaster. Far better to stand and fight than to wait for an inevitable slaughter. That goes for modern day fights against evil, too. I know this after many years of doing battle. Saul stayed where he was and most Hebrews joined him, though they were scared.

Verses 8-14

1.

"And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel (had appointed); but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

2.

And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. and he offered the burnt offering.

3.

And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

4.

And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and (that) thou camest not within the days appointed, and (that) the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash;

5.

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

1 Samuel 13

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Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

6.

And 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 would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

7.

But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him (to be) captain over his people, because thou hast not kept (that) which the LORD commanded thee.”

Samuel commanded Saul to remain at Gilgal for seven days without doing a thing. Saul had to wait until Samuel arrived. It was God's word, not Samuel's whim. Saul should have known that, but he was evidently a strong-willed and strong-minded man. He must have been on tenterhooks waiting for a week. The longer the time went on, the more men ran away. So, Saul felt he was justified in not waiting for Samuel, and he decided to make offerings to God himself. Perhaps his earlier prophetic experiences caused him to be proud, and he thought he could do without Samuel.

But, Samuel was still God's minister who led Israel spiritually. It was Samuel who God used for this purpose, not Saul. And Saul knew very well Samuel's prowess and calling. Hastily, he got together everything required for a sacrifice and offered the burnt offering to God. No sooner had he done this, than Samuel arrived on the scene. Saul must have been watching the time too closely! He just could not wait!

Saul went to greet Samuel, blissfully unaware of his great wrong. Saul acknowledged Samuel to be a great man of God – hence, though king, he kneeled before him and blessed him. But, he evidently did not acknowledge the will of God. In this, Saul was like so many modern-day Christians, who know they are saved, sing songs of praise, and yet have no idea at all what God's will is, and how important it is to remain in that will. They see no harm in doing whatever they wish. I have heard countless Christians tell me that whilst they can hear and read God's word, they nevertheless 'believe this or that'. In other words, they hear and read what God says, then they quietly ignore it and believe whatever they wish. Inevitably, what they believe or do is opposite to what God says. This is very common. They have been blinded by their own pride. It seems to me that every Christian is an amateur pastor or teacher! Each seems to think that whatever they 'interpret' is alright.

1 Samuel 13

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Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

That is why there cannot ever be unity and they cannot be 'as one' when every Christian believes something different, according to self-taste. They do not mind if scripture concurs with their beliefs... but when their beliefs do not concur with scripture, they simply ignore scripture, and the teacher who preach the true word! And so it was in Saul's day.

Far from being pleased to see Saul, Samuel was horrified. ***“What have you done!”*** Saul, still unaware of his sin, told Samuel of his actions. He said that because of the circumstances, he decided to over-rule God's command to wait until Samuel had come. He looked upon the growing problems and had taken a very human path to deal with the situation.

Do we not all do this when a situation becomes uncomfortable? This is like Christians who tell me without a qualm that they prayed for this or that 'as a last resort'!! God is far from their minds and hearts – it is only when their human means have failed that they 'resort' to God! Can you then understand why God does not answer? It does not matter how dark the clouds are, or how black they loom overhead. At the very start, we must work hand-in-hand with God. We must not try all our best tricks first and, when they fail, sigh and turn to God! Such an attitude shows we think of God as an 'old man in the sky' – an unreal entity of no substance or power.

A situation borne of God is apparent. He initiates it and provides the answers. It is up to us to follow His commands. This is very dynamic and I rarely witness Christians follow its path. If they did, they would be very excited as they watched God's plan unfolding! But, Saul was in a hurry. He just could not wait, so he started his own plan...the beginning of the end. He knew it was wrong – that was why he 'forced' (or, compelled) himself to do it. Forced or not, he was sinning.

Samuel called him an idiot and told him it was now too late – his actions had lost him his kingdom which would now be given to another un-named person (David). If Saul had complied with God's requirements, then God would have strengthened his kingdom and kept it in Saul's hands and family. Yet, this is a strange thing to say, for Jesus had to come through David's royal line. The most likely suggestion is that God knew what Saul would do and that His statement was rhetorical. Thus, Saul's actions were known before the world began, but he had to play them out to fulfil prophecy.

Verses 15&16

1.

1 Samuel 13

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Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

“And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people (that were) present with him, about six hundred men.

2.

And Saul and Jonathan his son, and the people (that were) present with them, abode on Gibeah of Benjamin: but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.”

We read nothing of Saul’s response to Samuel’s dark words, but it is most likely the two men discussed the matter in far more detail than we have recorded. Saul now had to make the best of a very foolish deal. He had only 600 men to do it with! Saul and his son decided to sit it out for a while in Gibeah of Benjamin (there were at least three Gibeahs at this time, which is why it was distinguished from the others with the name ‘Benjamin’). All the while many thousands of Philistines sat in the valley near Michmash, with countless war horses, ready to slaughter the frightened Hebrews.

Verses 17&18

1.

“And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way (that leadeth to) Ophrah, unto the land of Shual:

2.

And another company turned the way (to) Bethhoron: and another company turned (to) the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.”

The Philistines sent ‘spoilers’ or destroyers out from their camp – three large companies of men whose sole purpose was to kill, maim, ruin and corrupt. They destroyed everything and everyone in their path. A grim prospect for the few men of Gilgath to look forward to! They ran like cockroaches, everywhere. One company went east of Bethel (Ophrah) to a place near Michmash. Another went toward Bethhoron, in the mountains of Ephraim. The third went toward the desert region, in the valley running from Jericho to Jerusalem, literally ransacking and plundering their way from one place to the other. Such men would have been brigand types, very used to killing in cold blood.

1 Samuel 13

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Then we come to a chilling, pathetic piece of news – the Hebrews were totally unable to defend themselves, for they had no weapons at all!

Verses 19-22

1.

“Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make (them) swords or spears:

2.

But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.

3.

Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

4.

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: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found.

5.

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

So, the raiding party that attacked the Philistine garrison could only have been equipped with farm and home implements! Only Saul and his son had weapons – hardly a match for thousands of soldiers armed to the teeth. There were no craftsmen to make weapons, and no smithy shops. Evidently, between the time of Samuel’s leadership into battle with the Philistines and this period, the Philistines captured Hebrew land and had quite a lot of control over internal affairs. So much so that the Hebrews were not allowed to make weapons. They could not even

1 Samuel 13

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 14 February 2018 10:45

produce their own craft and agricultural tools. They were allowed only to have small sharpening implements (files) and had to take tools to the Philistine towns if they wanted anything bigger done, or for replacements.

Shares, coulters and mattocks were all kinds of plough shares. Forks were three-pronged implements, much as we have them today. We do not know what a 'goad' was, but today it is a spiked stick for driving cattle. Another meaning is a 'driving forward' – possibly referring to, say, something like a 'dibber'?

Some of the implements would have been heavy enough to be drawn by oxen, so there were very few items that could be picked up by hand and used as weapons – mainly the goads, axes and possibly forks. A hand held share would have been too unwieldy. The only other option would have been bare fists, large sticks and rocks. All because the Hebrews forgot their God. Whenever they did so, He left them to their own devices, and this always led to disaster.

In this case, the Hebrews were looking straight into the eyes of death... or were they? The next chapter deals with a description of the ensuing battles. I believe the books of Samuel to be exciting, full of life and challenge. Read with expectancy!

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