

King Saul's Disobedience

1 Samuel 13

1 Samuel 13 - *"Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, ² Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent. ³ And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" ⁴ Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.*

⁵ Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. ⁶ When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. ⁷ And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. ⁸ Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. ⁹ So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

¹¹ And Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, ¹² then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." ¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done 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. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

¹⁵ Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men. ¹⁶ Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people present with them remained in Gibeah of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Michmash. ¹⁷ Then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned onto the road to Ophrah, to the land of Shual, ¹⁸ another company turned to the road to Beth Horon, and another company turned to the road of the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

¹⁹ Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." ²⁰ But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his

mattock, his ax, and his sickle; ²¹ and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. ²² So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son. ²³ And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.”

Background Notes

Archeology certainly backs up 1 Samuel 13:19. Until the time of David, the Philistines had a monopoly on iron technology. Brass and bronze were available, but these metals were not as good as iron for making swords and spears. So, Israel had to go down to the Philistines just to get their tools and farming equipment sharpened, and they had to pay a high price for anything that could possibly be used as a weapon, such as pitchforks or pick axes. Thus, the Philistines not only outnumbered Israel when they faced each other in battle, but Israel had inferior weapons as well. Only King Saul and his son Jonathan had decent weapons (v22).

The various translations of verse 1 have some significant differences. The King James Version reads: “*Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel...*” The New American Standard Version reads: “*Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty-two years over Israel.*” The New International Versions reads: “*Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.*” Why the differences in the translations? Answer: There are some missing numbers in the early manuscripts of Samuel, and there are different numbers in the later manuscripts of Samuel, so we can’t be sure exactly how this verse should read.

In addition, some translations of verse 5 read that the Philistines had 30,000 chariots, and some translations read that they had 3,000 chariots. Again, this is because of different readings in various manuscripts. Manuscripts, by definition here, are hand-written copies -- copies that were made before the time of the printing press. So, what’s the story here? Most likely the correct number in verse 5 is 3,000 chariots, to go along with the 6,000 horsemen. Now don’t get the idea that the Bible is filled with these kinds of variations! No, they are relatively few, and they don’t affect doctrine.

Doctrinal Points

1. Disobeying the Lord is never justified by circumstances.

In verse 5 we read that the Philistines assembled together to fight against Israel. They had thousands of chariots and cavalry, and they had an army that looked like the sand on the seashore in number (v5)! They were camped in Michmash, less than ten miles away from King Saul’s capital at Gibeah. Saul had summoned the Israeli army to Gilgal, down in the Jordan Valley, but Israel was hopelessly outnumbered, with no chariots or cavalry.

Furthermore, the men of Israel didn’t have proper weapons. Only Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear (v22). Israel’s only weapons were their farm implements, such as pitchforks and pickaxes. As the result of these odds, the men of Israel were scared, and they hid in caves, thickets, rocks, holes and pits. A number of them even went AWOL -- they ran away across the Jordan River to the hills of Gad and Gilead (v6-7).

In view of these discouraging circumstances, Saul felt that he had to do something before he lost his whole army. Unfortunately, he took matters into his own hands and disobeyed the Lord. King Saul was supposed to wait for the prophet Samuel to come down to Gilgal and offer sacrifices to the Lord before the army went out to battle. 1 Samuel 10:8 says that Samuel told Saul, in no uncertain terms, that he was to wait: *“You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do.”*

But Saul disobeyed. He didn't wait for Samuel, and he disobediently offered the sacrifices himself. Disobedience is never justified because of circumstances. Notice, in verses 11-12, how Saul blamed everything but himself for his disobedience: *“Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’ Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.’”* How about that for an excuse? I felt compelled! I forced myself! Can you believe it?

Disobeying the Lord is never justified by circumstances, and yet some Christians will cheat in many areas of their Christian lives because of their circumstances. They even use the same excuse as Saul: “I had to do it” or “I was forced to compromise” because of circumstances. Disobeying the Lord is **never justified** by circumstances.

2. Disobeying the Lord results in loss of status.

King Saul started out well as the first king of Israel, but his kingdom and his dynasty would now be set aside -- because he disobeyed God! Disobedience results in loss of status. *“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done 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. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you’”* (v13-14).

Saul was told that he would be replaced with “a man after God's own heart.” Clearly this refers to David. Acts 13:22 says, *“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’”*

As Saul was removed from his responsible position because of disobedience, so we as believers will also suffer loss of status in God's kingdom when we disobey. This applies to our responsibilities as the Lord's servants now, and to our rewards in the Lord's kingdom in the future. Disobeying the Lord results in the loss of status. Are there areas in your life in which you are disobeying the Lord? Now is the time to confess your sin and start obeying the Lord, because disobeying the Lord results in the loss of status.

Practical Application

Give credit where credit is due.

Verse 3 says *“And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba... Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land...”* Attacking the Philistine garrison was quite an act of courage of Jonathan and the men under him! But now look at verse 4: *“Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines.... And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.”*

Saul refused to give credit where credit was due. As we follow the life of King Saul, we find that more and more he wanted to take all the credit for himself -- because of his pride! After David killed Goliath, Saul became insanely jealous when Israel began to sing David's praises. Saul refused to give credit where credit was due.

What about us? Watch out for personal pride! Pride always leads you to take credit for yourself. It could be a sign of a coming downfall. Don't take credit for what you didn't do. Give credit where credit is due!