

## The Beginning of Saul's Demise Surprisingly and Sadly Creates a Sense of Hopelessness for the People of God

1 Samuel 13:1-23

- We come to chp. 13 with expectations and hope, based on God's mercy and promise of blessing in chp. 12. So the sudden demise of Saul is unexpected. We go from hope in chp. 12 to none in chp. 13, because of Saul's failure.
  - Chps. 13-14 fit together to tell one story.
  - Chp. 12 is key to interpreting this: Disobedience and unbelief. Mercy. God's promises. The king's obedience.
  - When faced with a crisis against the Philistines, Saul immediately demonstrates unbelief and disobedience, resulting in God taking his kingdom from him. This is sad and seems hopeless, particularly as it happens immediately after God's promises in chapter 12. Yet, God's sovereignty and mercy persist as he will establish his king to rule and reign in righteousness.
- I. Vs. 1 - The literary intent is to show the immediacy of Saul's failure, heightening the hopelessness.
- **Vs. 1** - Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel...
  - Chp. 14 - Jonathan trusting and fighting while Saul sits. Willing to sacrifice Jonathan. 14:47-48 - When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.
- II. Vs. 2-7 - Jonathan's victory and the impending Philistine threat signal a hint of concern.
- **Vs. 2** describes a "standing army:" 2,000 men with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, north of Jerusalem, and 1,000 with Jonathan (Son...) in Gibeah of Benjamin, as the rest are sent home. **Vs. 3-4** - Jonathan defeats the garrison of the Philistines, seemingly a constant threat, at Geba, in southern Benjamin, and the Philistines hear of it. Saul blows the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." And all Israel hears it said that **Saul** had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a **stench** to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.
  - It's great that Jonathan does this. But why doesn't Saul take the initiative and lead his people? 8:19-20 - There shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. Saul gets the credit.
  - Furthermore, there is now the threat of Philistine retaliation, with significant numbers in **vs. 5** - 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and troops, at Michmash. **Vs. 6-7** - In fear, Israel's army hides in caves, holes, rocks, tombs, and cisterns, and some flee across the Jordan to Gad and Gilead. Saul's at Gilgal, and those with him are trembling.
  - Perpetual encroaching. Faith of one. God's purposes are going to persist even when people fail. Fear. Failure.
- III. Vs. 8-15 - Saul's fear, unbelief, and disobedience forfeit the continuation of his kingdom, and jeopardize the welfare of the people.
- **Vs. 8-9** - He waits seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. Samuel doesn't come to Gilgal. The people are scattering from him. He says, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." He offers the burnt offering. This is to seek God's blessing (14:36-37). Saul has no authority to do this. Samuel must (7:10). Fear. Impatience. No trust. Assumption.
  - **Vs. 10** - As soon as he finishes offering the burnt offering, Samuel shows up. Saul goes out to greet him. God's timing is purposeful. A similar scene will occur in chp. 15.
  - **Vs. 11-12** - Samuel asks, "What have you done?" Saul says, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." This is a justification of unbelief, fear, disobedience, and pride. The geography indicates the Philistines likely wouldn't have attacked. He also shifts blame.

- **Vs. 13** - Samuel tells Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.” The disobedience is performing a sacrifice he’s not allowed to make. Not waiting. Assuming liberties he is not allowed to have. Not trusting. Mixed with recognition of God. God will not tolerate wrong sacrifices.
- Also, for Saul sacrificial ritual is essential, but the word of the prophet is insignificant. He won’t submit to Yahweh’s word through his prophet. By his action Saul admits that certain emergencies render the Lord’s word dispensable. 15:22 - To obey is better than sacrifice...
- **Vs. 14** - “But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” This is obviously David, who will become the focal point of 1 Samuel in chp. 16 (Jonathan...). At this point, it’s just his kingdom moving forward. In 15:23, God further rejects Saul. God’s sovereignty and our responsibility in 13-14. He may be king, but the king is subject to the Lord.
- **Vs. 15** - And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin (Westward). Many Israelites have hidden (Vs. 6-7); weapons are unobtainable (Vs. 19-22); raiders are advancing (Vs. 17-18); the troops Saul did have were demoralized (vs. 7). But far worse is that Saul is without the guidance of Yahweh from his prophet. To not have God’s word is to be truly helpless and hopeless.
- In **vs. 15-18** - Saul and Jonathan and 600 men are in Geba , and the Philistines are threatening them at Michmash. The Philistines also send out three groups, likely in a flanking or pressuring strategy. 600.
- **Vs. 19-23** describe how Israel had no access to weapons because they had no blacksmiths. They had to rely on and pay the Philistines for metal work on tools. It seems the Philistines got rid of the blacksmiths, so there’s oppression. No one has weapons except Saul and Jonathan. The Philistines are poised at Michmash, with a height advantage overlooking Geba.

#### IV. What is this teaching us in the immediate broader context, and for our own lives?

- Immediately, coming out of chp. 12, this is about the comprehensive failure of the king to trust and obey, and portray hopelessness because of this, into which God will both immediately and beyond bring hope in his steadfast love and sovereignty. The failure of the king happens so quickly. The failure of Saul has a profound effect on the whole.
- The attacks of the enemy are constant, and can seem overwhelming. Unbelief and disobedience create hopelessness. God may often put us in situations where we have to wait and trust. Where there is no word of God hopelessness persists.
- The one who does believe and act stands in contrast. The proper view of the authority and necessity of God’s word is crucial. God’s already been purposeful in David, for he is sovereign. Hopelessness must be viewed through the lens of God’s mercy. For the helplessness of God’s people is the backdrop for his deliverance. God will not accept wrong a wrong sacrifice, but he does accept the right one. We have a king who has delivered us and continues to do so, without fail.
- He. 12:2 - Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...