

SAMUEL REBUKES SAUL

1 Samuel 13:1-22

Key Verse: 13:13

“You acted foolishly,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.

After his great victory against the Ammonites, King Saul faced another national crisis. This time, he had to deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines, which was God’s purpose in appointing him as king. But in a moment of crisis, Saul became proud before God. Trembling with fear, he decided to disobey God’s commands. He ignored God’s words. Samuel told Saul that it was a foolish thing to do and it would cost him his throne. God would search for his replacement--a man after his own heart. We learn that we must remain humble before God and obey his words even in a critical situation.

First, Jonathan attacks the Philistines (1-4). After his impressive victory at Jabesh Gilead against the strong man Nahash, the Ammonite king, Saul dismissed most of his men and sent them home (2). After all, they were not professional soldiers. They were farmers, shepherds and craftsmen. They had to take care of their families. Saul chose only 3,000 men out of the 330,000 that fought the war against the Ammonites. Of the 3,000, two thousand were with him at Micmash and a thousand were with his son Jonathan at Gibeah. Then someone did something that triggered a war with the Philistines when the king wasn’t quite ready for it. It was his son Jonathan. Look at verse 3. *Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it...* This was a serious provocation by Jonathan. This was like a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 by the Imperial Japanese army that awakened the “sleeping giant.” The Philistines had a much superior military force than the Israelites. They had thousands of chariots and charioteers. They had the state of the art weaponry. Their forces probably numbered in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. On the other hand, Israel had only 3,000 untrained men. They had no good weapons, not even swords and spears. Only Saul and Jonathan had them. Everyone else had only agricultural tools such as plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles.

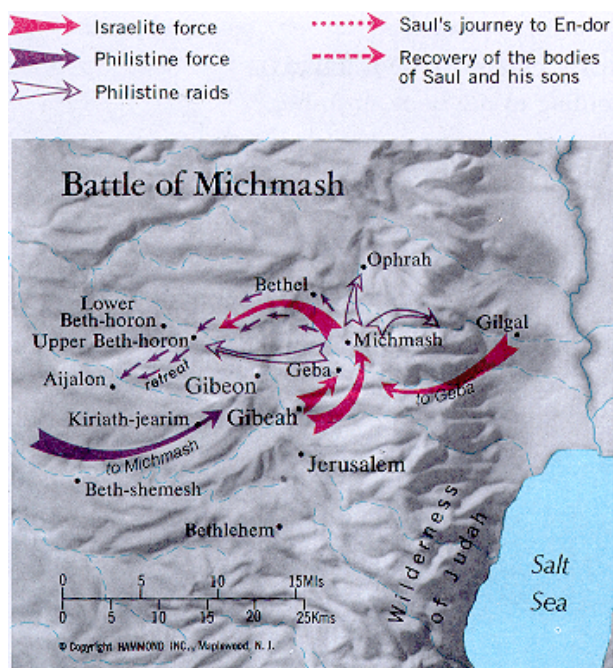
In this situation, Jonathan attacked a Philistine outpost. And the news spread to all over the Philistine territory. “Hebrews Attack: It’s a War!” howled the headline of the Philistine Times. The PNN (Philistine News Network) stopped their regular programming to talk about the impending war around the clock. King Saul realized how serious the situation was developing. He could not pretend nothing was happening. He had to spread the news to all Israelites to prepare them for a war. He had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, “Let the Hebrews hear!” So all Israel heard the news: “Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become a stench to the Philistines” (4). It was news that made the people very anxious.

So the million dollar question is why did Jonathan attack the Philistines in this situation? Why would you try to break a rock by throwing eggs on it? We can find a clue in the fact that Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost in Geba. Geba was located northeast of Gibeah, Saul's headquarters. Geba was also in the east of Ramah, Samuel's hometown. It tells us that the Philistines had encroached deep into the Israel's territory. It seems that the Israelites had allowed the Philistines to sneak into its territory little by little. And Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba. He decided that enough was enough. He would not allow the Philistines to move into the heart of his country. It didn't matter his people were outnumbered and outgunned by the enemy. He believed that someone who was much more powerful than the enemy was behind his people—the Almighty God himself. Jonathan had the courage that comes from his faith in God.

At this point, let us briefly review the relationship between Israel and the Philistines. The Israelites had been subject to the Philistines (4:9). The Israelites were defeated when they tried to use the ark as a good luck charm; 30,000 Israelites were killed (4:10) and the ark was captured by the Philistines. Then at Mizpah, with Samuel's leadership, they defeated the Philistines (7:14). The Lord revealed to Samuel that he had chosen Saul as the first king, saying, "He will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines" (9:16).

However, it seems that his son Jonathan was more focused on fulfilling God's purpose for his father Saul. His attack was a clear provocation against the Philistines. The Philistines were mad. Their media showed the Philistine people gathering in their major cities to burn the effigy of Saul and his son Jonathan. Their military pundits asked, "Who is this young man Jonathan?" Many of them urged their generals to attack Israel immediately. Others were cautious, reminding themselves that Israel had successfully defended Jabesh Gilead from Nahash. The news of the impending war was on the Israel's media as well. In this situation, King Saul summoned his people at Gilgal.

Second, quaking with fear (5-7). Look at verse 5. *The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Micmash, east of Beth Aven.* The Philistines had an impressive army. They had soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They also had advanced war machines including 3,000 chariots. They had 6,000 charioteers or cavalry. They camped at Micmash which was located north of Geba to fight Israel. Their assembly was indeed an impressive sight.



How did the Israelites react when they saw the Philistine army advancing toward them? They realized that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed (6). They were terrified by the sight. They tried to find hiding places in caves and thickets, among rocks, in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead (7). King Saul remained in Gilgal, but all his troops with him were quaking with fear. Fear swept through the nation and the people. They had no will to fight. They had no courage to defend their nation. They were not prepared to fight, either mentally and physically. They were defeated even before the battle.

Fear is our enemy in our spiritual battle as well. Fear does not come from God. He does not give us fear. Fear is Satan's favorite weapon to attack us with. Fear is the opposite of faith. When we don't have faith in God, our fear increases. Satan loves it when we have fear in our hearts. There are many things that cause us to fear. Young people become fearful when they think about their uncertain future, especially in economically difficult times like ours today. What do you personally fear? Is it your health? I recently had a vague fear of having Alzheimer's disease, because I seem to have certain memory loss. Do you worry about getting ill with a serious disease such as cancer? Are you fearful about not being fruitful in your life of mission? Whatever we may fear, we should remember that God does not give us fear and he wants us to overcome it.

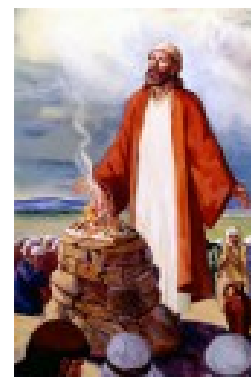
Third, because you have not kept the Lord's command (8-14). When Saul summoned his people to Gilgal, not many of them showed up--not 300,000, not even 3,000. In fact, he lost most of his men. Only 600 men remained with him (15). But something more serious happened in Gilgal and it was Saul's doing. When Samuel anointed Saul in a private ceremony, he anticipated a national crisis like the one Saul was facing now. So he gave Saul a specific instruction. He said: "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do" (10:8). Samuel told Saul to wait for him so that they could inquire of the Lord together about their course of action. It was to depend on God and follow his directions in a time of crisis.

So Saul waited for Samuel. While waiting, Saul had to watch the Philistine army advancing toward his camp. His troops became antsy. They were quaking with fear because of the threat from the Philistines. Saul was also anxious. He waited seven days even though his blood pressure was rising. But Samuel did not come even after the seven days. And his soldiers began to scatter. Saul became fearful. He couldn't wait any longer. And he made a fatal decision.

What did Saul do? He told his men to bring the offerings and he offered up the burnt offering himself. He assumed the duty of a priest himself, because he was impatient. Saul was also fearful of the Philistine army. He knew that he was outmatched by his enemy. His eyes were focused on the vast army, not on the Almighty God. In his fear, he made a wrong decision. We tend to make a wrong decision when we are in fear.

Saul thought acting quickly was more important than obeying the word of God. He abused his position. He took light of the job of offering to God. He went against the word of the Lord. He was more interested in showing his power before people than honoring God. The purpose of offering the burnt offering was to thank the Lord and inquire of him concerning the upcoming battle. It was to seek the Lord's favor (12). But Saul's action showed that he had no respect for God or his word. It was no more than a religious act to him. God was not happy with his. We cannot please God with our religious rituals. He wants our obedient hearts, not burnt offerings.

Look at verses 10-12. *Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."* Samuel already knew what Saul had done. He could see the evidence of the burnt offering on the altar. He could smell the burnt offering. When he asked Saul, "What have you done?" he was hoping that Saul would confess his sin and show his repentance. But Saul made an excuse just like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. After they ate the forbidden fruit, God came to them to ask the questions, "Where are you?" and "What is this you have done?" God wasn't asking for information from them. He already knew what they had done. He wanted to hear from them their confession and see their repentance.



May God help us to confess our sins before him rather than make excuses or rationalize our actions! "I disobeyed God because of my hard-pressed situation" is no excuse before God. Life often throws a curveball at us. God gives us challenges so that we may grow in faith. We must show our faith and trust in him in times of difficulty as well as prosperity. Saul failed to do so. He did not pass the faith test.

How did Samuel rebuke Saul? Look at verses 13-14. *"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."* Samuel said to him, "You acted foolishly." Saul acted foolishly when he decided to over-ride God's command because of his human situation. His action revealed that he trusted in the army more than God. He did not respect the word of God. He did not keep the Lord's command (14). Saul also thought that the ritual of offering the burnt offering was enough. It was a foolish thinking.

Saul's decision at Gilgal showed that he was not worthy to lead God's people. He had no heart for God. So God would seek out a man after his own heart and appoint him

to be the king of his everlasting kingdom. “A man after God’s own heart” refers to David. God would establish David as the king. How would he differ from Saul? David would not be perfect. He would commit the sins of adultery and murder. But David would not make an excuse about his sin. When Nathan came and pointed out his sin, David said, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2Sa 12:13; Ps 50). David knew what the Lord really wanted from him—the repentant heart!

Fourth, going to war with no weapons (15-22). How did Saul and the Philistines line up for the battle? It was like a little league baseball team that was matched up to play against a major league team, like St. Louise Cardinals who just won the World Series in a dramatic fashion. Only 600 men remained for Saul (15). Saul and his men were staying in Gebeah, while the Philistines camped at Micmash. The Philistines sent out three raiding parties toward Ophrah, Beth Horon and the borderland overlooking the Valley of Zeboim facing the desert (18). The Israelites were like a sitting duck. For one thing, they had no weapons to fight with. On the day of the battle, no Israelite men had a sword or spear. Only the king and his son had weapons (22). All the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to have their farm tools sharpened to use as weapons, because not a blacksmith could be found in Israel (20). The Philistines controlled the union of the blacksmiths and probably threatened them not to open a shop in Israel. (The price to sharpen plowshares and mattocks was 2/3 of a shekel, and 1/3 shekel for forks and axes. It also cost 1/3 shekel to repoint goads. I don’t know what these prices are in today’s dollars, but we can imagine they were not cheap (21).) The Israelites were expected to fight the war with farm equipment while their enemy had all kinds of advanced weapons. It is like trying to fight cyber-wars against Al Qaida when the bad guys control all the hackers of the world. We will learn in the next lesson, however, the Israelites did not need many soldiers or good weapons to fight the battle. We will find out how they were victorious against their enemy with a superior military machine.

In today’s passage, we learned that God wants us to be men and women of faith, obeying his word even when things look scary and we are tempted to go against God’s words. May God help us to know the heart of God and follow his words!