

I Samuel 13:1-28:25 The Testing of the King

Introduction

As we ended the last study King Saul had been confirmed and ordained as the first king of Israel. However, his ordination came with a stern warning from Samuel, “... *although the LORD your God was you king. Now therefore, here is the king who you have chosen, who you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and your king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you as it was against your fathers. Even now, take your stand and see the great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD that He might send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD, by asking for yourselves a king.*”

Rain on the wheat harvest means the harvest will be ruined. Wheat is harvested in the early summer when there is typically no rain in Israel so this is a miraculous rain called down by the prophet, associated with the demand for a king, and so the first king begins his reign dealing with a shortage of food. God will carry the people through if the king and the people rely solely on Him.

Chapter 13 Tested by the Philistines and Saul’s first huge mistake

Vs. 1 “*Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reined forty two years over Israel*”. Like an epitaph on a grave stone scripture begins by giving us the breadth of time Saul reigned as king. He began as a young man, just thirty years old, and died a violent death at age seventy two.

Vs. 2-4 In the first year of Saul’s reign he selected an army of three thousand men and trained them for war. Saul kept 2,000 soldiers with himself at Bethel, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, and his son Jonathan kept an army of 1,000 near Gibeah about 10 miles south of Bethel. It is interesting that if Saul is 30-31 years old, his son Jonathan is how old? He can’t be more than 12-15 years old at this time, and yet, he is leading an army of 1,000 soldiers.

Jonathan lead his men against the garrison of Philistines camped at nearby Geba and word of this quickly spread throughout the Philistine communities. Saul put out the word throughout Israel that war was about to commence and summoned all men to meet him at Gilgal.

Vs. 5-7 Saul prepares the people for war against a huge army of well-equipped Philistines. The odds look greatly in favor of the Philistines, but the Israelite army is willing to follow this

young king into war, though they have grave concerns. Apparently Samuel, the prophet, has established a 7-day waiting period, then he will offer sacrifices and the war can commence. Saul is impatiently waiting the seven day period.

Vs. 8-14 Here we see a glimpse of the unique relationship between king and prophet/priest. As prophet of God, Samuel is a unique spiritual advisor to the king. God speaks to the prophet and the prophet speaks to the king. Also, before Israel was a monarchy, it was a theocracy; the religious law was also the civil law and God presided as king. The people have demanded a man king and God has been relegated to the Spiritual domain in the eyes of the people, and obviously, in the eyes of King Saul. However, there are role differences between the king and the prophet/priest and these roles cannot be violated without severe penalty.

As the end of the seven day waiting period before battle was drawing near, Samuel had not yet arrived. Saul took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering and the peace offering, thus violating these important roles of the priestly duties. Even the king is subject to the Torah laws regarding offering sacrifice. As soon as Saul has completed the sacrifices, Samuel shows up and inquires, “*What have you done?*” When Saul offers his reasons/excuses for this major sin against God, Samuel continues with prophetic penalties upon Saul.

“You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He has commanded you. For now the LORD would have established you kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD has commanded you”.

And Samuel departed from Saul and his army.

Vs. 15-23 As they prepared for battle, scripture is clear to tell us that the Philistines had never allowed Israel to have its own blacksmiths, to prevent them from making implements of war. Therefore, only Saul and Jonathan had actual swords, all the other men carried hoes, plowshares, axes, and mattocks (something like a pickaxe or grubbing hoe). They could only get these sharpened by the Philistine blacksmiths.

Chapter 14 Saul’s failure to honor God creates lapses of judgment

(The following will be less narrative and more incidental to show Saul’s lack of trust and respect for God and his lapses in good judgment, likely resulting by being impetuous and not seeking God first.)

Vs. 1-5 Curiously, the Ark is taken to the battle field once again. **Saul has not learned from previous leader's mistakes.** We find Ahijah the High Priest from Shiloh in attendance with the Ark of God. Ahijah (brother of Ichabod) is the son of Phinehas, son of Eli the High Priest who raised Samuel. Phinehas had died with his brother when the Ark had been taken into battle and captured by the Philistines recorded in Chapter 4. In verse 18 Saul will call for the Ark to be brought to the battle field.

Vs. 6-15 Jonathan and his armor bearer experience God-given success against a garrison of Philistines, killing at least 20 Philistine warriors by themselves and thus creating great fear within the ranks of the Philistines.

Vs. 24-48 Apparently, in an attempt to motivate the troops, **Saul forbids them to eat any food for an entire day as they prepare to go onto battle. The threat of punishment by death is given to anyone who might disobey this command.** The men comply but become quite famished. They enter a forest dripping with honey comb and none dared eat, except Jonathan who had not heard the order because he was whipping the garrison of Philistine soldiers. Two outcomes from this foolish command:

- At the end of the day the men are so famished that they slaughter the Philistine livestock they capture and eat it raw, with the blood still in it.
- Saul feels the need to kill Jonathan for failing to heed his command on not eating. Fortunately, Saul's men stop him for harming the hero of the day, Jonathan.

Saul relents and calls off the war for awhile and returns to his home. Why would he do this as this would seem like the time to pursue the Philistines, while they were on the run from Israel and perhaps even eventually wipe them out as God had commanded Joshua earlier when taking the land. Vs. 36-37 gives us a clue. Saul sought guidance from God through the Urim and Thummim worn by the High Priest, and God did not respond to Saul's inquiry. We can see that God is turning away from Saul due to Saul's failure to honor and follow God.

Vs. 47-52 For the remainder of his reign Saul was in constant warfare. The Philistines (generally west), the Moabites (east), Ammonites (north east), Edomites (south east) and the kings of Zobah (north from Syria to the Euphrates) were constant threats and challenges to Israel's existence. It also lists the Amalekites who were nomadic dwellers in the desert to the south.

However, the war with the Philistines was the most pressing and consistent, and whenever Saul found a strong or mighty man among the Israelites, he drafted him into the army.

Chapter 15 Obedience is better than sacrifice; Saul fails to honor God, again

Vs. 1-9 Through Samuel God instructs Saul to strike and utterly destroy Amalek, the king of the warring nomadic tribe that attacked Israel early on in their departure from Egypt.

Cunningly, Amalek attacked Israel from the rear, picking off the weak and the stragglers. Under Moses' leadership Israel fought against Amalek in the well-read story of Moses keeping his hands held high. When he lowered his arms Amalek was able to withstand and even gain power over the Israelite army. Eventually they placed a stone under Moses for him to sit on and Aaron and Hur held his hands high so the Israelites prevailed. At that time the LORD instructed Moses to write this in a book and recite it to Joshua that God would utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven (Exodus 17:8-16). That has not happened in the time of Saul so God has sent Saul to wipe out all the Amalekites.

Saul takes 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 more men from the tribe of Judah to go attack Amalek. His mission was to wipe out every man, woman and child and all livestock. Saul easily conquered the Amalekites, captured Agag their king, alive, and saved the best of the sheep, oxen kids and lambs to bring back to Israel.

Vs. 10 God responded to Saul's disobedience; *"I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands"*.

Vs. 17-23 **The disturbing thing is that Saul did not perceive he had sinned against the instructions of God.** He had "good" reasons for saving the king and the animals. Some of the animals would be given to the soldiers as booty and some would be sacrificed to God. Samuel said to Saul, *"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of lambs. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have also rejected God, He has rejected you from being king"**.*

Chapter 16 David is anointed to be the next king

Vs. 1-13 God sent Samuel to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king. Jesse has eight sons, the seven older sons passed before Samuel and God rejected each one from being the next king. Finally Jesse called the youngest, David, from tending sheep in the fields and brought him before Samuel. This was the one God selected to be anointed.

Vs. 14-23 **The spirit of God left Saul**, which spiritually means there was room for the spirits of the dark forces to occupy his heart. Saul was terrorized by these spirits and his servants called David to come in and play his harp for Saul. The music provided some peace for Saul and Saul liked David and made him his armor bearer.

Vs. 23 *"David would take his harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him."*

Chapter 17 Slaying Goliath

As Saul fades from favor with God we see an increase in awareness and recognition of Israel's next king, David. Saul's disobedience has taken him from favor with God and soon he will understand David is his replacement, and he will do all he can to destroy David. But, David has favor with God, so all that Saul does to destroy David will be turned around on himself and brings only more misery.

Saul and his army find themselves at an impasse with the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. The champion of the Philistine army is a true giant named Goliath. He stands 6 and ½ cubits tall, making him anywhere from 9 1/2 - 12 feet tall. Ray Vanderlann suggests that the manner in which Goliath is described regarding his height and the armament he carries suggest his true number is 666 – Goliath represents Satan or the “antichrist”. His height is 6 cubits and a span; he carries **six** weapons or defensive armor elements, and the head of his spear weighs **six** hundred shekels of iron – **666**. Additionally, Goliath comes out for 40 days (vs. 16) to challenge the army of Israel. Surely we cannot miss the connection with the 40 days Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). His name, Goliath means “splendid” in Hebrew and he is from Gath, which means “winepress”. Satan has come to press Israel like grapes in a winepress, and he is doing it with pride and arrogance.

There is great significance in the words of David as he speaks to Goliath, *“You come to me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, who you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or spear, for the battle is the LORD’s and He will give you into our hands”*. (Vs. 45-47)

Can we read these words of David and not be reminded of the curse placed on Satan in the Garden of Eden, *“He will crush your head”*, (Genesis 3:15) or the words of Jesus when tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:4, 7, and 10)?

As David ushers in the Messianic promise first spoken by Jacob in Genesis 49:10 that the *“scepter (kingship) shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh (Messiah) comes...”*, the Davidic reign will bring the Messiah at the appointed time. The gospels of Matthew and Luke take great pains to show the Davidic line of Jesus who like David, is of the Tribe of Judah. Just as Jesus began His ministry by standing against Satan’s attacks, so, too, David begins his service to Israel by standing against Satan, first in the form of Goliath of Gath, then against his own king, Saul, who has taken up with Satan rather than God.

Saul and his army have been frozen with fear for forty days in the presence of this giant. However, David shows up on the scene, is appalled that this satanic giant has created such fear in the hearts of Israel's army, and takes it on himself to stand before this giant and defeat him in the name of God. An added incentive in stopping Goliath and the Philistines here is that if they fail, the Philistines can march up the valley just a few miles to Bethlehem, home of David, and conquer his hometown.

As the beloved and well known story unfolds, David prevails over Goliath, which means the Israelite army prevails against the Philistine army, and David becomes an instant hero – something Saul will grow to detest. Saul is a wily and shrewd old king and he senses this is more than just a chance victory by this young shepherd boy. Interestingly, even though the previous chapter tells us David has been called into King Saul's court to play his harp to soothe Saul, and Saul has loved him to the point of making David his armor bearer, Saul does not seem to know who this boy's father is and seeks to learn more about this young man. Chapter 16 identifies David as a son of Jesse, but Saul now wants to learn more about this young man, perhaps to mark him as a potential enemy to be wary of.

Chapter 18 Saul turns against David

Perhaps to make matters worse, David and King Saul's son Jonathan form an instant and lasting bond, another potential hazard to King Saul. King Saul knows he has fallen out of favor with God and it is just a matter of time before his days will end.

Vs. 6-7 An event takes place that sets the stage more solidly for enmity between Saul and David. Saul recognizes David as a fierce warrior and places David over his armies. After a particularly successful battle with the Philistines, as David was returning from battle, all the women of the towns came out with tambourines and other musical instruments, dancing and singing, "*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*". And Saul became angry and turned against David.

Chapter 21 A messianic picture

Vs. 1-10 David is on the run from Saul and he and his men are famished so David goes to Nob where the Tabernacle is now located and asks the High Priest, Ahimelech, for bread to eat. According to the Strong's Concordance and the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew to English Lexicon, the name "Ahimelech" is loosely translated as something like "brother to the king" or the "king's brother". Here we find a unique picture that this king to be, David, is given sacred bread from the Table of Show Bread by the High Priest who is named "brother to the king". The bread is specifically provided only to the priests, so here we see something of a type of communion feast. It is a further confirmation that there is a specific tie between David and the Messiah to come.

Ahimelech also gives David Goliath's sword which is being stored in the Tabernacle at this time.

Chapter 22 How evil is King Saul?

When Saul learns that Ahimelech has given food and a sword to David, and the High Priest has prayed on David's behalf he is more than angry. He has Ahimelech and 85 priests killed, then his men went to Nob and with a sword killed every man, woman and child and even the livestock. Saul's military men would not carry out the command to kill their high priest and other priests, so Saul's head shepherd, Doeg, the Edomite, was more than willing to carry out the killings. Note that the Edomites are the descendents of Esau, the brother of Jacob. In the story of Jacob and Esau, Jacob represents the one who follows God and Esau is the one who follows the ways of the world. Ahimelech is the descendent of Jacob and Doeg is the descendent of Esau. The conflict continues!

Chapter 23 -24 The conflict between Saul and David continues with wonderful narrative pointing out the conflict between darkness and light.

Chapter 25 – Death of Samuel

Vs. 1 Without drama or circumstance, scripture simply reports the death of Samuel the prophet, judge, and priest of Israel. He was a beloved leader and all Israel gathered and mourned his death and buried him at his house on Ramah.

Chapter 28 The death of Saul foretold

Vs. 1-7 When we first met Saul in Chapter 9 he was seeking his father's runaway donkeys and he searched out the seer, Samuel, to inquire how he might find the donkeys. Now Saul is old and tired, and engaged yet again in battle with the Philistines and he searches out a medium, the witch of Endor, to channel the spirit of Samuel from the dead to guide him one last time. Scripture is plain that Saul sought guidance from God but God would not communicate with Saul, even through the Urim of the High Priest. God had given Saul over to his own misdirection, and would help him no longer. So Saul resorts to violating the Torah by seeking out a sorceress (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

Vs. 15 Samuel is called from the dead and responds to Saul, *“Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? Saul responded by stating his dilemma, his fears and his need for direction. Samuel responds, “Why then do you ask me since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary? The LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. As you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of*

the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines”.

Saul was stricken with great fear and realized all was lost.

Conclusion:

1. Saul was chosen by God to be the king and held great promise to lead Israel before God if he, himself, as king would humble himself before God
2. A king needs a prophet, judge, priest like Samuel but should heed his words from God and not reject them
3. Saul failed to honor God by lack of obedience and God turned against Saul
4. Had Saul fully repented, God would have forgiven him and blessed him
5. God’s will will be done, and His will is focused on bringing the Messiah into the world, and that will be done through the lineage of David of Judah