

1st Samuel

Lesson 20

Continuing to look at 1st Samuel 13:1, we must decide if the verse begins a new storyline or ends the last storyline. Or, perhaps, we need to determine if it ends one storyline and starts a different storyline. The literal translation of the oldest Hebrew manuscript should be translated, *“One year Saul had reigned, and when two years he had reigned over Israel.”* The literal translation makes sense even though it seems in English to lead somewhere that it might fail to go. In Hebrew, it made perfect sense because the Hebrew people would have known that Samuel was telling them, “I have just told you what happened in the first year for Saul to become king, now I am going to tell you what happened in Saul’s second year as king.” All of that seems like a whole lot of words, and it is in English, but that is the word picture of what the Hebrew said to the Israelites.

We must address the writer’s writing style, which was common among all Hebrew writers. We start by asking a question about this verse. Is it the last thought the writer wanted us to know about when the meeting at Gilgal, where Saul was approved by all the nation, or is it the first thought the writer wants us to know about the next storyline he will develop? In our western mindset, it seems natural that this would be the first thought to lead into the next storyline, but there is more proof in the Hebrew writings that this may have been the last thought of the previous storyline, which would be natural in the eastern mindset. It is a time marker in the story to identify the timing of the previous story as well as the following. Let us explain this position by looking at illustrations found in all the Scripture that comes before this story.

In Genesis 5, Moses, in the Hebrew style, details the length of the lives of Adam through Lamech, giving the years that they lived, how old they were when their godly son was born, and then includes whether or not they had more sons and daughters, although the names of those sons and daughters were not named in the list. Why were the names not included? They were omitted because this was a list of the direct descendants of Adam through Lamech, the line that would one day lead directly to Jesus. In addition, Moses had already told the reader everything they needed to know about the line of Adam to Lamech in the previous four chapters. This list takes us from the creation of Adam to the preparation for the flood with Noah, Lamech’s son. Noah is included last in the list, but Moses does not tell us Noah’s age at his death. However, he does tell the age of Noah when he began to have three sons. The first was born when Noah was five hundred years old. All of chapter five recorded the pre-flood descendants of the LORD’s direct line back to Adam. Surely, Noah was dead by the time Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Why did he not tell us how old Noah was in the Genesis 5 list? The answer is easy. Moses used the list to conclude the previous stories and then introduce Noah to tell his story, which started in the next chapter. After telling us Noah’s story, Moses told us of Noah’s life and death timeline in Genesis 9:29, after he had told Noah’s entire story. Moses said, *“So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.”* (Genesis 9:29) There, Moses concluded Noah’s story and introduced the beginning of the next storyline that dealt with the sons of Noah, specifically his son Shem. In Genesis, after telling the story of Shem and his godly line of descendants that would one day lead to Jesus, Moses gave the age of death, the father’s age at the birth of his godly son, and whether or not he had other sons and daughters. The purpose of this lineage was to conclude the stories of the descendants of Noah and to introduce Abram (Abraham) to tell his story next. Then Moses told the story of Abram, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis ends with the age of Jacob at his death and also the age of Jacob’s son, Joseph, at his death. Along the way through Genesis, each time a storyline was completed, a time marker was included.

A few time markers are included in the books of Exodus and Numbers, which tell us when things happened and how long they took. In Leviticus, Moses included the time marker for the deaths of two of Aaron's sons. In Deuteronomy, Moses included the time markers for the deaths of his sister Mariam and his brother Aaron. At the end of Deuteronomy, Joshua included the time marker for the death of Moses when he said, *"Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated."* (Deuteronomy 34:7)

Moving into the book of Judges, Samuel recorded the beginning of the first cycle of sin when Israel was under the control of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. Samuel summed up that time by telling us it was for eight years (Judges 3:8). The LORD sent Othniel to deliver Israel. After telling Othniel's story, Samuel summed up his time by telling us he judged forty years and died (Judges 3:11). Moab then took over Israel, and Samuel ended their story by telling us that it lasted for eighteen years (Judges 3:14). Samuel then tells how the LORD sent Ehud to deliver Israel from Moab and summed up Ehud's time by telling us he judged for eighty years. On and on, we could go through every story in the book of Judges and find that Samuel always summed up the time for the previous story at the end and, in some way, gave an introduction into the next story. It was his style. It was also the Hebrew style which will continue after the death of Samuel and all the way through the history records in the Old Testament. It will be so at the death of Saul, at David's move from Hebron, at the time David resigned from being king and had Solomon anointed. On and on through the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles and we will find that the style is the same in the prophets.

It, therefore, seems that this verse in 1st Samuel 13:1 belongs with the last storyline as well as the following. The chapter and verse break is in the wrong place. In other words, it was not until the end of Saul's first year as king that the whole nation met with Samuel at Gilgal, after the Jabesh-gilead event, that Saul was truly accepted as the King of Israel. To say that another way, when Samuel said, *"One year Saul had reigned,"* he was telling us that the story he had just completed about Saul took the entirety of Saul's first year as king. When Samuel said, *"and when two years he had reigned over Israel,"* he indicated that the next story would take place in Saul's second year as king. Not wanting to get ahead in the story, but an interesting note at this point, in chapter 14, verse 47, the writer will make an entry into the record that will tell us that Saul's second year had ended and the next story will pick up years later in Saul's life.

1. The Story of the Victory of Saul's Son Jonathan (13:2-4)

During Saul's second year as king, it would seem that our writer has moved on and will not address the meeting with Samuel at Gilgal at all. Instead, the writer includes two events in the life of Saul after he was truly accepted as the King of Israel. First, the writer tells the story of the victory of Saul's son, Jonathan. In doing this, the writer introduces us to Jonathan for the first time. He will become a good friend of David during the last part of the reign of his father. Verse 2.

"Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent. ³Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear.' 'All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. (13:2-4)

This victory led by Jonathan occurred in Saul's second year. In this passage, we discover that Saul kept only three thousand men from his army. Two thousand were at Michmash near Bethel, and one thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah, Saul's hometown. The writer is telling us that this story occurred after the gathering of the men to fight at Jabesh-gilead and the subsequent meeting to firmly confirm Saul as king, starting Saul's second year. With all the men present, Saul carved out these three thousand men and stationed them at Michmash, Bethel, and Gibeah.

In this passage, we hear that it was Saul's son, Jonathan, who led the one thousand men to defeat the garrison of Philistines at Geba. Geba sat just about five and a half miles north of Jerusalem and sat right on the border of the tribal area of Benjamin and Judah. It was one of the forty-eight Levitical cities given to the priests at the time of Joshua's division of the land. The Authorized Version (another name for the King James Version) wrongly translated the word Geba as Gibeah. Gibeah was Saul's capital city deeper into the land of Benjamin, just a short distance from Geba. Sometimes in our English versions, Geba is translated as Jeb or Jeba. This makes sense because, at this time in the storyline, the Jeba strain of the Jebusites were still in control of portions of the area, specifically, the city of Jebu that stood on the northern side of the ravine across from Jerusalem on the southern side.

The passage ends with, *"Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear.' 'All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines.'"* It seems clear that the writer was using this battle with the Philistines, even though it was won by Saul's son, to prove the kingship of Saul in the country.