

1st Samuel

Lesson 23

e) Saul Reprimanded by Samuel (13:13-15a)

In Saul's second year as the King of Israel, he sinned greatly against the LORD. How bad was that sin? It was terrible, as we discovered when we saw Saul reprimanded by Samuel. Verse 13.

"Samuel said to Saul, 'You have acted 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 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 commanded you.' " Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. (13:13-15a)

Saul's sin was so bad that Samuel's reprimand revealed two things. First, his kingdom would not endure. Second, the LORD was seeking Saul's replacement. Why? It was because Saul did not keep what the LORD had commanded him to do.

Let us deal with the first punishment. What did it mean when Samuel said, "...for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now, your kingdom shall not endure." We have already seen the LORD hand out this same punishment before with another person in the text. It was with Eli, the High Priest. If you will remember, Eli failed to control his worthless sons, who were acting sinfully as a priest with the people. Years before Saul was king, the LORD spoke to Samuel when he was just a boy and told him about Eli's sin. When questioned by Eli, Samuel told Eli what the LORD had told him. The LORD had made up his mind. Eli's two sons would die on the same day. In addition, the lineage of Eli would be cut off forever from serving as High Priest. The LORD was already in the process of choosing the new line of Aaron to serve as His High Priests. If you will remember, when Eli died on the same day as his two sons, Zadok became the High Priest, and his descendants served as High Priests from that time on. Even into the days of Jesus, the High Priest were direct descendants of Zadok. Eli's priestly line would not endure. It would be cut off, and another line of Aaron would take the High Priesthood, and his descendants would fill that office forever.

Let us pause for a moment to set the timing of Eli's death and the establishment of Zadok as the priestly line. It occurred when, long after Samuel delivered the news to Eli. It occurred when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. As we have shown in the previous commentary, Eli was still the High Priest at this point in Saul's life. Eli was still alive, and so were his worthless sons. Samuel was old and gray, and his worthless sons were still alive. Saul had been appointed king and was in his second year as king. The Ark of the Covenant would not be captured by the Philistines until the twenty-seventh year of Saul's reign as king. At this point in the storyline, there were still twenty-six years until the capture of the Ark remaining. Zadok was not the High Priest yet, and he would not become the High Priest for another twenty-six years. The principle here is important. We are speaking of the principle of the timing of the LORD. He is never in a hurry or tied to the earthly timeclock. He is tied to heaven's timeclock. All accounts will be settled, in the LORD's time, not ours. Fret not, the evil of Eli and his sons would be punished years after the verdict of the LORD. It was the LORD's promise, and the LORD does not break His promise.

In the same way, as the promise made to Eli by the LORD, in this passage, the LORD promised Saul that his lineage as the King of Israel would not endure. It would come to an end. Had Saul not committed this sin in his second year as king, one of his descendants would have sat on the throne of Israel for all of Israel's existence as a nation. Point discovered here. Had it not been for the sin of

Saul, the kingly line of Israel would have been through the line of Benjamin, the least and last tribe of the sons of Jacob. Just as it took almost forty years to reveal the LORD's choice to replace the line of Eli as High Priest with the line of Zadok, the LORD would wait about twenty-six years to reveal the line of the king to take Saul's place. Not to get too far ahead in the story, in Saul's second year as king, David would not be born for another eight years, to Jesse, of the tribe of Judah. Then, once David is born, it would be another seventeen years until the capture of the Ark by the Philistines. David would be about seventeen years old at that time. After the return of the Ark, the Philistine's control would be run out of Israel, and Samuel would place the Ebenezer stone at the place of the battle. Then, the Philistines will not have control over Israel or the Promised Land again. They will try. Their first try will be to send their hero, Goliath, for a one-on-one fight to the death that would once again establish their rule over Israel. The Philistines thought Goliath could not be beaten. Nevertheless, he was, by a young shepherd boy with five smooth stones and Goliath's own sword. The shepherd boy's name was David. Just shortly before David turned about seventeen, Samuel searched him out at the direction of the LORD, and Samuel anointed David as the new king of Israel. He would then show up sometime later to fight Goliath and become known to Saul. However, Saul will not know that he had been anointed the next king. At least, we are not told anywhere in Scripture that Saul knew he was the next anointed king of Israel. Once again, we see the patients of the LORD and that He works on heaven's timeclock, not earth's timeclock. It will be about thirteen years after the Goliath battle that David will become king. At this point in our story in chapter 13, Saul still had at least thirty-eight years to rule as king. But, his days have been numbered by his sin at Gilgal.

Just to clarify the cast of characters alive at this point in the storyline, Saul is in his second year as king. He will reign for at least another thirty-eight years. Eli is still the high priest. He will be the high priest for at least twenty-six more years. David will not be born yet. He will not be born for at least another eight years. Samuel has grown boys who are practicing priests, which means they are more than thirty years old.

Our passage ends with the writer telling us that "... *Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.*" From Gilgal, Gibeah would have naturally been the next town Samuel would have a need to travel through on his way home. If Samuel were on his normal circuit, Gibeah would have been followed by Mizpah, and from there, Samuel would soon arrive at his home in Ramah.

4. The Story of the Organization of Saul's Army for Battle

a) The Israelite Warriors (13:15b-16)

The writer tells us that Samuel left Saul and journeyed on his way to Gibeah. He then tells us the story of the organization of Saul's army for battle after Saul's grave sin. Verse 15b.

"And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. ¹⁶ Now Saul and his son Jonathan and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash." (13:15b-16)

Before Saul's sin at Gilgal, he had two-thousand men with him, and he had one thousand men with his son, Jonathan, at Geba. If you will remember, Jonathan had already defeated the Philistine garrison at Geba. No doubt, the one thousand men were still with Jonathan, but Saul's men had scattered, and about fourteen hundred men had run from the army, leaving Saul with only about six hundred men. The Philistine camp was still at Michmash, as we learned in 13:5. That text told us the size of the Philistine army camped at Michmash. *"Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven."* For the Philistines, losing their garrison at Geba because of Jonathan, the Philistines wasted no time in gathering forces to return to fight Israel. But they could not return to Geba. Jonathan controlled that garrison area. But they could camp at Mishmash

with all their chariots and horsemen and soldiers “*like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance.*” The numbers of “*30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen*” are not without controversy among scholars. The Pulpit Commentary explains the controversy as follows.

... but thirty thousand chariots compared with six thousand horsemen is out of all proportion. Possibly the final 1 in Israel has been taken by some copyists for a numeral, and as it signifies thirty, it has changed 1000 into 30,000. Or, simpler still, shin [Hebrew word], the numeral for 300, has been read with two dots and so changed into 30,000.

The Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers addresses the controversy as follows.

The figures here, again, of the numbers of this vast army, are perfectly untrustworthy. In the rolls of ancient armies (and we possess many a one in the sacred records), the number of war chariots is always smaller than that of the horsemen; here, the chariots are represented as four times as numerous. In the rolls of the most famous armies, there never appear anything like this number. For instance, Jabin (Judges 4:3) had 900 chariots. Pharaoh pursued Israel with 600. When David defeated Syria, the great Syrian army had 40,000 horsemen and 700 chariots. King Solomon is only reported (1Kings 10:26) to have possessed 1,400 chariots. Zerah the Ethiopian had but 300 in his vast army, and the Pharaoh Shishak 1,200. Here the more probable reading would be “300” not 30,000.

Even with all the controversy, the writer was trying to tell us that the army of the Philistines was large enough to strike great fear in the army with King Saul.

b) The Philistine Warriors (13:17-18)

How large was the army of the Philistine warriors? It was large enough to divide into three companies to attack three places in the Promised Land. Verse 17.

“And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual,¹⁸ and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.” (13:17-18)

There were two villages named Ophrah in the Promised Land. One was in the tribal area of Benjamin, the same area as Geba, Gibeah, and Michmash. The other Ophrah sat in the tribal area of Manasseh, the tribal area north of the tribal area of Ephraim. It was too far away from Geba, where Jonathan and Saul’s warriors were stationed. But another clue to where the Philistines were headed is found in the words “*to the land of Shual.*” Where was the land of Shual? Leaving Michmash, on the way to Ophrah of Benjamin, traveling north on the road to Ophrah, the Philistines passed through the land of Shual.

The second company was sent to Beth-horon. Beth-horon was located in the tribal area of Ephraim. It was west of Geba, Gibeah, and Michmash. This second company was sent westward in the same direction as the town of Beth-horon. It does not tell us that they went to Beth-horon. It tells us that they were sent in that direction.

The third company was sent to the border at the valley of Zeboim. Zeboim was east of Michmash, in the land of Benjamin, just northwest of Jerusalem. The valley of Zeboim was the uncultivated mountain tops that lay in Benjamin’s eastern portion of the land headed toward the Jordan River.

In essence, these three massive companies of Philistines basically covered all the land in Benjamin’s tribal area that surrounded the capital of Israel in the hometown of Saul in Gibeah.

(1) No Blacksmiths in Israel (13:19-21)

After defining the placement of the Philistine armies in Benjamin's tribal area, the writer tells of two interesting situations that had developed in the Promised Land. The first was that there were no blacksmiths in Israel. Verse 19.

"Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears." ²⁰ So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. ²¹ The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes." (13:19-21)

This issue was purposefully presented by the writer before stating the second issue. This issue was the absence of blacksmiths in the Promised Land. When did the Philistines rid the Promised Land of blacksmiths because *"Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears."* It is once again time to address the timeline of Saul becoming king in Israel. If you will remember, previous to Saul becoming the king, the Philistines had controlled the Promised Land for forty years in the sixth cycle of sin revealed in the book of Judges. At the beginning of the Philistine forty years of rule over the Promised Land, Samuel was born and delivered to Eli at Shiloh to live. Just after Samuel was delivered to Eli, Samson was born. Twenty years later, the LORD called Samson to be the judge in the Promised Land. For twenty years, Samson struck fear in the Philistines who were controlling the Promised Land. Yet, Samson was constantly drawn to the women of the Philistines. At the age of forty, after judging for twenty years, Samson finally brought the rule of the Philistines over the Promised Land to a standstill on the day he died and killed all the leaders and lords of the Philistines. Samson was forty years old. Samuel was a little older than Samson. Then, about ten years later, when Samuel was most likely in his fifties, and his sons were in their early thirties, the Israelites asked for a king, and Saul was selected. At this point in the story, Saul is in his second year as king. Samson died a little more than twelve years before. It was, no doubt, that during the forty years of Philistine rule in the Promised Land, before Samson brought it to a standstill, upon his death. But as we have seen in the last commentary, it did not take long for the Philistines to regroup with new leaders and continue to threaten the Jews in the Promised Land. They will do so until the victory after the Ark's return twenty-six years after this point in the story when the Philistine rule comes to a complete end under the direction of Samuel the Judge. It was then that Samuel sat the Ebenezer stone. But at this point in the story, the Philistines were undoubtedly still in control of the Promised Land and felt that the Israelites were in rebellion to their rule when they sat Saul as King. In the two years of his reign, Saul had not established freedom in the land, and the Philistines still threatened all. To keep the Israelites under control, blacksmiths were forbidden in the land.