

Part 13

• *Despite a good beginning King Saul lost the possibility that his dynasty would last forever*

• *Reigned 42 years from the age of 30*

(1) The occasion of Saul's disobedience

• *Conflict with the Philistines*

• *The Israelites are fearful*

• *What led Saul into disobedience was a crisis of faith*

• *He was tested as to whether he would keep calm and simply go on believing*

King Saul began his kingship well. He had all the signs of spirituality and was divinely equipped for the ministry of kingship that God had given to him. This picture, however, decisively changes in 1 Samuel 13. One must remember that the narrator is only picking out certain highlights of the story. This story comes in because it was the decisive point at which Saul lost the possibility of a dynasty of kings that would have lasted forever. One does not have to think that his rejection came only because of one incident. It is likely that Saul had steadily become disobedient and that this story is included simply because it was a decisive occasion.

The text begins with a note concerning Saul. 'Saul was thirty years old when he became king and he reigned over Israel for forty-two years'¹. There are some numbers missing in the Hebrew manuscripts and no-one knows what was there originally. The New International Version is as good a reading as any and has the support of Acts 13:21.

We note (1) **the occasion of Saul's disobedience**. Saul's major task was to put down the Philistines. The story tells of an occasion when Saul formed two regiments of soldiers for himself and for Jonathan. He was feeling quite confident and had sent other soldiers home¹. Then Jonathan, with the smaller group of soldiers, showed great daring in making an attack on a Philistine 'garrison'² (or the Hebrew word might mean 'monument' or 'administrator', which would explain why the Philistines were more than usually affronted). The Philistines are aroused. Suddenly there is trouble in the land. Saul needs to get back the soldiers who had gone home. He summons the whole nation to join in the conflict against the Philistines³. The nation is told that Saul had attacked the Philistines; Jonathan was acting on his behalf. The people were summoned to assemble at Gilgal ready for battle⁴.

The Philistines also prepare for battle¹ and the Israelites are fearful. Some are hiding wherever they can². Some are crossing the river Jordan to an area they think is safer³. Those who were with Saul were terrified⁴ and greatly reduced in number.

Apparently there was an arrangement similar to the one mentioned in 1 Samuel 10:8. Samuel had promised to come to consecrate the army to God. He had said in effect 'Meet me at Gilgal and wait for seven days. Then I shall offer whole burnt offerings to consecrate ourselves to the Lord, and peace offerings to symbolise our happy relationship to God. We shall be looking to God to bless us in our time of need.' (This cannot be the **same** occasion as is mentioned in 10:8, although 1 Samuel 10:8 shows us that what we have here has been done by Samuel before. 1 Samuel 13:8 is telling us that Samuel had made an arrangement similar to the one in 10:8.) But now Saul is getting panicky. **What led Saul into disobedience was a crisis of faith. He was tested as to whether he would keep calm and simply go on believing.** Faith has two phases to it. What one could call 'initial faith' is the first time anyone ever believes. It immediately brings us into salvation because any faith in Jesus or (in Old Testament days) in the promises of God, introduces us into the

1 13:1

1 13:2
2 13:3a

3 13:3b
4 13:4

1 13:5
2 13:6
3 13:7a
4 13:7b

• Initial saving faith becomes diligent continued applied faith

blessings of Jesus' salvation. But saving faith becomes what one can call 'diligent faith' or 'continuous faith' or 'applied faith'. We are to go on believing. The measure of blessing we are going to get will depend on whether we apply our faith. When some crisis comes, will you apply your faith? A crisis is a test of whether you will persist in faith. We must take care that we do not lapse from faith and fail to experience the blessings of God as the living God^{□1}. Sooner or later, to every Christian, something will come which will challenge whether we shall persist in believing. Jude verse 5 says '*The Lord having saved his people out of Egypt destroyed those who did not believe in the second phase.*' Saul has been a great believer so far but will he be obedient now? He has been told to wait at Gilgal and do nothing until Samuel comes (similar to 10:8).

□1 see Hebrews 3:12

The Crisis

• There is temptation because of reduced numbers

There are several aspects to the crisis. **There is temptation because of reduced numbers.** The men begin to scatter^{□1}. Saul is worried and says 'I will have to do something before Samuel gets here, because my army is leaving me.' Before God moves in a mighty way there can be a dwindling of numbers. Remember Gideon's army^{□2}? Remember John 6:66-67? Numbers are important but obedience is even more important. In 1 Samuel 14 the Philistines are defeated as the result of the faith of only two men, Jonathan and his armour-bearer!

□1 13:8

□2 Judges 7

• Delayed speed at which things were happening

Another aspect to the matter is the **delayed speed at which things were happening.** '*Samuel did not come*'^{□1}. We all have to be taught how to be patient. Saul is eager that Samuel should come quickly. Then foolishly he does something he should not have done and acts the part of a priest in offering sacrifice^{□2}. Actually it was just after Saul had taken things into his own hands that Samuel arrived^{□3}. Saul did not have the patience to wait until the last moment. Foolishly he lapsed in faith just a few minutes before God's answer came. He started sinning and moved into great disobedience. God is not unsympathetic to our needs. He gives grace **in the time of need**. This is what Saul would not believe. God does not come to our rescue before we really need it. So often our faith is challenged and the question is, will we believe that God will come to our help **in time**?



□1 13:8

□2 13:9

□3 13:10

• A question for us

Will we continue in faith? Will we trust that God will come as the living God, as the God who keeps his promises and always rescues us in time?

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