

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 13

### *Saul Fights the Philistines*

**Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, 2 Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. 3 Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.” 4 And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. 5 And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, 7 and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.**

**13:1** (*thirty*) *years old* ... (*forty-*)*two years*. The wording of the verse follows the regularly used formula that introduces the reigns of later kings (see, e.g., 2Sa 2:10; 5:4; 1Ki 14:21; 2Ki 8:26). (CSB)

Verse establishes the formula that introduces the reigns of later kings. The omission of two numbers reminds us that fallible scribes copied the texts of the Bible, but their mistakes in copying have not compromised biblical doctrine. God allowed these small details to drop out. Because Saul had a son (Jonathan) old enough to be an officer in the army, he was probably past 40. As subsequent verses indicate, other details are also lacking in the account of Saul's reign; the omissions coincide with God's judgment on Saul's lack of faith and good judgment. It is as though God is shortening Saul's time as a commentary on his reign. (TLSB)

**13:2** Saul forms Israel's first organized military, probably militia troops, since the time of Joshua. Some details are lacking, including at what point in Saul's reign this occurred. The towns mentioned were in Israel's heartland, in the hill country not far north of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

*Micmash*. Located southeast of Bethel and northeast of Gibeah near a pass (see v. 23). (CSB)

*Jonathan*. Saul's oldest son (see 14:49), mentioned here for the first time. (CSB)

Important to David's life; first mentioned here as a son of fighting age. Cf Nu 1:3. (TLSB)

**13:3** *Geba*. Located across a ravine and south of Micmash. (CSB)

Jonathan's military prowess is immediately evident. (TLSB)

*Hebrews*. Term normally not used by Israelites to refer to themselves but used by outsiders. (TLSB)

**13:4** *Saul had defeated the garrison.* Although Jonathan had been victorious (v 3), news spread that Saul had defeated the enemy, perhaps evidence of his obsessive desire for personal glory. (TLSB)

*stench.* A metaphor depicting an object of strong hostility, as in 2Sa 10:6; 16:21; Ge 34:30; Ex 5:21. (CSB)

*Gilgal.* By prearrangement Saul had been instructed to wait for Samuel there. (CSB)

Like Bethel, in the circuit of towns Samuel visited as judge (7:16); location uncertain, probably in vicinity of Jericho. (TLSB)

**13:5** *thirty thousand chariots.* The Canaanites under Sisera (see Jdg 4:13) had 900 chariots. The Israelites did not acquire chariots until the time of Solomon (see 1Ki 4:26). (CSB)

Philistines had a distinct advantage, since the Israelites did not acquire chariots until the time of King Solomon, two generations after Saul. (TLSB)

*Michmash.* C 8 mi NE of Jerusalem, overlooking a pass leading to the Jordan Valley. (TLSB)

**13:6** Numerical and military superiority of Philistine army had its effect on Israel. (TLSB)

**13:7** *fords of the Jordan.* Crossing the Jordan wherever it was shallow enough to pass through, Israelites fled to the east. (TLSB)

**13:1–7** Encounters with the Philistines dominate Saul's reign. This is definitely a time that calls for trust in God. In a similar way, the question for us is not whether we will face troubles, but where we will place our trust at those times. True refuge resides only in the true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Samuel, the God who fulfilled His promises by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to save the world. • Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your gracious daily guidance and protection. We ask that You continue to watch over us and those we love. You graciously give us all things through Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Saul's Unlawful Sacrifice*

**8** He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. 9 So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. 10 As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. 11 Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, 12 I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” 13 And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” 15 And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. 16 And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. 17 And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of

**Shual; 18 another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. 19 Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.” 20 But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, 21 and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. 22 So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. 23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.**

**13:8–23** Saul’s character defects manifest themselves as he takes matters into his own hands rather than follow God’s directive. (TLSB)

**13:8–9** After a week, Saul grew impatient for Samuel. (TLSB)

**13:8** *time appointed by Samuel.* Saul is fully aware that Samuel’s previous instructions had reference to this gathering at Gilgal. (CSB)

*people were scattering.* The seven-day delay heightened the fear of the Israelite soldiers. (CSB)

**13:9** *he offered up the burnt offering.* Samuel had promised to make these offerings himself (see 10:8) before Israel went to battle (see 7:9), and he had directed Saul to await his arrival and instructions. (CSB)

**13:10** *behold, Samuel came.* Seems Samuel was testing Saul, waiting to see if Saul would keep the established order. (TLSB)

**13:11** *What have you done?* Reminiscent of God’s questioning of Adam and Eve (Gn 3:9–13). (TLSB)

*the people were scattering ... you did not come.* Like our first parents, Saul directed the blame away from himself to others and to the questioner. (TLSB)

**13:12** Saul’s words are a rationalization for his actions. Humans have a common tendency to offer reasons for not following God’s directives. (TLSB)

**13:13** *You have done foolishly.* The foolish and sinful aspect (see 26:21; 2Sa 24:10; 1Ch 21:8; 2Ch 16:9) of Saul’s act was that he thought he could strengthen Israel’s chances against the Philistines while disregarding the instruction of the Lord’s prophet Samuel. (CSB)

Moral failure rather than mental mistake. (TLSB)

*You have not kept the command the LORD your God with which he commanded you.* Saul was to recognize the word of the prophet Samuel as the word of the Lord. In disobeying Samuel’s instructions, Saul violated a fundamental requirement of his theocratic office. His kingship was not to function independently of the law and the prophets. (CSB)

As God’s prophet, Samuel spoke for the Lord, and Saul, like all of Israel, was to recognize that fact. Cf 3:20. (TLSB)

*forever.* Hbr word denotes a time into the unknown future. Because of Saul’s disobedience, however, his dynasty would be cut short. (TLSB)

**13:14** *your kingdom shall not continue.* Saul will not be followed by his sons; there will be no dynasty bearing his name (contrast the Lord's word to David, 2Sa 7:11–16). There is a striking parallel in the word of the Lord to Eli (see 2:30, 35). (CSB)

*the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart.* Paul quotes from this passage at Antioch (Ac 13:22). (CSB)

A reference to David. Later, God would promise David, “Your throne shall be established forever” (2Sm 7:16). (TLSB)

**13:15** *six hundred.* The seven-day delay had greatly depleted Saul’s forces (see vv. 2, 4, 6–8). (CSB)

Because of the delay, the number of troops with Saul had thinned (cf v 2); humanly speaking, his growing impatience was understandable, yet he had failed to wait for the Lord’s schedule. (TLSB)

#### *Israel Without Weapons*

<sup>16</sup> **Saul and his son Jonathan and the men with them were staying in Gibeah in Benjamin, while the Philistines camped at Micmash.** <sup>17</sup> Raiding parties went out from the Philistine camp in three detachments. One turned toward Ophrah in the vicinity of Shual, <sup>18</sup> another toward Beth Horon, and the third toward the borderland overlooking the Valley of Zeboim facing the desert. <sup>19</sup> Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, “Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!” <sup>20</sup> So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. <sup>21</sup> The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads. <sup>22</sup> So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them. <sup>23</sup> Now a detachment of Philistines had gone out to the pass at Micmash.

**13:16** *Geba of Benjamin.* May be the same place as Gibeah of Benjamin (v 2). (TLSB)

**13:17–18** Place-names indicate that the raiding parties left Michmash going north (Ophrah), west-southwest (Beth-horon), and southeast (Valley of Zeboim). Going out in every direction, they probably had the intent of plundering Israelite towns in retaliation for Jonathan’s rebellion (v 3). *border.* May refer to an east-west road that ran between the territories of Judah and Benjamin. (TLSB)

**13:17** *Raiders.* The purpose of these Philistine contingents was not to engage the Israelites in battle, but to plunder the land and demoralize its inhabitants. (CSB)

**13:18** *Valley of Zeboim.* Located to the east toward the Jordan Valley. (CSB)

**13:19** *No a blacksmith.* A Philistine monopoly on the technology of iron production placed the Israelites at a great disadvantage in the fashioning and maintenance of agricultural implements and military weapons. (CSB)

Philistines held the edge in metal technology (perhaps iron work learned from the Hittites); earliest discoveries of iron in Canaan were found in Philistine regions, including a sword, knives, and jewelry. (TLSB)

**13:20** *went down to the Philistines.* While the Israelites may have had some fears, their inability even to sharpen their own tools drove them to seek out Philistine skills. (TLSB)

*mattock*. Tool, shaped like a pickax, used for loosening soil. Indicates agrarian nature of Israelite society. A quenched and tempered steel pick was discovered at Har Adir in Upper Galilee in a fortress from the eleventh century BC. (TLSB)

**13:21** *two-thirds ... a third of a shekel*. Weight for gold and silver. Probably exorbitant fees; they helped keep the Israelites economically depressed. The first measurement is a “pim,” used only here in Scripture. See p cx. The word appears on stone weights discovered in Judea. (TLSB)

**13:22** *neither ... a sword nor spear*. The Israelites fought with bow and arrow and slingshot. (CSB)

Perhaps the Philistine raiding parties had confiscated Israelite iron weapons, except for the swords of Saul and Jonathan. The rest of the Israelites would use bows and arrows and slingshots. (TLSB)

**13:23** *pass of Michmash*. Philistine garrison encamped on north bank of the ravine that separated them from the Israelites, creating mounting tension. (TLSB)

**13:8–23** Because of Saul’s act of disobedience and lack of faith, he will lose his kingdom and God’s help against the Philistines. Often, we bring troubles into our lives by thinking that God is not acting quickly enough to remove or ease some difficult situation. Yet, He acts in “the fullness of time” as when “God sent forth His Son” (Gal 4:4) to forgive all our sins—including our faithless impatience. • Almighty God, in Your infinite wisdom, You use all things for our temporal and eternal good. Forgive us the many times we do not wait on You but turn to our own faulty human solutions. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)