

1 Samuel 12-13 Chapter Study

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¹⁴Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

After the great victory over the Ammonites Saul had just led, everyone was clamoring to affirm him in his role as king. So Samuel called them to Gilgal, a site of great historical significance to Israel. This was where the new generation that was about to conquer Canaan renewed the covenant with God under Joshua's leadership.

Samuel knew the nation was at a major turning point in its history; a new era was beginning, so he took them back to the very place where the last era had begun - Gilgal. There on the Jordan Plain, Saul was finally embraced by all the people in a hearty endorsement of his reign, and they worshiped the Lord.

This was a high point, a momentous occasion & celebration.

Samuel saw their delight but wasn't able to enter in to it because he could see beyond the moment to a dark, cloud filled future.

The beginning of Saul's reign marked the end of his own as the Judge.

It wasn't that Samuel was bummed out about being out of a job. What bothered him was that he knew that Israel's relationship with God was about to undergo a basic change that wasn't good.

And it was all because they got the king they wanted so badly.

So, while he still has the platform to speak, he stands and gives a final speech . . .

3. Samuel's speech to Israel Ch. 12

¹Now Samuel said to all Israel: "Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. ²And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day.

It was time for him to close out his ministry of leading the nation. They had the leader they wanted in Saul.

Samuel mentions his sons – meaning that while he was withdrawing from

public life, if they needed his services, they could look to his sons.
But of course, the elders of the tribes had already made it clear they wouldn't do that because Samuel's sons were dishonest.

While *they* may have been corrupt, *Samuel* had lived a long life of *remarkable integrity* since he was just a young child.

³Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: [the king] Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you.” ⁴And they said, “You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand.” ⁵Then he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they answered, “He is witness.”

This sounds like a bit of *boasting* on Samuel's part. He makes an appeal to his integrity & honesty & challenges if anyone has a complaint against him, for ALL the years he's served the Lord & His people.

No one has a *single complaint* about him mistreating them.

Sam doesn't make this claim to justify HIMSELF! He wants to reason with the people about how wrong-headed their request for a king has been.

For *decades* Samuel has been the leader God provided for them.

He'd brought deliverance from the Philistines.

He'd faithfully administered justice.

He'd provided political and economic leadership.

Everything they could have asked for in a king, *God Himself* had provided *through Samuel*.

And NOTE: there was *no corruption* in Sam's administration of justice.

Now Samuel makes clear *why* he brought up the integrity of his leadership . . .

⁶Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the LORD who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt.”

Moses & Aaron were considered their great heroes. They were bigger than life because of the way they brought the world's mightiest empire to its knees and effected the deliverance of their ancestors.

Samuel reminds them that Moses & Aaron were just the instruments God used.

It wasn't Moses & Aaron who did it – **it was God!**

⁷Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did to you and your fathers: ⁸When Jacob had gone into Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place.

Again, Moses & Aaron were merely the agents *God used* to lead His people.

⁹And when they forgot the LORD their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the

Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them. ¹⁰Then they cried out to the LORD, and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and Ashtoreths; but now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.’ ¹¹And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety.

Samuel gives a classic review of the cycles we find in the time of the Judges.

When Israel followed God, they were blessed, but when they turned away, He sent oppressors who troubled them until they came to their senses, repented, & cried out to God for deliverance.

Which He sent in the form of a Judge who not only defeated the oppressors but led in spiritual renewal & saw a return to the blessings of obedience.

Sam’s point in all this was that God had never left them without leadership when they needed it.

As their divine King, God was faithful. The last & best example of God’s provision was Samuel himself as his appeal to integrity had made clear.

¹²And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king.

When the Ammonites attacked Jabesh Gilead in ch. 11, the people ought to have known that if they just looked to God, He would have provided deliverance yet again.

But instead of asking for God’s help in what ever manner He wanted to send it, the people demanded a king who would fight for them.

¹³“Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you.

Sam warns them – they wanted a king – Okay, they’ve got one! Once in place, there’s no going back.

As we saw 2 weeks ago, though Samuel was angry at their demand for a king, God had told him to consent and find them a ruler.

God had heard their many prayers & counsel & knew they were not going to be dissuaded from this request.

So he consented & Samuel found them a king in Saul, the son of Kish, a Benjamite from Gibeah.

As Samuel said here in v. 13 – Saul was everything the people wanted in a king.

He was tall, dark, & handsome’ in fact he was a *head taller* than anyone else.

He was a skilled warrior, having learned from his father Kish who was well-known for his prowess in battle.

He came from a well to do family.

Saul had no ambition for position or fame as his early days make clear.

He demonstrated wisdom & mercy in his first decisions as king by not exacting revenge on those who opposed his throne.

11:13 makes clear that right after his victory over the Ammonites when his supported wanted to punish those who had earlier resisted Saul’s rise to the throne, he restrained their over-zealous loyalty.

As we come to this point in the story, we can't help but be very impressed with Saul – and that's the way it should be.

He was a good guy, a remarkable individual who truly was, according to human qualifications, a perfect choice to be king.

As v. 13 says, Saul was precisely the king they wanted & chose.

God not only consented to their request – He gave them the exact individual they thought they wanted & needed.

And he **turns out to be** the exact thing Samuel **warned** them about.

God had not given them a king before because HE was their King.

God is the only one who can handle power without being corrupted.

God knew that a human king would eventually fall prey to the corruption of power and wanted to protect His people from that.

Saul may be the **perfect example** of how power corrupts. He began so well, but went so wrong.

Saul stands in contrast to David, who was **God's idea** of what a king should be like.

David was an even greater king than Saul who had far more power because of his conquests.

But David wasn't corrupted by that power because he didn't see it as **HIS!**

He saw himself as God's agent, using **God's power** for His greater glory in the benefit of His people.

When it comes to power, the bottom line is this – do you **rule**, or **serve**?

If your mentality is to **Rule**, then power is used to **control & dominate**.

If your mentality is to **Serve**, then power is simply a tool to **benefit others**.

14If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God.

Samuel makes it clear that though they are facing a new era in terms of how they will be governed, their covenant with God still stands.

They must be careful to abide by the Law. If they do, blessing will follow. The converse also applies.

15However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16“Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: 17/Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.”

Though God had consented to their insistence on a king, that didn't make it any less wrong that they demanded one.

Samuel had tried to dissuade them, but they wouldn't listen.

So now that they have their king – he attempts to help them see what a huge slap in the face of God this all was.

That's what the previous speech has been meant to get across to them. When had God ever let them down? What had God ever done that justified a

request for a king? Never & Nothing!

It's crucial they understand that this isn't just the bitter ramblings of an old guy whose feeling rejected.

A way to make sure they understand what Sam's just said was from God is to provide a sign.

Though it was the time of the wheat harvest, early Summer, June, an unheard of time for thunder storms in Israel, there was going to be one that very day.

18 So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

Don't miss that – it's an important point. They not only feared God, they feared Samuel > God's appointed leader.

How foolish they now realized they were in asking for a king, when Samuel is the one they had made the demand to, the leader God as their king has sent to them!!!

This is like demanding that Jeff Gordon or Richard Petty find you a driving instructor from the Acme Driving School.

19 And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves."

They realize their error and ask for Samuel to intercede for them.

20 Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. 22 For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people."

Please don't miss that buckets of good stuff contained in these verses.

20 - "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart."

Okay – you've messed up royally. What's important is that you admit & repented of it, and give yourself completely to God. If you do that, you have nothing to fear.

I'm so blessed by what Samuel says here because it so, so, so reveals the heart & perspective of God toward us.

We mess up! Alright –so what do we do with our failure? We confess it for the sin it is, then get right back on track and go for it with all we've got.

Stop letting *past failures* bum you out & slow you down.

Have faith in God's perfect forgiveness and ability to fill you right now!

21 - And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing.

The "turning aside" here was to worship idols, which were nothing but chunks of wood and carved stone.

What a waste of time!

As we've seen in previous studies, the idols people in the ancient world worshiped were nothing more than surrogates for self.

Idol worship was a way to be *selfish* in a *socially-acceptable way*.

If you wanted power & prosperity you worshiped Baal.

If you wanted pleasure you worshiped Ashtoreth.

But those who devote themselves to self-worship eventually learn there's nothing more pointless & empty.

One of the most common *regrets* the self-absorbed & wealthy express as they come to the end of their lives is that they didn't do more for others.

There's a profound sense that they are about to depart this life with absolutely *nothing to show* for the 80, 90 years they lived.

Yet they leave behind many of the things the world counts as marks of success; mansion, cars, boats, airplanes, closets & closets of clothes, jewelry.

When Mother Teresa died, her earthly possessions fit into a single grocery bag.

But there are few people in the modern world who were more deeply honored & loved than her.

She lived a *totally selfless life*, giving it to God by giving it away at every opportunity to the least & last.

22 - For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.

We may wander from God, but He will never leave us.

Rather, His mercy & grace will continue to flow so that more praise will rise to Him.

²³Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. ²⁴Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. ²⁵But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

The people had asked that Sam pray for them, fearful that the thunder & lightning were evidence God was about to wipe them out. He said a failure to pray would constitute sin on his part.

He understood that prayer was a basic & necessary requirement for leaders of God's people.

If he *failed* to pray, it would constitute a sin.

The leader who doesn't pray *isn't really leading*.

Samuel again calls them to whole-hearted devotion by encouraging them to remember all God has done for them.

Then he ends with this warning – if after all God's goodness & mercy you stubbornly stay in rebellion, you'll be wiped out.

D. War Against Philistines

Chs. 13-14

1. Jonathan attacks Geba

13:1-4

¹Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over

Israel, ²Saul chose for himself three thousand *men* of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.

Just as Samuel had warned, Saul drafted 3000 of the choicest men into his army.

He took 2000 and reinforced a place called Michmash in the center of Israel, on the frontier with Philistia.

His son Jonathan took a thousand and reinforced Saul's hometown of Gibeah.

³And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba,

There are some who believe that Geba here is simply the name of the Philistine outpost that was *next to Gibeah*.

It makes sense that Saul would want the enemy outpost in his *own city* removed.

and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" ⁴Now all Israel heard it said *that Saul* had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and *that Israel* had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.

This is curious – *Jonathan* is the one who took Geba while Saul was at Michmash.

Yet *Saul* blew the horn, implying it was *his* victory.

He said, "Let the Hebrews hear!" meaning, hear of the victory. But he didn't credit his son with it.

When people attributed it to Saul, he did nothing to correct them.

This is the first hint we get that Saul's starting down a bad path.

He takes credit for something he didn't do.

Earlier he didn't care to be in the public eye – now, with 2 years under his belt, he's got an image as the king to maintain.

Since Jonathan was his son, it was easy to say that whatever Jon did was at his bidding.

Jonathan didn't argue with his dad because he *truly* didn't care who got the credit, just as long as God's people were loosed from oppression.

The taking of Geba would send ripples across Philistia and the Jews knew it was only a matter of time till they came up in force to put down the rebellion.

2. Saul's foolish sacrifice

13:5-15

⁵Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven.

Because the Philistines were a highly militaristic culture, we can be certain they had a significant intelligence network in Israel and knew all about Israel's new king.

They'd been waiting to see what impact Saul's presence would have, and now they knew.

The attack on their outpost at Geba meant all Israel was rising against them in

an attempt top thrown off their domination of the land.
In a previous battle a few years before, Samuel had led the militia of Israel in a successful rout of Philistine forces throughout a big chunk of Israel.
Because Saul had hesitated up till now, the Philistines had managed to creep back in and recapture a number of sites they had to vacate before.
As they face another campaign with Israel, they vow to not let the earlier defeat be repeated.
So they bring up 30,000 chariots, a cavalry of 6,000, and tens of thousands of infantry.

Saul has how many? 3,000!

NOTE: In Heb. the words for 30,000 & 3,000 are so similar that it's thought this reflects a very early copying error and ought to be 3,000. The 6,000 "horsemen" would then be the chariot riders; one to drive and the other to wield a long spear.

V. 4 tells us that Saul called for a national meeting at Gilgal, which lay well to the east of where the enemy laid up at Michmash.

⁶When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. ⁷And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

The people realized that the Philistines meant business and lost all hope of victory when they saw the size of the invasion force.

So they scattered like scared rabbits, some of them even fleeing eastward across the Jordan.

The people with Saul were panicked.

⁸Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

In 10:8, Samuel had given specific instructions about what he was to do here. Turn there . . .

You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do."

What helps our understanding of this command is to keep in mind that Saul's *primary task* as king of Israel was to liberate the nation from Philistine oppression.

It's within this context Samuel told Saul to *wait* at Gilgal for instructions. Both men understood that this meeting at Gilgal was part of the overall strategy for defeating the Philistines.

Samuel would come, lead worship, then *God* would make known His will regarding *how* to prosecute the war, just as He had again & again in Israel's past.

Saul & his troops went to Gilgal and waited a week as Samuel had said.

Slowly but surely, desertions fell out.

As Saul watched his forces dwindle, he felt he had to do something to rally some hope among the troops.

⁹So Saul said, “Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.” And he offered the burnt offering.

Don't miss the *detail* – in 10:8 Samuel had said *he* would offer *burnt & peace offerings*. Saul asked for the *exact same things*. He's *purposely taking* on a role that didn't apply to him – the role of a priest.

Only priests were allowed to offer sacrifices like this.

Saul's authority as king has gone to his head & moved him to think he can do what he pleases.

¹⁰Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

That word “greet,” is almost always translated as *bless*. It's something the greater bestows on the lesser.

Not only had Saul usurped Samuel's role as *priest* in offering the sacrifice, he now assumes his role as king is *superior* to Samuel's as *prophet* of the Lord.

In 10:8 when Samuel told Saul to meet & wait for him at Gilgal it was so that Saul as king could receive God's instructions about how to proceed in battle.

Saul now acts as though he's above such direction.

He'd had barely completed the offering when Samuel arrived.

While the English translation of this passage is vague the Hebrew is clear this is still the 7th day.

Samuel was **NOT** late. He just hadn't come when Saul had *expected* him.

That expectation was framed by his understanding of how to conduct a winning campaign against the Philistines.

Such a strategy needs men, so when soldiers desert, you do whatever you can to keep the ones left.

Saul needed to remember the lesson of Gideon, whose army was whittled by God from 32,000 down to 300.

He ought to have reasoned to the same conclusion his own son did in the very next chapter, that God can save by just a few.

Indeed, if Saul had been walking in faith, he would have counted Samuel's absence until the last minute as part of God's victory plan.

But 2 years on the throne have taught Saul to depend on himself, not God.

And because of that, his grasp of what God had told him through Samuel was edited & reshaped by his own expectations.

Yesterday, I drove to Chili's for a lunch appointment at 11:30.

I waited till 11:50 and when they didn't show up I left.

Driving back to my office, I was a tad miffed.

As soon as I got backed I called to see what happened.

I was politely reminded that the meeting was for TODAY, Wednesday.

Then I remembered and checked my calendar, and sure enough, it was listed on both days -yesterday and today. I'd forgotten to erase it from yesterday's appointments.

As I waited in front of Chili's I got more and more irked at their failure to show up.

But the error was entirely mine.

Samuel wasn't really late – he just didn't come within the time Saul expected him too.

11 And Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* you did not come within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, 12 then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."

To prove Saul was not walking in faith, he gives a litany of all the things *he saw* that shaped his decisions.

- 1) The people were deserting
- 2) Samuel was late
- 3) The enemy was within striking distance.

All this conspired to force his hand. He says, "What else could I have done?"

He could have, *should* have done what God had *told him to* – Wait for Samuel – who in fact, *wasn't* late!

13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done 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."

This was a test to prove what kind of man Saul was. Did he walk by faith or sight?

The king of Israel must be a man who chooses wisely, who doesn't give in to panic & circumstance but trusts in God at all times. Saul failed.

14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Saul was the kind of king the people thought they wanted. He ended up being weak & easily seduced by the power of his office.

Because God loved Israel, he would replace Saul with a king after His own heart, someone who would walk in faith, not sight.

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men.

Interesting – this is something God told them not to do – numbering themselves.

He didn't want them looking to numbers as they went into battle.

If they had a huge force they might think it was their numerical superiority that gave them the advantage.

If they had few & were outnumbered, it might keep them from fighting altogether.

God wanted them to depend on Him for victory no matter how many or few they were.

Saul's count here stands in contrast to the amazing example of faith we're about to see in his son in ch. 14.

3. The Philistines counter

13:16-18

¹⁶Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people present with them remained in Gibeah of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Michmash.

¹⁷Then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned onto the road to Ophrah, to the land of Shual, ¹⁸another company turned to the road to Beth Horon, and another company turned to the road of the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

They went north, east, and west, attacking Jews where ever they could find them. Gibeah, Saul's headquarters was to the south and they were trying to provoke him into open battle.

4. No iron weapons for Israel

13:19-23

¹⁹Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." ²⁰But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; ²¹and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. ²²So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.

Archaeology has well established what we find here. Iron is quite abundant in Philistines layers of occupation at this time while it's very rare in Israelite levels.

It was a rather common for a dominant group to limit the technology of their enemies.

The Etruscans prohibited the Romans from making iron weapons, as did the Nebuchadnezzar prohibit Israel and Cyrus the Lydians.

The only 2 who had them were Saul & Jonathan.

²³And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

The main camp at Michmash set an entry post to overlook the pass that ran between Gibeah & Michmash.

5. Jonathan's faith-venture

14:1-46

a. Jonathan's proposal

vs. 1-10

b. the rout

vs. 11-15

Last Sunday

During WWI when the British were fighting the Turks in this area, a major remembered the name Michmash in the Bible. So using a candle one night he located the text here in 1 Sam 14 and read Jonathan's story.

He woke his commander and read him the story and two agreed they ought to

look for the place to see if it would give them an advantage over the Turks who were camped nearby.
The patrol found the pass as described and a way up the cliff that lead to a half acre of flat land where there was a small sentry post.
Another company was dispatched which surprised the Turkish guards and quietly dispatched them.
They took up positions on the half acre and waited for sunrise.
When the Turks woke the next morning they saw this entire company of British sitting just across from them and thinking they were about to be surrounded by General Allenby's army they began a hasty retreat. They were all either killed or taken prisoner.

15 And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling.

It's here we get a glimpse of what God may have been intending to do.

Jonathan walked by faith in God and brought forth this might victory.
God exponentially increased the effect of it and caused the entire enemy camp to panic.
What turned their fear into outright terror was that the earth itself began to shake.
This was just too much of a coincidence for the superstitious Philistines and they began to run around like a bunch of screaming girls.

c. Saul joins the battle

vs. 16-23

16 Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and there was the multitude, melting away; and they went here and there.

17 Then Saul said to the people who were with him, "Now call the roll and see who has gone from us." And when they had called the roll, surprisingly, Jonathan and his armorbearer were not there.

Okay – when the watchmen reported that the enemy was melting away, what Saul ought to have done?

He should have attacked! But he—calls roll? Yeah – he wanted to know who might be responsible for this attack on the enemy.

Instead of doing his business as king and leading the fight, he's worried about who's going to get the credit.

18 And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here" (for at that time the ark of God was with the children of Israel).

Saul had called for the ark to be brought from its resting place at Kirjath Jearim to Gibeah so it could be used as a weapon.

It seems he'd forgotten the earlier lesson of the ark's capture by the Philistines when the Jews held a superstitious belief in its power.

Or maybe he knew of the devastation it had worked while in Philistia and hoped the enemy would be terrified by its presence among them. Either way – this was an *improper* use of the ark.

Saul seems to have no qualms now about *using* God to his own ends.

19 Now it happened, while Saul talked to the priest, that the noise

which was in the camp of the Philistines continued to increase; so Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.”

The priest was using the Urim & Thummim which were in a pouch behind the breastplate, to answer questions about whether or not they should join the battle.

Saul finally realizes the answer to that is not going to be obtained by the Urim & Thummim.

It's already being answered across the field where his son is single-handedly conquering the enemy.

²⁰Then Saul and all the people who were with him assembled, and they went to the battle; and indeed every man's sword was against his neighbor, and there was very great confusion. ²¹Moreover the Hebrews who were with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp from the surrounding country, they also joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.

Jewish defectors who'd gone over to the Philistines turned back to fight for Israel.

²²Likewise all the men of Israel who had hidden in the mountains of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, they also followed hard after them in the battle. ²³So the LORD saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven.

They pushed the Philistines west back toward the coast.

d. Saul's foolish vow

vs. 24-46

²⁴And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, “Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food.

Big man Saul has to save face for his continued hesitating when it comes to battle.

Twice now it's been his son who's gone forth to do what he as the king was supposed to do – fight the Philistines.

Jonathan didn't need a priest, or the Urim & Thummim, or the ark – He had a simple but solid & confident faith in God.

In the face of Jonathan's dramatic courage, Saul tried to save face by making this high sounding vow!

“No one eats; no one stops for their *personal needs* until we've utterly defeated MY enemies!”

Your enemies?!? If you mean this then why'd you wait for so long to attack?

This is nothing but grandstanding and an attempt to salvage his well-tarnished image.

Battle is thirsty work & the people were dragging as the day wore on. But no one could eat because of Saul's foolish vow.

²⁵Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his

mouth, for the people feared the oath. ²⁷But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened.

²⁸Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed *is* the man who eats food this day.’” And the people were faint. ²⁹But Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?”

Jonathan politely points out the rashness of his father’s vow.

³¹Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. ³²And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered *them* on the ground; and the people ate *them* with the blood.

Saul’s vow had driven the people to the point of *desperation*.

They were so hungry that when the battle was finally done, they began eating raw meat, meat that had not been properly butchered according to the requirements of the law.

Remember, they were not to eat meat that hadn’t been bled.

³³Then they told Saul, saying, “Look, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood!” So he said, “You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day.” ³⁴Then Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, ‘Bring me here every man’s ox and every man’s sheep, slaughter *them* here, and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.’” So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slaughtered *it* there. ³⁵Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

This is after 2 full years on the throne – yet it’s his first altar.

The way this is written it’s seen as a plus; what Saul did here was good.

After his great start in chs. 9-11, he crashes in chs. 13 & 14, but this looks like maybe he’s wising up.

Certainly he realizes his hesitation in going against the Philistines had led to his problems.

His son has shown him twice now how much better it is to just trust God and go for it.

So he builds an altar for worshiping God for the victory He’s given.

And he tells the people to stop sinning by eating improperly prepared meat.

³⁶Now Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them.” And they said, “Do whatever seems good to you.” Then the

priest said, "Let us draw near to God here."

Oops – bad counsel n the priest’s part. Saul said let’s go and the people were gung ho – but Ahijah, the rejected priest counseled that they ought to ask of God, meaning using the Urim & Thummim again.

The problem is – God wasn’t speaking either *through* the high priest or *to* Saul.

³⁷So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day.

Because Saul has been *rejected* as king.

But he assumes the reason why God isn’t answering is because someone else is the problem.

³⁸And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today. ³⁹For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him. ⁴⁰Then he said to all Israel, "You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." ⁴¹Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, "Give a perfect *lot*." So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. ⁴²And Saul said, "Cast *lots* between my son Jonathan and me." So Jonathan was taken. ⁴³Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, and said, "I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!" ⁴⁴Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." ⁴⁵But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die. ⁴⁶Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

The people let this whole process go to see just how far Saul would go with it, But when they realized he was serious about executing his own son for violating his silly oath, they intervened and said, "No way, Jay! Not at all, Saul!"

At this point they have to be realizing their king isn’t such a hot shot after all. His son is pretty excellent though.

And I have to say that in light of the absolutely brilliant way in which Jonathan is always presented, I wonder why the throne couldn’t have passed to him.

My consolation is in seeing the man God chose to replace Saul – David.

It may very well be that it was God’s grace that kept Jonathan **OFF** the throne.

Just as Saul started well but the crown ruined him, maybe the same would have happened to Jon.

6. Saul’s military campaigns

14:47-52

⁴⁷So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against

all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed *them*. ⁴⁸And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.

Saul appears to have overcome his tendency to avoid battle and went out in numerous campaigns to push back those who'd encroached on Israelite territory.

⁴⁹The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui, and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were *these*: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. ⁵⁰The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

⁵¹Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. ⁵²Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.

Just as Samuel had warned, Saul conscripted all the able-bodied men into his army.